

INSPECTION REPORT

AYLESBURY HIGH SCHOOL

Aylesbury

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110494

Acting Headteacher: Alan Rosen

Reporting inspector: D. Gosling
7118

Dates of inspection: 3rd February – 6th February 2003

Inspection number: 249725

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:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18 years
Gender of pupils:	Girls
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Richard Wells
Date of previous inspection:	3 rd – 7 th March 1997

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30128	Shirley Stanley	Team inspector		How well is the school led and managed?
1049	Brian Evans	Team Inspector		How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Aylesbury High School is a large girls' grammar school in a rural area catering for girls aged 11-18. There are 1257 pupils on the school roll and 380 of these are in the sixth form. The school is very popular with parents and is over-subscribed. About 95 per cent of pupils stay on to the sixth form. The pupils have favourable social-economic backgrounds overall, with the proportion eligible for free school meals well below the national average. Although very few pupils are in the early stages of learning English, a small proportion comes from minority ethnic backgrounds particularly other European and Asian backgrounds. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, as in other grammar schools, is well below the national average, although there is a small number with specific learning difficulties and one pupil with a statement. Aylesbury High School does take a wider range of ability than most grammar schools (about the top 30 per cent of the ability range), with significant numbers of pupils having only attained the average Level 4 in their Key Stage 2 tests.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Aylesbury High School is a very good school. Attainment is very high compared with national averages and the pupils achieve very well, particularly at A level. Teaching overall is of a very good quality. Teachers are committed and skilful, with a very high level of subject knowledge. Although there is not a permanent head teacher at the moment there is, and has been since the previous inspection, purposeful and imaginative leadership of the school. This is reflected in its Beacon School, Language College, Artsmark and Investors in People status, as well as a number of other awards. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds and with special educational needs are secure and happy and play a full part in the life of the school. The school's strong links with a local special school, a school in Africa and the local community, and its rich languages provision show that it is striving to support equal opportunities. The school is meeting the needs and aspirations of its grammar school pupils, as indicated by the range and quality of university places gained by students and also by the high level of personal development and sense of responsibility which it engenders. Overall the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The vision and drive of the leadership and the high level of support for teachers and accountability
- Consistently high quality teaching which challenges and motivates pupils
- An excellent ethos where pupils work very hard and harmoniously and support each other
- Excellent A level results and high quality sixth form teaching
- Very high standards in English and very high quality English teaching

What could be improved

- Planning for improvement at whole school and department level
- The limited accommodation

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 good progress since the last inspection. It has sustained the strengths and moved forward well in a number of areas. Pupils' standards of attainment have improved overall (see below), particularly in the sixth form where the average A level points score has risen from 20.1 in 1996 to 22.3 in 2002. Teaching has also improved considerably. There were no unsatisfactory lessons observed in this inspection and there was a much higher proportion of very good or excellent lessons. Strengths in leadership have been maintained and the school has been led with energy and purpose. The use of data,

and systems for monitoring and evaluating standards, are more rigorous. The school has adopted a wide range of initiatives which are adding to the vitality and quality of learning in the school, including Language College Status, Beacon School Status and the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. The two key issues in the last inspection, improving the monitoring of teaching and improving the quality of the Key Stage 4 tutorial, have been addressed well.

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 points 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	N/A	A	N/A	

Key	
Very high attainment	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

NB. National Comparisons for A and AS level performance are not yet available for 2002

Pupils' attainment is very good. The standards being attained in the school are in the top five per cent compared with those nationally, and average compared with those being attained in grammar schools. Pupils' achievement is also very good. It is important to realise that the ability range of the school's intake is wider than usual for grammar schools and that the achievement of pupils is very good when taking the pupils' standard on entry into account. In recent national value-added analyses which grade pupils' attainment compared with how well they achieved in tests at the end of the previous key stage, the pupils scored above average for grammar school pupils in the 2002 Year 9 tests and well above at GCSE. At A level, the students' performance in 2002 was higher than in 2001, when it was well above the national average.

In the 2002 end of Key Stage 3 tests, pupils' results were very high compared with those nationally. They were particularly strong in English and mathematics where 99% and 97% of pupils respectively gained at least a Level 6. English results were well above the average for similar schools and were the highest in Buckinghamshire LEA; mathematics and science results were broadly in line with similar schools.

At GCSE in 2002, 96 per cent of pupils gained five or more grades at A*-C, which was below the school's target of 97 per cent. However, there were particular circumstances which explained these results. The school operates on the principle of trying to accommodate pupils with personal difficulties, some repeating years who have come from other grammar schools and abroad, even if this has an adverse effect on examination data. In 2002, one pupil taught in a different year group was not entered for any subjects and two were taught for almost their entire time at Key Stage 4 in the LEA Pupil Referral Unit. The school has high expectations of those on roll entered for GCSE examinations - it has set a 2003 target of 100 per cent of pupils taking examinations gaining five or more A*-C grades.

Attainment at the higher grades at GCSE was very good in 2002. Pupils performed best at full course design and technology (63 per cent A* or A), English language (60 per cent A* or A), English literature (70 per cent A* or A), French (60 per cent A* or A), music (70 per cent A* or A) and Spanish (72 per cent A* or A). Pupils were weakest at drama (35 per cent A* or A), business studies (34 per cent A* or A) and dance (31 per cent A* or A).

No national comparisons are yet available for Advanced Subsidiary level results in 2001 or 2002 but there was some very high attainment, with over 60% A or B grades gained in 16 of the 25 subjects for which there were entries. Results were very high at A level in 2002 and many of the students went on to prestigious universities, including seven to Oxbridge. 97.5 per cent of the students entered gained a grade at A – E. As at GCSE, there was excellent attainment at the higher levels, with an average of 65 per cent of students entered gaining A or B grades. Sixty-five per cent or more of the students entered gained an A or B grade in English language and literature, mathematics, history, religious studies, biology, psychology, English literature, French, German, music, politics and economics. The lowest proportion of A and B grades was in design and technology and art.

The pupils' work seen during the inspection was of a very high standard. It was well presented, well organised and structured, and displayed high levels of accuracy and skill in literacy and numeracy. The range and use of Information and communication technology (ICT) was satisfactory.

There is a good overall trend of improvement over the past five years. At Key Stage 3 the trend is in line with the national trend. At Key Stage 4, despite the dip in 2002, the trend is above the national trend. A/S level results improved significantly in 2002 and since these contribute to the final A level grades, this should lead to even higher A level performance in 2003. A level results also improved significantly in 2002, the average points score improved to 22.3 in 2002 from 19.6 in 2001, and the percentage A-E attainment improved to 97.5 per cent from 96 per cent. The nationally recognised value-added system used by the school shows the students to have performed very well compared with their attainment at GCSE.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. The pupils are well-motivated, enthusiastic and hard working. They also work very well collaboratively and by themselves.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils are orderly and polite in and out of the classroom. They are able to work very well independently, without supervision.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils display considerable maturity and are very reflective about moral issues. There is a high level of mutual tolerance and respect. They are prepared to take risks and will question teachers and each other. They are very supportive of each other and are polite. They co-operate well with staff and other adults.
Attendance	Very good. The attendance rate is very high compared with the national average and higher than the girls' grammar school average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is very good overall. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed during the inspection and over half were excellent or very good. Teaching is strongest at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3, the National Key Stage 3 Strategy is leading to very well-structured lessons with a fast pace of learning.

In the sixth form, lessons are very well-planned and researched. At all key stages the teachers' high level of subject expertise is generating an enthusiasm for learning and enabling the more able pupils to reach their potential.

The teaching in English, mathematics and science at Key Stages 3 and 4 is very strong. Teachers of these subjects are well-organised, and use a wide range of effective strategies to encourage pupils to be actively engaged in their learning and to work independently. In the sixth form, the strongest teaching observed was in design and technology and history, where nearly all lessons were very good or excellent, and some of the teaching was inspirational. There are no significant weaknesses in the teaching of any of the subjects in the sixth form or at Key Stages 3 and 4; the few weaknesses in individual lessons are not part of any pattern in subjects or across the school.

The skilful provision for literacy and numeracy is apparent in lessons and pupils' books at Key Stages 3 and 4. Teachers model writing tasks skilfully, provide examples of how to structure writing, and encourage pupils to find evidence from texts, graphs and tables to support judgements. Pupils are effectively extended in lessons where work set challenges those of all levels of ability. Individual education plans are in place for pupils with significant special educational needs and are being used well by teachers to set work. Good provision is made for those pupils who are gifted and talented; they are stretched particularly through complex work and by probing, targeted questions. The two pupils who speak English as an additional language and have some difficulties with English receive adequate additional support.

A notable strength of the school is the quality of learning. In all lessons observed learning was at least satisfactory and it was very good or excellent in over half. The pupils are enthusiastic, supportive of each other and very hard-working. They move into tasks quickly and show considerable resilience when confronted by difficult problems.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. A very good range of subjects is on offer, with language provision and citizenship especially strong. However, statutory requirements for Religious Education (RE) are not being met and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is limited in Year 9 and at Key Stage 4.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. There is rigorous provision for the pupils with specific learning difficulties and appropriate support is in place to help pupils with statements.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. There are very few pupils, but all are reaching a good standard in English in National Curriculum tests and GCSE. Additional teachers provided by the LEA provide appropriate support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. There is excellent provision for pupils' personal, moral and social development. Provision for spiritual development and reflection in lessons and assemblies is very good but the school is not complying with the legal requirement for a daily act of collective worship.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. There are clear and effective measures for pastoral support and health and safety. Rigorous assessment and target setting systems are in place.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The school has been led innovatively since the last inspection and has won several awards, including Beacon school status. Planning for further improvement is an area for development. Subject team leaders and curriculum managers are well-organised and effective.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors have a good grasp of the standards being attained by pupils and the school's key priorities. They do not have a secure overview of the quality of teaching.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Excellent use is made of value-added data, and audits of departments by the leadership team are very thorough. A rigorous classroom observation system is in place.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Very good use is made of teachers and support staff and accommodation. Priorities in the school improvement plan and the team improvement plan are costed. The school applies the principles of best value and is particularly alert to benchmarking data on pupils' standards.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children are happy at school • The school helps the children to become mature and responsible • The school has high expectations of the amount of work produced and pupils' standards • Teaching is good • Their children make good progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information they receive on their children's progress and the timing of parents' meetings • The range of activities on offer outside lessons • More consistency in the implementation of homework, discipline and assessment procedures

Inspection findings endorse parents' views about the strengths of the school. Pupils are relaxed and happy in the school environment and the school is very effective in encouraging pupils to take responsibility and develop their personal skills. Inspectors also found that the quality of teaching, the high expectations of pupils and the progress they make were strengths. Inspectors found there to be good quality reports on pupils but agree that Year 7 and 8 parents' meetings could be more useful if they took place earlier in the year. The school has already recognised this issue and plans to change the dates. Inspectors did not agree that there was a limited range of activities outside of lessons and found that there was rich provision, particularly in the form of trips and visits. Inspectors also do not agree that there is any significant inconsistency in implementation of policies.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

AYLESBURY HIGH SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form has 380 students on roll and is much larger than average. Around 95 per cent of students continue into the sixth form from the main school and they are joined each year by a small number of students from other schools. As in the main school, about 8 per cent of students are from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are fourteen students who have special educational needs and 17 who speak English as an additional language. Attainment on entry is well above average. Entry requirements are a minimum of five GCSE A* to C grades. All students follow AS and A-level courses. In addition, there are opportunities for courses in Italian, Chinese, Japanese and Sports Leaders. About 98 per cent of the students move into further or higher education at the end of Year 13. Retention rates are very high and very few students leave before the end of their courses.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a very good sixth form that is cost effective. Teaching and learning are very good. Standards are rising and are well above the national average. The students make very good progress and their achievement is correspondingly very good. A level results have been consistently well above the national average. The range of courses on offer meets the needs of students well. Students are mature and determined to succeed. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good overall.

Strengths

- Students' level of attainment is high, and is particularly strong in English and modern foreign languages.
- Teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge which they use extremely effectively to support students on the courses they are studying.
- Students are mature and confident and make an excellent contribution to the life of the main school.
- A very full enrichment programme of activities, including work-shadowing and community involvement, develops students' wider understanding of their place in society.
- There is very good guidance and advice for students based on good assessment of their progress and needs.

What could be improved

- Provision for meeting the statutory requirements for the daily act of collective worship and religious education.
- Accommodation, including the shortage of private study space for students.
- Strategic planning for continuous improvement for standards, teaching and learning and accommodation.

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

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	Good. The curriculum meets the needs of most students. Teaching and learning is good. Students work very hard.
BIOLOGY	Very good. Enthusiastic and talented teachers work well as a team to provide outstanding learning opportunities for their highly motivated students. Practical work includes latest techniques and develops high level skills.
CHEMISTRY	Good. Consistently good teaching encourages and supports the learning of committed and able students. A good scheme of work sets high standards for learning.
DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY	Very good. Very good teaching. Attainment is above the national average. The well-structured course enables students to develop individual style. Well-developed learning skills lead to imaginative responses from students.
BUSINESS STUDIES	Good. There is a trend of high attainment. Teachers have very good subject expertise and use data well to evaluate progress and set targets. There could be a wider variety of teaching strategies in lessons.
ECONOMICS	Very Good. Students attain high standards and they analyse and evaluate data well. Teaching is very good although there is some inconsistency in assessment procedures.
PHYSICAL EDUCATION	Good. Teaching and learning and leadership are very good. AS students achieve well. However, there is no provision for PE in Year 13, thus limiting older students' progress and enjoyment of the subject.
ART	Very good. There is very good leadership and management, and students have excellent attitudes to the subject and lessons. This has resulted in the improvement of standards, in particular at AS level and as shown in the students' work seen during the inspection.
DRAMA	Very good. Very good teaching leads to high standards. Students' attitudes are excellent. Leadership and management are good.
CLASSICAL CIVILIZATION	Very good. Very good teaching, a well-planned curriculum and very good extra curricular opportunities enable students to achieve above average standards.
GEOGRAPHY	Good. The standards of work seen and examination results are well above the national average. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and lessons have a clear structure.
HISTORY	Very Good. Leadership and management, teaching and standards are very strong, but there is scope for teachers to develop more independent learning by students.
ENGLISH	Excellent. Standards, teaching, leadership and management are all excellent.
FRENCH	Very good. Well thought-out curriculum. Very good teaching from proficient and knowledgeable staff who have very good command of the language. Very good use of target language during lessons and high expectation that students should conduct all transitions in French. Students achieve well. Very good guidance given by staff.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good support and guidance are given to students. Induction procedures are very good; systems for pastoral support are clear and well understood. Careers education and advice provided by the school are very good and there is regular support from the Careers (Connexions) Service. Assessment procedures, including marking and feedback are good; procedures to monitor students' progress are good.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good leadership provides clear direction for continued improvements. Daily management is very good with clear procedures for monitoring attendance and students' welfare; all students are effectively included in activities. Monitoring and evaluation are good overall and the monitoring of achievement against national and local data is rigorous. There is insufficient strategic planning for continuous improvement in standards, teaching and learning and accommodation.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are taught well and challenged to do their best in lessons. • Students are helped to study independently. • The curriculum suits their talents and aspirations. • Students found teachers to be accessible for help 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work is not always thoroughly assessed. • There is not a wide range of activities and enrichments. • Advice given is not helpful or constructive. • They are not well advised about future options • The school does not respond to their views

Almost all of students in the sixth form responded to the questionnaire. Inspectors agree that the wide range of courses on offer is well suited to students' aspirations. Teaching is very good in most subjects and students are consistently well challenged to do their best. Most teachers provide plentiful opportunities for students to work independently and are always on hand to help them if they have problems with their work. Moreover, inspectors find that there is a good range of worthwhile activities and enrichment courses outside of lessons and that work is thoroughly assessed. Guidance on options is very thorough and students' views are sought and acted upon.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The vision and drive of the leadership and the high level of support for teachers and accountability

1. Despite all members of the leadership team being in acting positions, the school is being led with vision and purpose by the acting head teacher and the leadership team and it rigorously evaluates its own progress. Since the 1997 inspection the school has been led and managed innovatively and the leadership team has built on strengths. A wide range of initiatives illustrates this, including:
 - the award of Beacon School Status which identifies the school as a model of good practice for middle management, the induction of newly-qualified teachers and the training of students;
 - the designation of specialist school status for languages based on the standards being attained by pupils, the quality of teaching and the richness of language provision;
 - the continuation of the Investors in People Award for the support and development of staff, following a second assessment;
 - two School Curriculum Awards for the links between the school curriculum and the community;
 - an Arts Mark gold award for arts provision;
 - an International Schools Award for links with other countries;
 - the effective implementation of the national Key Stage 3 Strategy designed to raise standards and improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum for pupils in Years 7-9. These initiatives have helped create a dynamic and exciting learning environment for pupils.
2. As well as being creative and forward-looking, the school leadership has developed some rigorous systems for self-evaluation. A clear overview of the standards being attained in each year group and each subject has been established. Value-added systems based on pupils' prior attainment also provide an accurate picture of how well each department is performing. Evaluations of pupils' and departments' test and examination results are analysed by the acting head teacher and presented to staff and governors for discussion. These evaluations include trends in performance and comparisons with schools with similar intakes. Key Stage 3 audits have also been conducted by each head of department; these provide a very comprehensive self-evaluation of standards, the curriculum, teaching, assessment and management. Some analysis of performance data from an ethnic perspective does take place but the school recognises that this could be developed further.
3. The leadership team observes the lessons of all teachers in the departments which they line manage. The results of these observations are being used to evaluate teaching rigorously against a range of criteria and to clear picture of strengths and weaknesses.
4. Towards the beginning of the Autumn term members of the leadership group prepare written evaluations of departments which include a summary of conclusions about the standards being attained by pupils and the quality of teaching. Reports are detailed and constructive, clearly identifying strengths and weaknesses. The evaluation of the modern

languages department in 2002 was particularly rigorous and specific e.g. the assessment of pupil participation in a lesson - " the ratio of questions from most asked to least asked was at least 8:1".

5. The statutory Performance Management system has been implemented effectively. The cycle of planning, monitoring and review meetings is on schedule and all staff have objectives set and professional development needs identified.
6. The views of parents and pupils are also used as part of the self-evaluation process. Formal surveys have been sent out to parents and pupils and the responses analysed and taken into account in evaluations and the school improvement plan.
7. Staff are well supported and valued within the school as evidenced by the Investors in People Award and the quality of the induction and training of newly qualified teachers and students. Teachers and departments contribute towards the writing of the school improvement plan. Even before the national initiative to reduce teachers' workloads, the school had been very active in this area. Teachers have been freed from many administrative tasks including the collection of money for trips, photocopying and examination invigilation. In addition, shared areas have been placed on the school computer network which include schemes of work, lesson plans and individual lessons which can be stored and shared.

Consistently high quality teaching which challenges and motivates pupils

8. Teaching in the school is of a very high quality. Lessons are characterised by very good subject expertise, careful planning and organisation, challenge, and lively independent and investigative work; these are all leading to a fast pace of learning and a vibrant learning environment.
9. During the inspection 52 per cent of the lessons seen were very good or excellent; 94 per cent were good or better; and 100 per cent were at least satisfactory. Teaching is strongest in Key Stage 3, where the National Key Stage 3 Strategy is having a significant impact, and in the sixth form where nearly all lessons are characterised by a fast pace of learning and high expectations.
10. The findings of the inspection endorse the views of the parents in questionnaires and the student survey. The vast majority of parents thought teaching was good and that expectations were high. A very high percentage of students thought that they were well taught and that they were helped to study independently.
11. The most notable strength in teaching is the high level of subject expertise and the way teachers use this to challenge pupils and generate enthusiasm in lessons. At the start of lessons teachers are able to contextualise work and draw from a wide range of references which deepen the pupils' understanding. This was apparent across the range of subjects: for example in history and English lessons teachers refer authoritatively to the periods being studied, as well as to other periods and the modern day. Another example was a Year 8 music lesson where the teacher was able to talk fluently about a wide range of instruments. A particular feature of many lessons is the clarity of explanations. The teachers' grasp of subject knowledge and skills is leading to a clarity of understanding of some of the most difficult aspects of examination specifications and this in turn is leading to many pupils achieving very high levels in National Curriculum tests, GCSE and A level.

One example was a Year 11 mathematics lesson where the teacher's exposition on equations and the models used drew some outstanding work from pupils. Teachers have an excellent grasp of subject specific technical vocabulary and explain terms lucidly to pupils. In a Year 8 music lesson where terms such as *legato*, *dissonance* and *staccato* were clearly understood by pupils following clear explanations and examples.

12. The questioning of pupils by teachers is very skilful. In many lessons there are quick fire questions at the beginning which reinforce knowledge and skills and challenge pupils. This technique is being effectively used across the range of subjects and it is particularly good in languages and mathematics lessons. In one Year 9 Spanish lesson the teacher, through rapid questioning, pressed and pressed pupils until they were word perfect. There is also a good balance in lessons between fast, closed questions and open-ended questions which require full responses and problem solving. In many whole class sessions, nearly all pupils answer at least one question and the teachers constantly probe, challenge and target pupils with questions.
13. There has clearly been significant progress since the last inspection in the encouragement of active and independent learning. Teachers encourage pupils to work out answers for themselves and are providing opportunities for pupils in most lessons to discuss ideas, either in pairs or groups, and to present them. In two Spanish lessons, one in Year 9 and one in Year 13, the teacher required pupils to ask each other, and answer, questions in Spanish, which they did skilfully. In two lessons observed, a Year 11 English lesson and a Year 9 history lesson, the pupils prepared speeches, and in a Year 9 geography lesson the pupils played a lively game which simulated trade exchange.
14. Teachers are very quick to engage pupils by making links with the pupils' own experiences, contemporary life and culture. Some examples of this seen during the inspection were a debate on Gibraltar in a sixth form Spanish lesson, the use of music from film clips in a Year 8 music lesson, the use of video diaries in an English lesson on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, and the writing of diaries in a Spanish lesson.
15. The engagement of pupils through the variety of activities in lessons is also enhanced by the variety of resources used. During the inspection good use was made of videos, computers, overhead projectors, and prompt cards to create vitality and enhance learning in lessons. In a Year 10 English lesson there was particularly good use made of computers when pupils worked collaboratively completing character charts on *Lord of the Flies*. During this session pupils were enthusiastic and engaged and they not only developed their ability to find evidence from texts, but also developed their word-processing skills.
16. Lessons are well-structured by teachers and tasks are usually timed. The influence of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy is apparent not only at Key Stage 3 but also in GCSE lessons. Nearly all teachers are planning lessons according to the Strategy's three part structure – whole class introduction, independent, paired or group work and a final session where learning is reviewed. This structure is being implemented skilfully by teachers and leading to very productive teaching. Sessions at the ends of lessons where learning is evaluated are particularly well managed.

An excellent ethos where pupils work hard and support each other

17. A major strength of the school is its ethos and the positive and effective steps the school takes to promote it. The pupils are hard-working, co-operative, polite, well-behaved, enthusiastic and prepared to take the initiative. The vast majority of parents in questionnaires said their children liked the school and 91 per cent thought that behaviour was at least good. In three quarters of lessons observed pupils' attitudes were judged to be very good or excellent. Another indicator of motivation and commitment to learning is the school attendance rate which is well above the national average.
18. In classes, pupils listen to each other with respect and are able to collaborate in finding solutions to problems. The girls are prepared to take risks and offer ideas because of the secure and supportive classroom environment. In two of the English lessons observed pupils spontaneously applauded contributions made by individuals and groups of other pupils. This willingness to take on responsibility in a climate of support and tolerance is contributing to the quality of learning not only in lessons, but also in assemblies. In one Year 11 English lesson, for example, where the pupils were asked to prepare a talk designed to persuade the teacher to change her mind about a subject, there were some outstanding presentations on some sensitive issues such as sex education and the wearing of jewellery.
19. A noticeable characteristic of the pupils is their willingness to wrestle with difficult ideas and tasks. Pupils relish challenging work and show considerable resilience. This enables teachers to pitch work at a high level and provide a thorough coverage of the knowledge and skills required to attain the top grades. A good example of this was in a Year 9 English lesson where pupils focused throughout on a demanding analysis of the rhythm of a piece of Latin verse, followed by a detailed analysis of a speech from a Shakespeare play which contained some archaic language and sophisticated linguistic devices.
20. The pupils have high expectations of their teachers and demand a high level of clarity and expertise. In nearly all lessons the pupils are prepared to question and challenge the teacher if they disagree with what has been said or if they are unclear about explanations. A good example of this was in the same English lesson mentioned in the previous paragraph where one pupil challenged the teacher about the number of syllables in the word *Illium* from an epic by Virgil. The questioning is always constructive and polite and is a key part of the learning culture in lessons.
21. This lively engagement is partly due to a deliberate and effective encouragement of pupils to take responsibility. Some good examples of this are: the sixth formers leading assemblies; Year 12 pupils running a peer-led programme on drugs awareness; Year 10 pupils organising the school "International Day"; and an active School Council whose views are sought on a range of issues, including, recently, the appointment of the new head teacher. The range of school trips also encourages pupils to take on responsibility. These include the thriving Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and a personal development trip for all Year 8 pupils to Aberdyfi in Wales which one parent said at the parents' meeting had had a profound impact on her child's confidence. The sixth form are also involved in DfES Citizenship project which has received national attention.
22. The school is very active in promoting tolerance and understanding of a broad range of cultures and of those groups who are disadvantaged. Trips abroad, strong links with a local partner special school and a partner school in Kenya, the successful citizenship

programme, links with the local community, and international days have all helped to create a mutually tolerant community alert to those who are disadvantaged.

Excellent A level results and high quality sixth form teaching

23. A level results are well above the national average and there is some excellent attainment at the higher grades. This is leading to a high proportion of students gaining places at prestigious universities. The main reason for this is the high quality of teaching; in particular the expertise and knowledge of teachers is challenging and stretching students.

Very high standards in English and very high quality English teaching

24. A significant contributory factor to the school's academic success is the quality of the pupils' learning in English and the effectiveness with which English is taught.
25. In 2002 the proportion of pupils gaining Level 6 and above and Level 7 and above in the Key Stage 3 tests was well above the average for similar schools. The Key Stage 3 results were the highest in Buckinghamshire LEA for 2002, with all pupils, except one, gaining at least Level 6. Results at GCSE were also very good with all pupils entered gaining a grade at A*-C and 60 per cent gaining a grade at A* or A. There was also excellent attainment at the higher levels in English literature GCSE in 2002 with 70 per cent of pupils gaining an A* or A grade. Attainment at A level was exceptional in 2002 with 70 per cent of students gaining an A or B grade in English literature and language and 71 per cent in literature. Of the nine students who were entered for the advanced extension award, one gained a distinction and seven were awarded merits.
26. Pupils' books also show a high level of attainment in English and show that this is playing a key part in their academic success across a range of subjects. The written work of pupils is accurate and very well structured with excellent use made of charts and sub-headings. Discussion writing is particularly strong. Even at Key Stage 3, pupils are able to structure an argument using introductions, conclusions and link paragraphs. The quality of presentation of work is also high. In nearly all books seen pupils' work was clearly and attractively presented with clear handwriting.
27. In lessons and assemblies, oral work is exceptionally good. The pupils invariably use Standard English and can express complex thoughts with confidence, clarity and precision. A particular feature of the pupils' oral work is their wide range of vocabulary. One example of this was in a Year 11 lesson where the pupils were preparing persuasive speeches and used sophisticated vocabulary not only in their speeches but also in their analyses of them. Phrases such as *premature aging* and *collective enquiry* were used with fluency and accuracy in speeches and pupils referred to *hyperbole*, *rhetorical devices* and *antithesis* when they reviewed speeches.
28. One of the key reasons for the high standards in English is the quality of the English teaching. At all key stages, the expertise of teachers is very strong, both in terms of subject knowledge and also knowledge of National Curriculum and public examination specifications. Teachers have a very good grasp of methods, which is well illustrated by the way they have implemented the National English Key Stage 3 Strategy framework and lesson structure.

29. In all English lessons observed, teachers had high expectations and, more practically, an awareness of what pupils need to gain the highest levels and grades. There was a very clear review of grade A* and A criteria in one Year 11 English lesson, with some clear examples of how to achieve them. A particular strength is the foundation in language analysis being laid in Key Stage 3 and its development and focus at GCSE Stage 4. This is a key element in the criteria for the top GCSE grades and is making a significant contribution to the high level of English attainment. As well as literary devices, the good grounding in some complex key themes in literature, for example, appearance and reality in Shakespeare, are contributing to the high proportion of top grades at GCSE and A level.
30. Assessment is a very strong feature of the management of the English department and of teaching. The systems in place are rigorous: they enable a good oversight of standards and the progress of individual pupils and inform target-setting. The marking of work is informative and in lessons assessment of pupils' contributions is challenging and constructive.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Planning for Improvement at Whole School and Department Level

31. Although there is a clear drive to raise standards from the leadership team and from heads of department through analyses of results, reviews through line management meetings, and reports, whole school and department improvement strategies are not sufficiently specific or rigorous.
32. The degree of consultation in the writing of the school improvement plan is good. The 2002/3 plan was written in the summer term and was a collaborative effort involving governors, the leadership team, pastoral teams and the whole staff. Department Improvement Plans are informed by the school improvement plan. There is no improvement plan in place for the sixth form.
33. It was decided this year to produce a shorter, more succinct plan but the format of the current plan is weak and does not constitute a clear improvement strategy. The plan is divided into appropriate areas such as targets, objectives, success criteria, responsibilities and costings. There is no section which indicates the key actions needed to achieve the targets and there are no deadlines; this makes monitoring very difficult.
34. An area of confusion is the overlap between the targets and objectives sections. An example of this is *Target 3 Revise our Curriculum Model* which has as one of its two objectives *Consult on, agree and implement a new curriculum model*. The targets, objectives and success criteria sections are also too vague. This is illustrated by Target 1 which is *The Learning School*, and has as one of its success criteria *the implementation of recommendations*. The success criteria, particularly, are not sufficiently qualitative or quantitative and are of little use in evaluating how well the plan has been implemented.
35. There are two other key deficiencies in the current plan. One is that there is no reference to long term priorities; the other is that it does not relate to any audit. There is no indication in the plan of what the baseline position is for the targets and it is unclear how the plan relates to areas of weakness identified through any audits. For example, there is virtually

nothing in the plan which relates to improving standards in the sixth form or in addressing inconsistencies in performance in any subjects at GCSE.

36. The same weaknesses appear in the English, mathematics and science improvement plans. These are not written to a consistent structure, have vague success criteria and no timing. More importantly, again there is no obvious link between identified weaknesses and actions planned.
37. The weaknesses in the whole school and team plans are partly an issue of timing. There are rigorous audits of departments by the leadership team, self-evaluations by departments and action points are identified. However, these take place in the Autumn term, after examination results, and the school improvement and subject team improvement plans are written in the summer term. The school has recognised the issue and understands the need to develop more systematic links between audits, targets and improvement strategies.

The Limited Accommodation

38. The latest DfES method for calculating a school's capacity indicates that the school has insufficient space for the number of pupils on roll. Few of the teachers have fixed teaching rooms and room occupancy in both general and specialist rooms is high. There is only one suitable indoor space for Physical Education – the gym - and only one changing room which has to accommodate multiple classes.
39. A particular problem is the provision in the sixth form. The sixth form common room is much too small for the numbers of students: during assemblies it is packed to capacity, with many having to stand and some having their view obscured. There is a lack of private study space – an issue raised by parents in the pre-inspection meeting – and this is leading to a large overspill into the school library. This in turn restricts the library's availability for the rest of the school.
40. The sixth form teaching rooms are also very cramped for some classes. The national changes to the sixth form curriculum in September 2000 has led to larger classes. Some of these have been accommodated in full size rooms, which again has led to less capacity for the rest of the school. Some of the larger classes are still taught in cramped sixth form rooms.
41. The leadership team and governors are alert to these issues and have raised money and made bids to the LEA in an attempt to address them.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- (1) Establish more rigour and clarity in improvement plans at whole school and departmental level and ensure they address identified areas of weakness. (paragraphs 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36 and 37)
- (2) Continue to devise long and short term strategies to address the lack of accommodation. (paragraphs 38, 39, 40 and 41)

Sixth form

- (1) Establish a strategic plan to sustain and build on the strengths of sixth form provision and standards and address some of the weaknesses in accommodation. (paragraphs 39, 40, and 90)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	34
	Sixth form	55
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		41

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	4	12	16	2	0	0	0
Percentage	12	35	47	6	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	6	24	22	3	0	0	0
Percentage	11	44	40	5	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.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	877	380
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	8	1

Special educational needs	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	25	11

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	60

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	7
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	17

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	95.5
National comparative data	91

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	.1%
National comparative data	1.2

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	179	179

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	178	178	176
	Total	178	178	176
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	99 (100)	98 (98)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	99 (97)	97 (97)	88 (87)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	178	180	179
	Total	178	180	179
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (99)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	99 (97)	99 (97)	94 (99)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	N/a	187	187

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	179	184	185
	Total	179	184	185
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	96 (99)	98 (99)	99 (99)
	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	60.8 (62.4)
	National	39.8 (39.1)

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	81.0

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	n/a	173	173
	Average point score per candidate	n/a	19.6 (21.2)	19.6 (21.2)
National	Average point score per candidate	n/a	18 (17.2)	17.5 (7.6)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	n/a	173	173	n/a	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	n/a	19.6	19.6	n/a	0	0
National	Average point score per candidate	n/a	17.9	17.4	n/a	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**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1027	0	0
White – Irish	10	0	0
White – any other White background	56	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	6	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	7	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	19	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	22	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	13	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	11	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	5	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	24	1	0
Chinese	17	0	0
Any other ethnic group	17	0	1
No ethnic group recorded	32	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: Y 7 – Y 11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	70.25
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.9

Education support staff: Y 7 – Y 11

Total number of education support staff	16
Total aggregate hours worked per week	475

Deployment of teachers: Y 7 – Y 11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75
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Average teaching group size: Y 7 – Y 11

Key Stage 3	27
Key Stage 4	23.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2
	£
Total income	3,448,177
Total expenditure	3,518,864
Expenditure per pupil	2,847
Balance brought forward from previous year	79,425
Balance carried forward to next year	8,738

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	19.3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	22.2

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1257
Number of questionnaires returned	359

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	50	43	4	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	53	42	3	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	37	54	3	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	27	59	10	2	2
The teaching is good.	36	55	3	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	51	16	4	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	45	4	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	32	2	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	21	54	16	4	5
The school is well led and managed.	29	56	3	3	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	51	3	1	2]
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	31	44	10	2	13

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

42. From 1999-2001 A level results have been well above average in comparison with results nationally and also for those in girls' schools. National comparative data is not yet available for 2002 but results were significantly higher than those in 2001 and the overall grade A-E pass rate was very high at 97.5 per cent. In 2001 A level results were very high or well above the national average in biology, business studies, communication studies, English language and literature, design and technology, geography, German, history and Spanish. They were below average in only two subjects - French and religious education. In 2002 results in these two subjects improved, with value-added data showing French to be one of the strongest.
43. Attainment was particularly good at the higher levels in 2002 and there has been a tradition of high A level grades. 65 per cent of the 2002 entry gained grades at A or B and this resulted in a very high proportion of students being accepted by prestigious universities, including seven by Oxford or Cambridge. The subjects with the highest proportion of A or B grades were: English language and literature (70 per cent), mathematics (70 per cent), history (65 per cent), religious studies (75 per cent), biology (69 per cent), psychology (68 per cent), English literature (71 per cent), French (83 per cent), German (73 per cent), music (83 per cent), politics (76 per cent) and economics (77 per cent). The weakest attainment at the higher levels was in design and technology (30 per cent) and art (47 per cent).
44. A few Year 13 students took Advanced Supplementary levels in 2001. There are no national comparisons available yet for the 2001 and 2002 Advanced Subsidiary (AS) results. AS level results were good, however, in 2002 and should enable students to sustain the high levels of attainment in A level in previous years. The strongest performances at AS level in 2002 were in music, art, mathematics, communication studies, and classical civilisation. The weakest performance in A/S levels was in chemistry, English literature, physics and government and politics. The highest proportion of lower grades was in chemistry (five grade Es and two unclassified) and physics (four grade Es and three unclassified).
45. There has been a trend of high attainment at A level and also a trend of improvement. In 2002 the average points score for A level improved dramatically and was the highest for five years. The A-E grade pass rate at A level also improved from 96 per cent in 2001 to 97.5 per cent in 2002.
46. In the 15 subjects chosen for inspection, standards were well above average overall. Attainment was judged to be very good or excellent in two thirds of the lessons observed and at least good in the vast majority. Standards were excellent in English literature and well above average in mathematics, drama, biology, business studies and economics, art, French, classical civilisation and history. Standards attained in chemistry, geography and design and technology were above average. There were no examinations in A/S or A level in physical education in 2001. Standards being attained in the A/S level Year 12 physical education course so far are above average. There are no examinations in personal, social and health education but standards seen in lessons were good.

47. The students make very good progress in lessons and their achievement in the 15 subjects above is very good overall. Achievement is at least good in all subjects. The nationally accredited value-added system that the school uses shows no underachievement in any subject over a three year average. Taking the standard on entry into account, there is excellent achievement in English literature and very good achievement in chemistry, biology, design and technology, drama, economics, classical civilisation, French and art. Students' achievement is good in business studies, mathematics, geography and physical education. Students with special educational needs achieve well.
48. Standards seen in other subjects that were sampled during the inspection were above average overall. They were well above average in Spanish, religious studies and physics.
49. A key contributory factor to this very good achievement is the high standard of students' written and oral language, and their ability to interpret and use data. The foundations for these basic skills are laid early on at Key Stages 3 and 4.
50. Across the whole range of subjects, students' writing was accurate, well-presented and well-structured. The students are able to collate and organise information well and can write fluently with an extended vocabulary and sophisticated understanding of specialist subject vocabulary. A central feature in lessons is the way the students are able to problem solve in pairs and groups and express their views with clarity and precision. This is helping them refine and consolidate their learning. The students are very skilful in the use of data, and they present and interpret graphs and tables with clarity and accuracy. This is a key factor to some of the high attainment in mathematics, the sciences, design and technology, and humanities subjects.
51. A short course in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is currently taught to all students in 12 and nearly all students reach at least a basic level through this course. Good use was being made of computers in the work and lessons observed. The students have sound basic word-processing skills and can use spreadsheets. It was clear from a range of subjects that the Internet was being used well to access information.
52. Two other key factors in the high attainment at A/S and A level are the high quality of teaching and the students' learning skills. The teachers' mastery of their subjects, their fluency and authority, is having a major impact on attainment at A and B grade level, particularly in English related subjects and modern languages.
53. The other key factor is the students' own ability to assimilate knowledge and skills and work independently. They are very focused and resilient when tackling difficult concepts. They take risks in a supportive classroom climate and are prepared to question and ask for extra help when they are unclear about what is being taught. High quality project work and research are central to success in design and technology, art, geography and economics.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

54. The sixth form students at the school have very good attitudes. Whether in study, outside in competitive pursuits or helping in the community, the girls have a strong resolve, which shows a pride in both themselves and their school. This aspect is clearly one of the school's many strengths and as such, has improved upon the already existing high

standard of the previous inspection. In all the lessons seen, attitudes were at least good and in many, very good and sometimes excellent. The high commitment that students have to their school can be seen from the considerable distances that some of them travel. The students are very highly motivated and they enjoy and excel in the responsibility given to them for arranging their own, unsupervised and highly successful independent learning. Within the twelve months preceding this inspection there has been only one short term and one permanent exclusion from the school.

55. The personal development and relationships of the students is also very good. It is underpinned by a shared value system, a firm commitment to academic excellence and also to the welfare and needs of others. The latter was displayed when students suggested inviting in students from a neighbouring special needs school to watch musical performances. Then, it was decided that as these students were regular visitors they might as well become part and parcel of the actual performances. Positions on the school's democratic cabinet are well sought after, as is membership of the school council, itself run successfully by the sixth form.
56. Whilst being interviewed, it was clear that the students were in no way shy of articulating their own opinions but at the same time, often with a wry sense of humour. They are highly respected by the rest of the school for their organisational skills. During a house assembly witnessed and entirely run by sixth form students, they initiated the organisation of individual short musical events for every form and also set initiative tests for them, involving building a bridge from spaghetti and marshmallow and making a mummy from used cardboard reels. Many girls have benefited from extensive travel, via student visits in the last year to countries such as China, Germany, Austria, Spain, Greece, Italy and Morocco. They also appreciate what can be learnt from the small but quite influential ethnic diversity of students within the school. The school encourages work shadowing and two Year 13 girls have been to Brussels to sit in the European Parliament and watch procedures for three days. Other students have visited the House of Commons and also sat in at local council meetings. There is very little friction in the school and, from talking to students, bullying is all but non-existent. In fact Year 12 students are working with younger pupils to run SHARE, a listening service where pupils can voice their concerns. The majority of students get on well together and respect the views of others. A genuine affection that they feel for their tutors, mentors and other members of staff, is well reciprocated.
57. The attendance of students is now very good and above the national average for this type of school. Most students arrive on time and the majority of lessons commence promptly. Due to the extensive efforts of staff, punctuality into lessons is not now the problem that it was at the previous inspection.
58. From speaking to individuals during the inspection, it is difficult to agree with some of the criticisms made on the student questionnaire. Most students' views are that this is a very good school to which they enjoy coming. Specifically though, some students marked low on: receiving helpful and constructive advice, being well informed of their progress, being well advised about future options, receiving support and help for personal problems, having their views heard, receiving a range of activities and enrichments and having work thoroughly assessed. However, a very high percentage of students also said that: their choice of subjects suits their talents and aspirations, they are well taught and challenged, the teachers are accessible to help and they enjoy the sixth form and recommend it. The written guidance for students and the channels of communication are very good.

59. Overall, it is clear that the very positive attitudes, values and personal development of students at the school help considerably towards the success of their learning. This aspect is also clearly enhanced by the school's very good programme of spiritual, moral and social education. In assemblies, tutor periods and in lessons, students from different ethnic backgrounds and those with special educational needs are fully integrated and there is a high level of mutual support and respect.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

60. The overall quality of teaching is very good. During the inspection over half of the lessons observed were very good or excellent and none were unsatisfactory. Teaching is characterised by a high level of subject expertise, very good planning and high expectations - all of which make a significant contribution to the very high proportion of A or B grades attained. There were no significant weaknesses in any of the teaching observed and no weakness which was apparent across the range of subjects. The students also rated the teaching highly. The vast majority thought they were well-taught and challenged and 91 per cent also thought they were helped to study independently.
61. In the 15 subjects chosen for inspection, teaching is very good in English literature, biology, classical civilisation, design and technology, PE, art, history, French, drama and economics. Teaching is good in mathematics, chemistry, business education, geography and personal, social and health education.
62. There are no aspects of teaching which are not at least good. The main strengths are the high levels of subject knowledge and also, related to this, the way the teachers challenge and inspire students. There are no particular weaknesses in teaching skills. In the occasional lesson there could have been more student involvement, but in most this was a strong feature.
63. In most subjects the teachers show themselves to be aware of the main debates currently taking place about key issues related to the examination courses. They are also able to model writing and practical work at a very high level. Teachers' in-depth knowledge, not only of their subjects but also of examination requirements and grade criteria, is leading to excellent attainment at the higher levels in most subjects and also to the high proportion of students gaining places at top universities. In the subjects inspected, the quality of subject knowledge is particularly high in modern languages and in English literature. In English literature, teachers' subject knowledge is enabling them to speak fluently about writing in different periods and also about texts by the same author. In French, teachers have an excellent command of the language and knowledge of French life and culture.
64. Teachers have high expectations of their students, who are challenged in lessons and probed by skilful questioning. This was especially apparent in English literature, drama, business studies and modern languages lessons. In one Spanish lesson where there were high expectations, questioning was very effective, the teacher encouraged the students to use complex political concepts and language to review possession of Gibraltar and not only the teacher but also the students questioned and challenged each other.
65. Another key reason that teaching in the sixth form is effective is the quality of teachers' planning and the amount of preparation they put into lessons. Plans contain clear, appropriate and challenging learning objectives and the activities planned to achieve them

are well-balanced, usually involving the active engagement of students. Very few lessons were teacher dominated and even in these the quality of learning was good.

66. Teachers are aware of the relatively few students with special educational needs and take these into account when planning lessons. None of the students who speak English as an additional language are weak at English - all gained at least an A*-C grade at GCSE.
67. There is no specific provision for key skills teaching in English and numeracy but in lessons teachers give valuable advice on how to structure essays, take notes, use data and conduct research. Information and communication technology is taught separately in Year 12. These lessons did not take place during the inspection but in other lessons and in students' work, teachers were skilfully extending information and communication technology skills.

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

68. The curriculum provided for sixth form students is very wide ranging and it meets the expressed needs of the students very well. Students in Year 12 have a choice of 23 AS-level programmes of study. In addition to their four or five AS subjects, students also follow a supplementary study chosen from nine topics, which include Japanese, Chinese, Italian, Urdu and an AS course on critical thinking. Nearly 95 per cent of the students move directly into sixth form from the main school. All students have aspirations to enter higher education and this is reflected in the school's focus on A-level subjects. A small number of students join the school from other schools in the surrounding area. In 2002, a very high proportion of Year 13 students moved on to higher education and nearly all Year 12 students continued their studies into Year 13.
69. There are no advanced vocational courses on offer although, following a recent curriculum review, a vocational information technology course is currently being introduced. The school has been wise to respond to demand by concentrating on quality rather than extending the number of courses. Provision for the small number of students with specific learning difficulties is very good. Academic and enrichment programmes meet the needs of the gifted and talented students well. Key skills are currently supported through A-level subjects rather than taught separately, which is appropriate for the very large majority of Aylesbury High students.
70. A wide and imaginative enrichment programme for sixth form students operates at lunchtimes, in the evenings and during holiday periods. The levels of take up are high for these activities. A large and dedicated proportion of the staff ensure that they contribute strongly to the development of this very mature and sensible group of young people. Such opportunities contribute to the impressive self-esteem and confidence that students project in their activities both in lessons and around the school. Guest speakers, eminent in their field of work, give stimulating lectures on topical issues. In the past year, the topics covered have been diverse and included seminars on the Israeli-Arab world, the African and Asian Venture, the police, the prison service, the Euro and female health issues. These seminars prepare students for the world beyond school very well. A significant proportion of students who responded to the inspection questionnaire did not feel that the school provides a good range of worthwhile activities and enrichment courses. However, students interviewed during the inspection were positive about this aspect of the school's provision.

71. The school is very responsive to local circumstances. It gives well-informed, impartial and objective advice to its Year 11 pupils about the full range of post-16 options available to them. All students are entitled to, and receive, detailed careers advice and guidance on opportunities post-18. In addition to the local careers service, students are supported by a well-informed sixth form careers and higher education team. Work shadowing placements were found for 95 Year 12 students in the past year. These took place both in the United Kingdom and abroad. Students shadowed, amongst many others, high court judges, surgeons, business managers and television producers. Year 13 students indicate that this experience has been influential in their selection of university courses. In addition, a particularly strong feature of the sixth form programme is students' involvement in the local community. All Year 12 students spend one afternoon a week for two terms working in hospitals, charity organisations and homes for the elderly and handicapped.
72. The sixth form curriculum, as at the time of the last inspection, does not meet the statutory requirement for religious education or daily collective worship, but this is not currently restricting students' spiritual development. Overall, the provision the school makes for students' continuing personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Many lessons allow students to appreciate the intangible, and also successfully promote spiritual development through creative writing and poetry. In psychology lessons, the students' personal development is well supported by the constant requirement to understand human feelings and consider the impact of human action on others.
73. The moral and social development of the students is excellent and builds on the consistently strong moral guidance that students receive from Year 7 onwards. The system encourages students to take on leadership roles and to support younger students; it enables them to take the initiative in activities such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. House captains organise successfully many dramatic and sports events. The school meets its aim of ensuring that all students play a productive role within the school.
74. Provision for multicultural education is embedded in school activities, and cultural development is further improved by the range of visual and performing arts. For example, modern language students visit France and Germany and the school has growing links with Spain, Italy, Poland, Australia and some developing countries. A group of students spent two weeks on an expedition to Morocco. Further afield, 24 students and three staff spent three weeks at the University of Nationalities in Beijing learning Mandarin Chinese. In the summer of 2002, the school arranged a for a group of students from its partner school in Chagaik, Kenya to visit. Other examples include visits to the Tate Modern and National Galleries and theatre visits to Hamlet and Othello.
75. There is a very harmonious and tolerant atmosphere in the sixth form. It has a very strong work ethic and is open to ideas and suggestions from all of its members. The attitudes and behaviour of the student body are exemplary and they leave the school confident and fully prepared to meet their futures.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Advice, support and guidance

76. Sixth form students receive very good advice and support both on personal and educational matters. New and existing students receive a sound and stimulating induction

into the sixth form prior to joining and continue to enjoy a good level of support throughout their course of study. The management team in the sixth form, composed of experienced staff, is available to counsel and advise. In addition, sensible use is made of health professional services outside the school to further enhance provision. Some reservations were expressed by a minority of students through the questionnaire, in respect of the level of support and guidance provided. However, students who were interviewed unreservedly acknowledged the good level of support and guidance available to them.

77. A measure of the success of the educational advice is the very high percentage of students who are accepted for their first choice of career or university. There is an effective programme of careers education in place, delivered by tutors, which supports the majority of students who access higher education, as well as providing routes into employment. High quality, up to date reference material for careers education and guidance is available in the library.
78. The attendance rate for the sixth form in 2000/2001 was significantly above the national average for sixth forms. It was slightly lower than the main school but reflects the absence of students sampling places of employment, and universities.

Assessment

79. Assessment in the sixth form is good. Entry into and progress through the sixth form is informed by comprehensive data on students' attainment. Good use is made of an established commercial A-level information system that enables the school to evaluate student and subject department performance against realistic expectations/predictions for grade levels.
80. The form tutors are an integral part of the monitoring of student performance as they have a regular overview of the effort and progress grades for all subjects. Agreed performance targets are set within subjects. Any under-performance is identified and subject to action involving the student, parent, tutor and head of sixth form. Further numerical or personal targets are set to resolve performance issues, a process that is generally seen as supportive by students. Students' performance is reported regularly to parents in summary and written form. Parents and students value the long reports but have some reservations about the brevity of the short reports.
81. The marking of students' work, particularly long assignments or essay type work is well balanced between an acknowledgement of positive features and an indication of what the student can do to improve further. The English department has particularly effective assessment strategies in place including student self- assessment. Students identify their file notes as an area that could be improved upon. Some teachers do not assess the quality of these notes and yet they are an important factor in understanding new work and revision for examinations.

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

82. Students' views on the school are generally very supportive. The school selected a sample of students for interview and others spoke formally and informally with inspectors during the course of the inspection week. In addition, nearly all students in the sixth form completed a pre-inspection questionnaire. Students are very pleased with the choice of

courses that the school provides, as it gives them an opportunity to follow a programme suited to their talents and career aspirations. They also appreciate the way in which they are treated as young adults, together with the availability and willingness of teachers to help them if they have difficulties with their work or have personal problems. The majority of students think they are taught very well, are challenged to do their best in lessons, and are encouraged to study and research independently. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and would advise others to join.

83. Nevertheless, a significant number of students do not believe that work is assessed thoroughly, advice given is always constructive and that the school provides a good range of enrichment and activities. However, inspectors do not consider these opinions to be valid. They find that work is assessed thoroughly, advice given by staff is very helpful and that there is a good range of enrichment opportunities and activities in which students can become involved.
84. The inspectors agree with parents of sixth formers that there is a lack of private study space for students. Inspectors feel that parents' concerns about lack of challenge and an inconsistency in implementing policies are not justified.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

85. Leadership of the sixth form is good. The sixth form has a clear set of aims and values within which effective curriculum provision is made. The governing body and the acting senior leadership team are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the sixth form. Attainment data is presented clearly for governors and carefully analysed in governing body meetings. Although there is a whole school improvement plan, there is not clear strategic planning for continuous improvement in standards, teaching and learning and accommodation in the sixth form. There is a shared belief that students should become independent learners and the ethos and educational direction set by the good leadership enables all students to benefit from the courses offered in the sixth form. Entry requirements are applied and entrants into the sixth form are perceived as having the potential to gain grades in their chosen courses. The school has rightly recognised the need for an increase in provision of accommodation for the sixth form, and in particular for private study areas.
86. The day to day management of the sixth form is very good. The head of sixth form is well supported by a committed team of tutors, an assistant head of sixth form and a higher education tutor. Together they provide very good support for students. A wide range of information and attainment information informs the head of sixth form's work, including analysis of external examination results, progress and value added information and target grades.
87. The admission and induction arrangements are very well organised. Students are encouraged to play an increasingly important part in the school and in the wider community. Students describe post-16 life as enjoyable. They have equal access to the opportunities and there is a high level of participation in clubs and house events - over 500 students were involved in clubs or house activities in 2000/2001.

88. There are very good procedures for monitoring students' progress. Procedures to monitor and promote high quality teaching and learning and high standards of work are incorporated within the whole school system. Teaching and learning are very good and this represents high achievement overall. A system is not yet in place for establishing an overview of the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form subjects. There are very good relationships between students, and between teachers and students. Sixth form students say they are treated as young adults.
89. The quality and range of resources across subjects are good. Resources are used well to produce improving standards. The provision and availability of information and communication technology are good. There is a dedicated room in the main sixth form accommodation for information and communication technology. The library provides very good support for students' learning. Teachers are well qualified for the subjects that they teach and have access to very good professional development opportunities.
90. Accommodation is inadequate overall for teaching and learning. Teaching rooms situated in the sixth form area are too small for the high numbers of students in, for example, English. There is a shortage of independent study areas for sixth form students. Accommodation is sometimes better when students are taught in subject areas. The sixth form social area is inadequate for the increasing numbers. However, during the inspection week it was seen to be a central place, with a pleasant atmosphere where students met each other and communicated with members of staff.
91. The sixth form is very cost effective and does not require any subsidies from the main school. The sixth form very slightly subsidises the main school. The school monitors all spending closely and ensures that specific grants are used for the purpose intended.

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

In the inspection, 15 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

GCE Advanced Supplementary level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	4	100	62	50	15	3.3	1.5
Biology	1	0	52	0	2	0	.79
Classical Studies	1	100	n/a	0	n/a	2.0	n/a
Religious Studies	1	100	85	0	26	3.0	2.4

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	57	91	87	46	43	6.1	5.8
Chemistry	47	94	91	49	43	6.4	5.9
Biology	72	93	88	49	34	6.7	5.3
Physics	29	87	88	35	40	5.7	5.7
Design and technology	12	100	91	50	30	7.2	5.4
Business Studies	35	100	92	60	32	7.4	5.5
Economics	11	91	89	36	36	6.4	5.5
Art and design	13	100	96	23	46	6.8	6.6
Music	3	100	93	100	35	8.7	5.7
Drama and theatre studies	16	100	99	50	38	7.1	6.6
Classical studies	33	100	95	61	49	7.3	6.5
Geography	8	100	92	63	38	7.3	5.7
History	17	94	88	59	35	6.9	5.5
Religious Studies	5	100	92	20	38	5.2	5.8
General Studies	2	100	85	50	30	7.0	4.9
Other Social Studies	28	89	87	14	34	4.8	5.3

English language and literature	14	100	92	79	30	8.4	5.3
English literature	50	98	95	56	37	6.8	5.9
Communication Studies	24	100	93	63	31	7.08	5.53
French	12	92	89	25	38	4.50	5.59
German	10	100	91	90	40	8.40	5.81
Spanish	6	100	89	50	39	7.33	5.70

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics

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

Strengths:

- The progress and achievement of the vast majority of students.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and the rigour in curriculum coverage.
- The use of 'Starter Packs' to support Year 12 students beginning their studies.

Areas for improvement:

- To ensure that all students gain at least a pass grade at either AS or A level.
- The retention of students from GCSE, and from Year 12 into Year 13.
- The involvement of students in their learning, including their assessment, in a greater variety of ways.

92. A level attainment in mathematics in 2001 was above the national average and improved considerably in 2002. The progress and achievement by the vast majority of students in the sixth form is good. Numbers entered for the A level have been reasonably consistent over recent years. In 2002, of the 44 A level candidates, 96 per cent achieved a pass grade; of these, 68 per cent gained A or B grades, an improvement on the previous year. Also in 2002, 71 per cent of the AS candidates, gained A or B grades.
93. Teachers worked hard between 2001 and 2002 to ensure that the disappointing results in 2001 were not repeated. They also took steps to offer students' a wider range of modules. The school encourages students to re-sit modules if they fail to secure a pass grade, and also to re-sit individual modules in Year 13 in order to improve their overall grade at A level. There is good provision for the higher attaining students, with most of the six A level and ten AS level students achieving their expected grade in Further Mathematics in 2002.
94. The standard of work seen in lessons and in students' books is well above course requirements, and they achieve well. Students in Year 12 have a good knowledge of such mathematical processes as differentiation and integration; they use relevant statistical measures well, including both random and systematic sampling. Students in Year 13 also have sophisticated skills in the use and application of statistics.

95. Teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject. All lessons have clear objectives and are conducted at an appropriately brisk and challenging pace. Work, including homework, is regularly marked, with clear guidance about how students can improve. Teachers use the outcomes of assessment well to consolidate previous learning before they move on to new areas. There is more scope in some lessons for student involvement, particularly the weaker students, through targeted questions, small group discussion and self assessment. Where teachers use a range of strategies students respond very well. For example, Year 12 students enjoyed testing the hypothesis that 'trees that are given fertiliser have improved growth'. This ensured that they understand how to apply their theoretical knowledge. Similarly, Year 13 students enjoyed using whiteboards when responding to questioning during a starter activity.
96. Students are very well behaved and attentive. The vast majority work very hard and show very good commitment. Students of all abilities take pride in the presentation of their work. A very small minority do not show the commitment necessary to meet the demands of the course requirements and finish their studies without gaining a pass grade at either AS or A level.
97. Leadership and management are good overall. There is rigorous monitoring and evaluation and good improvement strategies are in place.
98. Progress since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Standards are broadly as they were then, with high levels of attainment and many able mathematicians benefiting from good teaching and a positive learning experience. Every year several students move on to read mathematics related degrees at university, and are well prepared to do so.

Biology

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

Strengths:

- Teachers use their very good subject knowledge effectively in their teaching.
- All elements of the biology course are taught with enthusiasm and interest.
- Very good provision for the highest attaining students.
- Students have very good attitudes to their learning.
- A rich practical experience includes latest techniques and develops high level skills.

Areas for improvement:

- The provision of a more stimulating learning environment with specimens, articles and artefacts relevant to the course.

99. Standards in this subject are well above A level course requirements. 69 per cent of the students passed with the highest grades (A and B). This is a further improvement on standards that were already well above the national average. Over the last four years more students have gained pass grades (A-E) than the national average. In 2002 all but 4 per cent achieved a pass grade. From the work seen in the current Year 13 the majority of students continue to work to standards that attract the highest pass grades. This is the same very high standard that prevailed at the last inspection.

100. Written work shows that students have a good command of all the elements of the course, ranging through molecular biology, biochemistry, plant and animal physiology and microbiology. They can interpret data from field observations showing an in-depth understanding of the accuracy and relevance of the data gathered. In Year 12 practical work, for example, students very confidently use micropipettes and micro tubes to set up an experiment in molecular biology. They understand some complex biological investigation techniques. They have an understanding of the symptoms and causes of cystic fibrosis and the possible ways for it to be treated.
101. Very good teaching was seen in a Year 12 group studying DNA protocol. The lesson was lively and interesting. High expectations for learning prevailed as the students were skilfully questioned to reinforce previous learning and to extend their thinking. The class practical work introduced them to the latest technique of separating and detecting DNA fragments using gel electrophoresis. The lesson led on to current issues such as the causes of cystic fibrosis and the possibilities of gene therapy.
102. It is the synergy between the teachers' skills and enthusiasm and the students' interest that leads to very good learning and progress in this subject. Students of all abilities are very well supported as individuals. Students complete their work with care and attention to accuracy and detail. They often extend their learning through additional individual research. The quality of learning is particularly enhanced through the provision of a rich and challenging practical experience. In Year 13 the skills required to maintain sterile conditions when setting up an experiment to investigate the effectiveness of antibiotics on bacterial growth were expertly demonstrated. The students develop outstanding practical skills and they gain experience of some of the most recent research techniques.
103. There are very good schemes of work that ensure continuity and quality of learning as the students progress through the course. The students' work is monitored regularly. Helpful and supportive comments are given which enable the students to identify their weaknesses and improve further. The students feel that they are well informed about the progress they are making with their work. Support for continued learning outside of formal lessons is good.
104. An experienced and dedicated head of subject leads the department to a very good standard. Recently introduced initiatives will further enhance the quality of teaching and learning. The teachers work well as a team to ensure continuity in learning. A team of technicians provide good support for learning through the maintenance and management of the more advanced equipment required for these courses.

Chemistry

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

Strengths:

- The standard of teaching is good.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject.
- Students are dedicated to their studies.
- Students of all abilities and interests are well supported.
- Practical work is carried out to a high standard.

Areas for improvement:

- More frequent opportunities for assessing students' standards and progress.
- Further opportunities to use Information and communication technology fully in the collection, processing and interpretation of data.

105. In the recent A Level examinations 68 per cent of the students passed with the highest grades (A and B). This is a substantial improvement on the number of students achieving the higher grades in examinations over the last four years, although these have always been above the national average. During this time, consistently more students have gained pass grades (A-E) than the national average. This is the same high standard that prevailed at the last inspection.
106. From the work seen in the current Year 13 the majority of students continue to work at standards that will assure good pass grades. In Year 12, for example, the students can construct three-dimensional models to display and compare the formulas for primary, secondary and tertiary alcohols. They can confidently use the convention for naming these organic compounds. They understand how hydrogen bonding affects the boiling point of alcohols with different molecular structures. Their experimental techniques are very good and they fully understand the chemical processes involved.
107. The quality of teaching is good. Students of all abilities were very well supported as individuals. Their work is completed with care and attention to accuracy and detail. Students often extend their learning through additional individual research. Very good teaching was seen in a Year 13 practical investigation to determine the factors affecting the position of equilibrium in a chemical reaction. The lesson was delivered specifically to develop advanced skills in problem solving. The teacher carefully avoided presenting information as an established fact. This generated a more challenging learning environment. The students were empowered with the skills to think through other challenging investigations to arrive at accurate conclusions independently.
108. It is a combination of the students' dedication and interest and the pace, rigour and advanced preparation of the lessons that leads to good quality learning in this subject. The teachers know their subject very well and they teach with enthusiasm and dedication. Explanations are clear and the terminology of the chemical processes is used effectively. The teachers know their students well and they all receive encouragement and support appropriate to their interests and abilities. Lessons are taught with sufficient depth to challenge and extend the learning of the highest attaining students. The students are highly motivated and involved with their studies. They ask thoughtful questions demonstrating interest, perceptiveness and a basis of good prior learning. They work independently when required to do so to research their studies. They work very well together in practical sessions, supporting each other in their learning.
109. Theoretical elements of the course are organised well and to high standards. The students' practical experience is very good and further challenges their scientific thinking whilst developing their skills of experimental enquiry, data analysis and interpretation. Support for continued learning outside formal lessons is good. Analysis of their work reveals that information and communication technology is not used fully to enhance the

students' understanding, interpretation and presentation of data and to monitor experiments by direct sampling through sensors.

110. There is a good scheme of work that ensures continuity and quality in learning as the students progress through the course. The students' work is marked regularly. Helpful and supportive comments are given which enable the students to identify their weaknesses and improve further. Tests ensure that progress is monitored. However there are opportunities for further assessment to take place to ensure that the students are more frequently informed about the standards that they are achieving.
111. A newly appointed head of subject leads the department with enthusiasm to a good standard. Recently introduced initiatives are further enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. The teachers work very well as a team to ensure continuity in learning though more use could be made of information and communication technology. A team of technicians provide good support for learning through the maintenance and management of the more advanced equipment required for these courses.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and Technology

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

Strengths:

- very good teaching.
- A/S and A level results overall are higher than the national average for selective schools.
- accommodation is of a good standard and is enhanced by a range of pupil work on display.
- the attitude and behaviour of students is very positive.
- the teaching team is well supported by two experienced and competent technicians.

Areas for improvement:

- extra focus/emphasis on formal drawing techniques.
- fine tuning of new syllabus requirements to ensure that the number of A grades is increased.
- encouragement of a broader range of pupil project work.

112. There are two courses available in the sixth form, Advanced Subsidiary (AS) level and A level in Product Design. In 2002 11 students sat the AS examination. All students passed and 63 per cent gained an A or B grade. Ten students sat for the A level examination. All students passed with an A-E grade but there were no grade As. In the previous year A level results were better. They were well above the national average with a quarter of students gaining grade As.
113. Attainment is well above the national average and above the average for selective schools and students are achieving very well for their capability. Both courses are well structured and students are provided with appropriate support and assessment guidance together with detailed planners. Individual projects are of good quality and students increase their bank of skills and techniques as they develop their ideas. Student understanding of the design process is good and through this they are enabled to develop distinctive personal styles. Work on display provides evidence of a variety of innovative responses and acts as a stimulus for others. Students show interest in their work and concentrate for

appropriate periods of time. The standard of planning/learning skills is good. Students demonstrated research and analytical skills and were able to use complex data in their project planning. Some students might be encouraged to be a little more adventurous in their choice of project work. Practical skills are largely limited to the use of wood and wood products.

114. In the Year 12 lesson observed students were engaged in individual project work in which they researched and analysed the design features of a group of products. Students worked towards a modification or re-design of the product to improve on performance or styling. Work seen was of an appropriate quality and quantity and there is evidence of a clear understanding of the process. Teaching was very good with the teacher acting as advisor/consultant and questioning the development of the project. Students were clearly aware of assessment criteria and had appropriate support documentation. Year 13 students are part way through a major design project and are working at different stages. They respond well to the teaching style which is largely that of individual support. Demonstrations of techniques and processes are well done and students work on their projects confidently. Learning skills are well developed and students make good progress. The projects were largely of a furniture/child's toy nature and some students might be encouraged to be more adventurous in their choice of project in the future.
115. The quality of teaching is very good and teachers are experienced, competent and knowledgeable. They has created a positive learning climate and has provided good quality written support materials. Assessment criteria are clear and feedback specific and methodical. Teaching styles are appropriate and students respond easily. The organisation of specialist rooms is good and the teaching team is well supported by two very effective technicians. Further development work is in progress to improve the quality of formal drawings and to fine-tune the new syllabus responses.
116. The department is a collection of separate activity areas within a federation. A curriculum manager has overall responsibility whilst subject management is delegated to specialists. Changes have been made in Key Stage 3 and further developments in textiles are anticipated. Assessment is detailed and integrated into the learning process. The management system encourages a positive team approach and is appropriate and effective.

BUSINESS

Business Studies

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

Strengths:

- A trend of high levels of pupil attainment.
- The very good subject expertise of teachers and their high expectations.
- The use of data to set targets for students.

Areas for improvement:

- A wider variety of teaching styles.
- A consistent approach to assessment by teachers.

117. Business studies A and AS level results in 2002 were high, with a large proportion of students achieving A or B grades. In 2001 A level results were well above the national average and this has been the trend of very good results and good achievement taking standards at GCSE into account.
118. Students' achievement is good. Students show a very good understanding of the key concepts in the work and can often apply this understanding in unfamiliar contexts. Students are articulate and higher attaining students use the specialist language of the subject confidently and effectively in both oral and written work. Lower attaining students with no previous experience of business studies, sometimes find difficulty in the early stages of the course in coming to terms with the specialist language of the subject.
119. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers show very good subject knowledge and understanding. They are encouraging and positive and this inspires confidence amongst the students. Case study approaches are well used. Teaching methodology is generally appropriate, although in some lessons, teachers do not provide for a sufficient variety of learning styles. Teachers have very high expectations and promote effective learning by encouraging students to research, to form their own opinions and to articulate their views. For example, in one business studies lesson seen, students worked collaboratively on answers to a range of questions on the impact of government economic policy on business activity and then shared their responses with other another group of students who had been working on a different question. This promoted high level discussions around the key issues, fostered by very good teaching and excellent attitudes to learning.
120. Students have very good attitudes to learning, they are well motivated and show a real interest in the subject. They have well developed independent learning skills.
121. Within the economics and business studies department, trips and visits enhance the curriculum experience for sixth form business studies students and Young Enterprise makes a positive contribution to students' learning. There are some useful links with the business community and these could be used more systematically to support learning. The department makes a significant contribution to the development of students' key skills.
122. The leadership and management of the department is good. There is a clear vision for the role of business studies and economics education in the school. There is very good use of performance data in reviewing performance and setting targets. There is a strong focus on teaching and learning in departmental discussions and policies. Monitoring of students' work and the quality of teaching and learning takes place regularly. Lesson observations highlight key strengths and weaknesses but need to be more systematic and focused. Although work is marked thoroughly, there is no consistently applied assessment policy across the department.
123. Progress since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Students' evaluative skills are now good, and although lower attaining students still encounter some difficulties in the early stages of their course, they are generally well supported. Links with local businesses are developing. The size of rooms continues to restrict learning opportunities.

Economics

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

Strengths:

- Students achieve very well.
- Very good teaching promotes students' conceptual knowledge and understanding and skills of analysis and evaluation.

Areas for development:

- Links with the world in lessons.
- More consistent assessment practice.

124. Economics A and AS level results in 2002 were very high and a very large proportion of students achieved A or B grades. In 2001 A level economics results were above the national average. In recent years also A level results have been better than the national average and achievement has been good taking the attainment at GCSE into account.
125. Students' achievement is very good. They show very good skills of economic analysis. They research very effectively, making good use of the Internet in their research, although their capacity to be critical in their use of sources is, as yet, underdeveloped. Students show a very good understanding of key economic concepts and can apply them well.
126. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers show very good subject knowledge and have a real passion for the subject, which inspires students to achieve at the highest level. Teaching styles encourage the development of independent learning skills. Lessons are well planned and students are encouraged to apply their knowledge and understanding in unfamiliar contexts, although there are occasional missed opportunities for using real world examples in teaching. In the best lessons, teachers encourage and support students in handling relevant real world data to support their understanding of key concepts. For example, in one lesson on international trade, the teacher promoted really effective discussion by providing a range of visual cues including diagrams, charts and graphs showing trading patterns in relation to a range of different world economies.
127. Students have very good attitudes to learning, they are well motivated and show a real interest in the subject. They have well developed independent learning skills.
128. Economics education makes a significant contribution to the development of students' key skills.
129. The leadership and management of the department is good. There is a clear vision for the role of business studies and economics education in the school. There is very good use of performance data in reviewing performance and setting targets. There is a strong focus on teaching and learning in departmental discussions and policies. Monitoring of students' work and the quality of teaching and learning takes place regularly. Lesson observations highlight key strengths and weaknesses but need to be more systematic and focused. Although work is marked thoroughly, there is no consistently applied assessment policy across the department.

130. Progress since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Students' evaluative skills are now good, and lower attaining students are generally well supported. The size of rooms continues to restrict learning opportunities.

Classical Civilisation

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

Strengths:

- Very good teaching enables students to reach high standards.
- The students' attitudes to the subject are exemplary.
- The standards achieved are above average.
- The extra-curricular provision is very good, particularly the biennial trips to Greece.

Area for improvement:

- Further extension work could be given to the most able students.

131. The standards achieved at A level and AS level are very good. Results at A level have been consistently above the national average and slightly above those for other subjects in the school over the last four years. All students who were entered for A and AS levels over the last four years passed, and the percentage of those achieving A or B grades was above the national average. There was a slight decline in the latter in 2002 at A level. It resulted from surprisingly low results in one examination paper, a pattern that was reflected nationally.
132. While a few students have studied Latin previously, the majority enter the course with no prior knowledge of this subject. Many have lower grades in their GCSEs than are expected elsewhere as a pre-requisite, yet they make very good progress during both years of the course. Those with special educational needs and English as an additional language make equally good progress as the majority. In discussion students display a good understanding of the ancient world. One group spoke knowledgeably about Virgil's *Aeneid*, with a clear understanding of the epic poem; another showed an appreciation of early Greek customs of greeting, as seen in the *Odyssey*.
133. The teaching and learning in Classical Civilisation are very good. The lessons seen were all at least good and in one case excellent. The teachers' strong knowledge of their subject leads to lively teaching, which enables students to learn effectively. In one lesson graphic parallels were drawn between Homeric epic and modern film versions of fantasies, and an inventive drawing technique was used to foster an appreciation of the literal imagery in the poetry. Students work diligently, keeping clear and orderly notes, which are well illustrated with drawings of ancient art and architecture. Their attitudes in class are exemplary; they were seen contributing articulately and thoughtfully to discussions, and taking notes with alacrity. The most able students are provided with extra reading and pursue essay topics to suitably high levels, but there could be more targeted questions for them to consider in class. Teachers use assessment very well to inform students about their progress, and students are provided with full information about the requirements of the syllabus.
134. The improvement since the last inspection has been good. The new AS and A levels have been fully implemented and are being taught well. Very few students fail to complete either year, and the proportion of those continuing the subject right through to A level is above average.

135. The department is well led and managed. Data is analysed effectively in order to plan for the future, and suitable steps have been taken to remedy the situation in the one A level paper in which students attained less well last year. There is very good provision for extra curricular activities: the school has hosted Classical conferences with high-calibre speakers in each of the last two years, and the biennial trips to Greece are a highlight that bring the ancient world alive to students. At the time of the inspection 42 students were preparing for this year's trip.

French

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

Strengths:

- Students make good progress and achieve standards which are well above the national average in their AS and A level examinations.
- The quality of the teaching is very good; the teachers have an excellent command of the language.
- Students' attitudes towards their learning are very good.

Areas for improvement:

- The teachers need to explore ways of involving the least confident students more actively in conversation during lessons.

136. Pupil attainment in French is high. From 1998-2000 A level results were well above the national average. A level results dipped in 2001 when they were below the national average but in 2002 there was a significant improvement and results were high. All students gained at least a C grade, with an outstanding 88 per cent gaining an A or B grade. The AS Level results for the past two years have been well above the national average, with over two-thirds of the candidates achieving an A or B grade. The results in both the full A Level and AS Level papers show that students make greater than expected progress based on their attainments at the end of Year 11.

137. The evidence from work seen during the inspection, in lessons and in students' files, shows that standards in both Year 12 and Year 13 are well above average, although not quite as high as the exceptional results achieved by the full A Level students in 2002. Students from the whole ability range achieve very well and make very good progress as a result of carefully planned and prepared lessons and a very good range of additional opportunities which are available to them.

138. The undoubted strength in the students' work is their ability to understand spoken French, which is due to the department's uncompromising policy of conducting lessons entirely in French. In one lesson for students in Year 13, the teacher, whose mother tongue is French, spoke with great rapidity and made no concessions with regard to the complexity of her language, yet, through their answers to her questions, students showed very good understanding of the language. Many students speak confidently and convey their views and opinions clearly and well. They speak spontaneously, with good pronunciation and, in some instances, a very good use of French idiom. Some students, however, are more reluctant than others to speak, their accents are not quite so authentic and they struggle with some vocabulary. Students have a very good understanding of written French. They

read texts from a wide range of sources and demonstrate a very good understanding of both gist and detail, according to the task set. Students have good research skills and are confident in using information and communication technology, such as accessing French websites, to support their learning.

139. The overall quality of the teaching is very good. The teachers have high expectations and provide demanding lessons, in which the students learn very well. All of the lessons observed during the inspection were either good or very good. Lessons are very well prepared, with a good range of up-to-date and interesting material. A key factor in the very good progress made by the students is the excellent command of the language shown by all of the teachers, who conduct lessons entirely in French and are able to lead complex discussions on a wide range of topics. Students also benefit from having a native speaker within the department and a foreign language assistant. Students who have found the transition from GCSE to AS Level particularly difficult, value the opportunity to have additional conversation lessons in pairs with the assistant. The teachers also have a very good knowledge of French life and culture. In a very good lesson in Year 13, for example, the teacher's thorough grasp of the political regime in France helped students to gain a good understanding of how the French and British political systems differ. The teachers make very good use of authentic material to develop students' understanding of French. In one lesson in Year 13, for example, students listened to the French President's address to the nation, and in a lesson in Year 12, students compared newspaper and television reports of a train derailment.
140. The teachers have high expectations that the students should always respond in French, and maintain an appropriate balance between correction and encouragement to speak without interruption, so that students gain the confidence to speak with fluency and without fear of making errors. However, some teachers are more effective than others in using methods which give students the maximum opportunity to speak. In a very good lesson in Year 12, for example, the teacher gave students the opportunity to work individually, then with a partner and then in a larger group, before concluding the lesson with a whole-class debate on the freedom of the press. In a very good lesson in Year 13, students had been asked to prepare a talk about their views on politics. Some very good short talks were given, as students had prepared themselves well. In other lessons, most of the opportunities for speaking were in direct response to the teacher's questions, thus affording fewer opportunities to the students to speak and resulting in some students speaking very little at all.
141. A particular strength is the quality of relationships between students and teachers. The students appreciate the efforts made by their teachers and display a very mature attitude towards their learning. They display a high level of independence and enjoyment in their learning. Students appreciate the way teachers mark their work and give feedback to them during lessons or, at times, on an individual basis. The marking of students' written work is thorough and gives clear guidance about how to improve. As a result, students are aware of what they need to do to improve. Only a few students with special educational needs study French, but their needs are clearly known to the staff who provide appropriate help and reinforcement.
142. Students have very good attitudes to their work. They are keen to learn and want to succeed. They show much interest in the subject and maintain a high level of concentration and motivation throughout lessons. Some groups, characterised by lively and animated discussions, are more responsive than others.

143. The leadership and management of French in the sixth form are very good. The quality of the work in French was a crucial element in the school's successful bid to acquire Language College status, and the school's provision for languages is held in high regard. Staff have adapted well to the changes of syllabus in recent years, and new schemes of work are thought out carefully. The school organises opportunities for students to travel, work and study abroad, building on the benefit many students have experienced from visits and exchanges organised by the school in previous years. Rooms are equipped with appropriate audio-visual equipment, and a dedicated computer suite and satellite television link are available for students.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art

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

Strengths:

- Management and leadership.
- Teaching.
- Assessment and monitoring.
- Attitude and behaviour: students' interest in the subject.

Areas for improvement:

- Students' drawing skills, particularly with regard to figurative work.
- Y12 students' range of writing in their sketchbooks/journals.

144. Attainment in A level art in 2001 was above the national average. The 2002 AS level results showed that students attained well above the national average for A and B grades. This reflects an upturn in attainment following a period when results had depressed to be at or around the national average level. Within the context of the school, this had been a lower performance than expected. The current Y13 students are achieving at a level well above the national average for A/B grades. Similarly, the current Y12 students are achieving at levels well in advance of the national average for the subject. This signals a continuing trend of improvement within the subject. The success of the subject currently is the outcome of a restructuring of the programme of study and the administration of the courses and subject overall.

145. Y12 students have produced research sketchbooks of very high quality. Even those students indicated as lower performers have extensively researched work showing a broad range of media and approaches. The overall level of work is very high. Students are able to sustain extended investigative work exploring a theme. They use a good range of methods to create visual work including some excellent mixed media work. The exploration of artists' work is systematic and informative. In one class, excellent use was made of imagery from German Expressionist cinema to inform dramatic qualities in the students' work on structure and mood. This was counterbalanced by the students' carefully composed studies employing the formal properties found in Russian Constructivist works. Figurative work exposes some limitations in the areas of drawing. However, students' use of a range of treatments and approaches using colour and diverse media enables them to circumvent those limitations. The written work in the

sketchbooks/journals of lower performing students is too narrow in range. This writing does not do justice to the lively and inventive visual work with which it is juxtaposed on the pages of the sketchbooks/journals.

146. Y13 students have extensive research and creative work that demonstrates an attention to the qualities of the media used and mature exploration of the relationship of colour, composition and mood. There is extended development of themes in students' sketchbooks that show work of very high quality. Students' work on the A2 level unit 'problem solving' shows that they have thoroughly researched a very large range of artists and that they have successfully used that research to develop and extend their own work. Their visual work and writings demonstrate that they have a good understanding of the key qualities of the works they have utilised. The written work in the books of the higher performing students shows well-documented research and good quality evaluative writing analysing their own and others' work. Students show a very high interest in the subject. They work independently to explore their themes and projects in depth. Students work well together and discuss their ideas confidently and informatively.
147. Teaching is very good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject matter taught. Planning is thorough and analytical and there is detailed identification of learning objectives for lessons. These objectives for lessons are clear and contribute to the sense of purpose and direction in the lessons. They also help to focus and inform the feedback and plenary discussions at the end of the lessons. Teachers' expectations are high both with regard to students' involvement in the practical work and discussions, and with regard to the volume of extension or preparation work undertaken between lessons. Teachers encourage students to reflect upon their work and to apply their understanding of the works of other artists. Students are well managed. The framework of introduction, practical and demonstrations, and plenary gives the lessons a definite shape and helps to maintain the balance between production and reflection in the students' work. In lessons there are frequent interventions from the teacher to challenge and stimulate the ideas and working practices of the students. Students report that they feel they make very good progress in this learning situation.
148. Monitoring and assessment are thorough and effective. The teachers have a very good knowledge of the work and plans of the individual students. Ongoing assessment of students is thorough. Regular assessments are made of each student for each unit of work. These assessments are made against the eight identified criteria relevant to the examination assessment objectives. As well as the teacher assessment in the individual student record, each student also evaluates their own performance against the table of objectives and this is recorded alongside the teachers' evaluation. The review plenary sessions at the end of lessons are particularly effective in developing the teacher's picture of individuals' progress.
149. Excellent leadership and management have brought about rapid improvement in students' attainment. The subject is well led and managed. Clear and effective action has been taken to improve student performance, though there is scope to develop students' drawing, and writing in notebooks. A clear scheme of work has been written. This framework for progression has made a positive impact on students' learning.

Drama and theatre studies

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

Strengths:

- Recent results in the GCE AS and A-level courses have been consistently well above the national average.
- Students' achievements are very good. They reach high standards in their devised performance, in their written work, and in directorial analysis.
- Teaching is very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and effective class management. There is sequential planning, and perceptive and inclusive questioning of students.
- Students' attitude to learning is excellent. They learn well, work co-operatively with each other, and display enthusiasm and enjoyment.
- Leadership and management are good. There is clear educational direction, and the work is well organised.
- Accommodation is of a very good standard and contributes significantly to the delivery of the subject.

Areas for improvement:

- Students need to be consistently challenged in their performance skills to work at the limits of their abilities.
- Opportunities for students' personal development should be identified within the schemes of work.
- The use of analysis data to be used more rigorously in subject planning.

150. The provision in drama and theatre studies caters for some 60 students. GCE, AS and A-level courses are offered.

151. Standards in drama and theatre studies are well above average. In the GCE AS and A-level examinations, all the students entered in 2002 attained grades A-E, with over half gaining the higher A/B grades. Recent results have been consistently above average, and are continuing to improve.

152. Observation in lessons and a scrutiny of a sample of students' written work confirmed that standards are high. Students act with imagination, are creative, and show sensitivity in their voice and movement skills, evident in the presentation of extracts from a reasonably wide range of plays. In their devised presentations, students exhibit good control of voice skills, using pause, pace and inflection. Similarly, movement skills are appropriate to the roles undertaken. They demonstrate their ability to use gesture, poise and stillness appropriately to enhance the groups' presentation. Higher attaining students are more physically at ease with the role they are developing, and are consistent in their voice projection. All students show an awareness of each other's work in the groups' devised performance, and each contributes to the creation of an integrated interpretation. In their analysis of a scene from Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, students demonstrated their understanding of the playwright's intentions, and were able to interpret sensitively character from the nuances of the textual language. They understand the relationship between the performer and an audience, as well as the visual qualities of costume and lighting. They know how each can enhance overall performance. In their writing, students analyse and evaluate plays with a perception and understanding that enables them to

identify in detail the attributes of the text being explored. Their response to directional analysis is particularly good.

153. The achievement of AS and A-level students is very good. There is good progress in performance skills, and in the analysis and evaluation of theatre. This is in response to the quality of teaching, and their commitment to their own learning. It is evident that students enjoy the subject, as they work with interest and enthusiasm. Their writing is more assured, as they become increasingly confident of the conventions and of the use of specialist terminology. Students' writing is coherent, well structured and fluent, displaying an awareness of the relationship of the text to the wider social and historical context. In their process journals of the workshop text *The Bacchae*, students demonstrated well-developed arguments, and comprehensive explanations of the rationale and processes in developing a chosen theme. There were perceptive analyses of the processes of role development and performance presentation, as well as insights into personal development.
154. The teaching of A-level drama and theatre studies is very good. The teachers have good knowledge and understanding of their subject, and effective class management and organisation. Planning is progressive and sequential, lesson objectives are made clear, and the questioning of students is both perceptive and inclusive. Appropriate work is set to extend the learning from the lesson, and to encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. They make use of the internet for contextual, critical, and biographical purposes. Students' work is systematically marked and informs them of the standard being achieved and how they might progress further. The attitude of the students to their learning contributes to the high standards being achieved. They work energetically and creatively. They share ideas, respond positively to any criticism of personal performance, and each contributes wholeheartedly to the group's devised performance. However, occasionally the students work too comfortably within their own capabilities.
155. There are clear procedures for the assessment of students' work and progress. Individual performance is regularly monitored and targets established. The students appreciate the support available to them. They are clear about their progress and standard they are achieving. They also understand the examination assessment criteria, and how they might improve upon their personal performance. Their curriculum is enriched by theatre visits, workshops, and school and house theatrical productions.
156. Overall, the leadership and management of drama and theatre studies are good. The aims for the subject are precisely stated, and there is a commitment to high standards. Colleagues are well supported through clear responsibilities, and a detailed scheme of work that ensures the curriculum is appropriately delivered. The schemes of work develop sequentially, supported by suitable resources. However, further identification is needed within the schemes of work of the opportunities for students' personal development. The performance of the subject is analysed and there is planning for further improvement. The subject is well resourced and managed. Accommodation is of a very high quality, and contributes significantly to the standards being achieved.

Physical Education

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

Strengths:

- The introduction of an AS level course in September 2002, raises the profile of the subject in the school.
- The teaching and learning are very good.
- The Sports Leaders (CLSA) course continues to be a popular option in Year 12.

Areas for improvement:

- There is no provision for the subject in Year 13.

157. Standards in relation to national averages will emerge after the school's first AS level class completes the examinations in physical education in the summer term, 2003. In 2002, attainment on entry to the sixth form from the main school is well above average; the prior attainment of girls joining from other schools tends to be more modest. A commendable number of students gain the Community Sports Leaders award each year. Standards in competitive sport are good at district level. Individuals represent the county in hockey, tennis, netball, cross-country and athletics. The U19 netball team reaches the regional championship finals regularly. The cross-country team came third in the South of England Schools Competition.
158. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 12 are above average overall in examination and leadership courses, and most students achieve well. AS level students use computers competently for research purposes as they prepare power point presentations about new initiatives in sport. The girls are articulate; their written work is usually well above average. The highest attaining girls can analyse information, including graphs, and draw conclusions effectively; middle attainers demonstrate an above average grasp of the relevant topics; the lowest attainers are less secure when extracting key facts or linking theory to practical examples. The two students from Year 13 who choose to join Year 12 for AS lessons, reach similar standards to the rest of the class. Leadership and communication skills are developing well amongst students following the CSLA course in Year 12. In practical activities, where they adapt games to meet the needs of primary school students, performance is average overall, ranging from county standard for some hockey players to fairly basic in cricket.
159. Overall, teaching and learning are very good. The teaching of AS level theory is of a very high standard and most students are making very good progress to date. Some excellent planning and excellent use of resources, together with high expectations and skilful questioning, ensures that students across the ability range work diligently on challenging tasks. The teacher's very knowledgeable, good humoured approach encouraged them to raise queries and seek clarification during an excellent lesson on sport in society. Thorough assessment and marking of coursework ensures they know what they have to do to improve. Occasionally, spelling errors and incomplete work needs following up more methodically with weaker girls. The impact of teaching on learning was good in a CSLA lesson, where the students cooperated sensibly with adults and peers to adapt and improve games practices.

160. Leadership and management are very good. Some promising monitoring and evaluation strategies are evolving. Assessment is very good. The head of department has a clear vision for priorities in the subject; she coordinates a committed team successfully; she promotes a good range of extra-curricular activities for sixth formers. To date, opportunities for older students to develop their interest in sport during lessons or via links with other sixth forms are under- developed. In one A/S theory lesson a pupil for whom English was an additional language was not given extra support but the department is committed to equal opportunities as evidenced by its strong links with a local special school.
161. Since the last inspection, improvement has been satisfactory. In the last subject report, references to the sixth form comprised only a brief description of the curriculum and a judgement that changing facilities were inadequate. Whilst the recent introduction of an examination course demonstrates commitment to raising the subject's profile, and the CSLA course continues to be a popular option, whole school curriculum arrangements mean there is no improvement to timetabled provision for the subject in Year 13; currently, there is no general, recreational course in Year 12. Recent building projects have not included additional changing rooms.

HUMANITIES

Geography

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

Strengths:

- Standards in examination results are well above the national average.
- Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and lessons have a clear structure.
- Teachers have a strong team spirit, fostered by good leadership.
- The retention rate on the AS course is well above average.

Areas for improvement:

- Several students have yet to achieve the fluency in essay writing that will assist them to gain the highest examination grades.
- Some students' notes lack the coherence desirable in a useful revision source.

162. Standards overall are well above national expectations. The most recent GCE A level results are well above the national average, showing a gradual upward trend since the previous inspection. The proportion of students gaining the highest two pass grades has declined slightly since the peak of 73 per cent achieved in 2000, but remains very high. The first AS results in 2001 were somewhat disappointing for a selective school, but improved substantially in 2002 and were then well above the national average. The school's analysis of value added performance over a three-year period shows that the subject performed less well than most subjects in the school.
163. Students' achievement is good. Standards of work seen in lessons and in the scrutiny of students' files during the inspection are well above average and are better than the most recent examination results. This improvement is due, in part, to improvements in the standards of teaching in recent years. Students compile comprehensive notes, extracting

relevant information from a range of sources. In some cases the work in their files is poorly organised, lacking the coherence necessary in a source for revision. They have a good knowledge of topics in both physical and human geography. Year 12 students showed a good grasp of hydrological theory and were able to apply it effectively to reach an understanding of the causes and effects of the Lynmouth flood of 1952. Students produce well researched personal studies, using advanced statistical methods to analyse gathered data. They use computers to enhance the presentation of both text and graphs, and make good use of the Internet in independent research. Approximately one third of students have yet to achieve a sufficiently fluent essay style to ensure the highest examination grades.

164. Teaching is very good overall, and never less than good. This represents a marked improvement since the previous inspection. Lessons have a clear structure. A range of learning resources is used very effectively. Teachers display very good subject knowledge, not only in what they say, but in the way they give effective guidance in the use of resources. They encourage independent learning by urging students to carry out detailed research on a variety of topics. Students learn well, responding positively to very good teaching. They work collaboratively and listen respectfully to each other. Learning is advanced at each point of a lesson by teachers' well-chosen examples and by the expectation that students will contribute to their own learning and to apply any previously acquired knowledge. Teachers give expert guidance on examination technique, as seen in a Year 13 lesson. Extended pieces of writing are marked regularly. In most cases students are given clear and accurate judgements of the quality of their work, which help them to improve it. Good relationships with their teachers give students the confidence both to seek help and to present their research findings to their peers without embarrassment. Teachers provide additional support through well-attended workshop sessions. A minor weakness in some teaching is a failure to ensure that the quieter students are drawn into active participation in discussions.
165. Good leadership and management of the subject have a marked influence on the quality of teaching and learning. Students' progress is monitored carefully. Detailed schemes of work and relevant case studies contribute significantly to learning. Good stocks of reference materials are well deployed. Teachers keep up to date with examination requirements through appropriate in-service training. The introduction of a programme of mutual lesson observation within the department has fostered team spirit and engendered improvements in teaching. This department is thriving under its current leadership and inspection evidence suggests that the good overall improvement since the previous inspection will continue.

History

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

Strengths:

- very good leadership and management.
- very good standards of achievement.
- very good teaching.

Areas for improvement:

- further development of strategies for independent learning.

166. Standards achieved by students are well above the national average. In 2001 A level results were well above the national average and they improved in 2002. Results in 2002 at A level show a full pass rate at A-E grades with 65 percent of students gaining A-B grades. At AS level 79 per cent of students passed at A-B grades and all passed at A-E grades. Both sets of results are a slight improvement upon results in 2001 in the A-B range and within a longer term trend of above average standards. Most students move from AS to A level and the subject is attracting more students from Year 11 for entry in 2003. The school's value-added system and students' work shows that students' achievement is very good.
167. Standards of work seen show that students in Years 12 and 13 are attaining in line with their target grades and that these are well above national average. Year 12 students are able to use information technology to select examples of propaganda posters which best exemplify the ideology of the Nazi party in the 1920s to 1933 and to analyse successfully their impact. Year 13 students are able to present detailed research into the policies of Northumberland during the reign of Edward VI, to compare his success with those of Somerset as part of their study of the role of the Protectorate in the reign of a young king, and to use historical sources to take a critical view of historians' interpretation of the role of Northumberland. Higher attaining students in Year 13 are able to make very good links between the policies of Northumberland and to set them in the context of long term issues of power and religion in Tudor England.
168. Teaching is very good. Its impact upon learning is primarily to ensure that students work to cover courses to a high standard of understanding and analysis, as seen in a Year 13 lesson where students were able to use features of the Nazi Government of the 1930s to decide if they matched traditional views of a strong leadership or supported a selected contemporary interpretation of a government without clear policies. Learning by students is very good because they respond very well to teachers' well planned lessons and to the use of teachers' probing questions which ensure that detailed knowledge is understood in a broader historical context. Higher attaining students take the opportunities given to explore their understanding of the broader historical issues as seen, for example, in an A level question posed to a Year 13 class which encouraged a response based upon a broad understanding of the challenges to the monarchy in sixteenth century England.
169. Leadership and management are very good. The curriculum offers a balance of historical issues drawn from British and European history with well planned continuity from AS to A2 level. The development of the Individual Assignment has contributed to the overall raising of achievement and to the enjoyment of the subject by students who wish to explore their own historical interests. The sample of Individual Assignments from the students who submitted their research to meet examination requirements in 2002 was impressive in the range of topics chosen. The quality and range of students' research is further developed by their access to evidence held by the Public Records Office.
170. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Students are regularly given challenging tasks and they are encouraged to use the additional resources built up by the department. Further development is needed of strategies to support students' independent learning.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English literature, but English language and literature and communication studies were also sampled. The standards attained in examination for both subjects are consistently high and well above the national average. The quality of the teaching observed and a scrutiny of the students' writing confirmed the high standards.

English

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

Strengths:

- Recent results in the AS and A-level courses have been consistently well above the national average.
- Students' achievements are very good. They reach high standards in both their oral and written work, exhibiting a well researched and argued personal point of view, closely referenced to the text they are studying.
- Teaching is very good. The teachers' subject knowledge and understanding are excellent; lessons are thoughtfully and imaginatively planned, are intellectually challenging, and teachers' questioning is perceptive and inclusive.
- Students' attitude to learning is excellent. They learn very well, with enthusiasm and enjoyment, and work together co-operatively.
- Leadership and management are excellent. Educational direction is clear, and the department is very well organised.

Areas for improvement:

- In a minority of lessons, the opportunity for discussion between students was not fully utilised, and needs to be allowed to develop.
- All the planning for improvement, through the detailed department analysis, should be fully incorporated into the department improvement plan.

171. The provision in English caters for some 230 students. GCE AS and A2 courses are offered in English literature, English language and literature, and communication studies.

172. Standards achieved in GCE AS and A-level English literature examinations are very high. They have been well above the national average for the last three years, and have maintained the high standards seen at the last inspection. All the students who entered English literature GCE A-level examination in 2002 attained grades A-E. A significantly large majority achieved the higher grades A/B. Retention rates are very high, well above average, and attendance is good.

173. Observation in lessons and a scrutiny of students' written work confirm that standards are well above average. Achievement in the sixth form is very good. Students display good textual knowledge. They exhibit a sensitive interpretation of a wide range of texts, and the critical concepts associated with literary study. In their discussions and in response to teachers' questions, they express an independent and well-argued point of view that displays a depth of understanding, and a perceptive insight. In a Year 12 lesson on Shelley's *Frankenstein* students were able to recognise parallels and contrasts within the text, particularly with respect to characterisation, drawing parallels with Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner", a text they had previously read. They are articulate in expression, and in

offering convincing judgements, that draw on their appreciation of social, cultural and historical contexts. Students reach high standards in extended critical writing, and make effective use of the language of literary criticism. Their writing is perceptive, and they develop their arguments with detailed textual references, as well as offering evidence of wider reading and independent research.

174. The achievement of AS and A-level students is excellent. There is clear progress during their sixth form studies, as they respond to the quality of teaching, both with energy and creativity. They are focused upon their learning, are willing to work independently, and are responsive to their teachers' questions. Lessons are characterised by their effort, interest and enjoyment of the subject. Students show good progress in both thinking and writing skills. There is a clear development both in the quality of students' writing and the range of reading that they undertake whilst in the sixth form. There is a developing maturity, and a growth of critical insight and understanding, as evidenced in the response to an essay on Jane Austen's *Emma* as a comic novel. Students make good use of the Internet for contextual, critical and biographical purposes.
175. The teaching of A-level English is very good, and at times, excellent. Teachers display extremely good subject knowledge and understanding. The planning of lessons is thoughtful and imaginative, demonstrating a blend of scholarship and awareness of students' needs. The questioning by teachers is perceptive, inclusive, and intellectually challenging of the students. They are encouraged to learn independently, and to develop a personal view about the texts they study. Students' writing is consistently and professionally assessed and encouraged. The pace of the lessons is challenging, expectations are high, and this further encourages the development of students' skills. The skills of close reading and interpretation of text were demonstrated in a Year 13 lesson on Shakespeare's "The Tempest". Students were successfully exhibiting insights into the characters and the implications of the power of language. They illustrated their argument with close textual reference.
176. The attitude of students to their learning is a particular strength. Students work well together, sharing ideas, and are supportive, though critical where appropriate, of each other's views. They feel supported by the teachers, are clear about their progress and performance, the examination requirements, and how they might improve further. The department has very detailed procedures for the assessment of students' work and progress.
177. The leadership and management of English are excellent. There are clear aims. The teachers work well together as a team, sharing a commitment to very high standards. Individual responsibilities are clear, documentation is thorough, and the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is effectively undertaken. Regular meetings are held to discuss students' progress, retention and achievement, as well as the quality of teaching and learning. There is an annual review of the courses offered to students, which results in a thorough and critical self-assessment, leading to planning for consolidation and, where identified, improvement.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL EDUCATION

Overall the quality of provision in personal and social education is **good**.

Strengths:

- The teachers' subject knowledge and understanding in areas such as student application to Higher Education.
- Good planning and the structure of the course ensure lessons are well matched to student needs.
- Students show a mature attitude and learning relationships show respect for adults and student.

Areas for improvement:

- The range of teaching strategies in some lessons could encourage greater student participation in discussion.

178. There are no public examinations or national tests in the subject and therefore the commentary is based on direct observations of tutorial studies, sampling student work, staff and student interview.
179. Students' achievement in the subject is good. In lessons they readily engage with the activities, and are confident and articulate in expressing opinions. They listen carefully to each other and the teacher and genuinely learn from each other. In a lively discussion on university entrance requirements, students and teachers were observed pooling ideas and information to extend the knowledge base for all. Where gaps were identified, students volunteered to pursue the required information. Students are encouraged to manage their time and plan ahead for their future so that they are well prepared for university or job interviews. They are capable learners with well developed, independent study skills as seen through their regular use of the Internet to research topics of interest.
180. The previous inspection report made reference to the well planned programme of personal and social education that was effective in preparing students for the next stage of their education. This continues to be the case and this sound base has been developed to provide a more extensive programme. Year 12 students benefit from university taster courses, Centigrade, a computerised analysis of subject choices, aptitudes and career possibilities as well as university visits and input from visiting lecturers. Students receive extensive support and guidance in making career decisions and a mark of this success is demonstrated in the very high number of students who are accepted for their first choice of university or career. Those who choose to enter employment benefit from an employability course that briefs students on interview techniques and areas such as psychometric testing.
181. The quality of teaching is good. Experienced form tutors deliver the personal and social education programme through a weekly tutorial. Their knowledge and understanding of the needs of this age group is good and supplemented by good quality teaching resources that give a consistency across the year group. The best teaching made use of the considerable student talents within the group for lively discussion and the use of probing questions to

quieter students ensured the participation of all. All lessons seen were at least satisfactory due to the teachers' sound subject knowledge but not all exploited the potential of the group.

182. In addition to the taught programme there is an extensive programme of visiting speakers who share their experiences and expertise with the sixth form group. Speakers of known quality contribute on diverse matters such as female health issues, what to do in a gap year, financial planning and the work of the Samaritans. This programme gives a responsible role to the students who prepare the room, introduce and thank guests for their contribution.
183. Sixth form students also make a valuable contribution to the personal and social education programme in the main school through peer learning and mentoring. After appropriate training and with support, some have taken drug education sessions whilst others have supported younger students who experienced bullying. Others have supported students coping with bereavement. The mature approach of sixth formers who have contributed in this way was apparent, and younger students had benefited but the sixth formers were insistent how much they personally had gained from participation. Further opportunities for sixth formers to contribute and develop were in the area of sport where they had trained to become sport leaders and coached and organised Year 6 games.
184. The management of personal and social education in the school is good. The head of sixth form, deputy head of sixth form and higher education tutor are an experienced team who brief tutors well and offer extensive support to individual students. Relevant up to date materials support tutors in the delivery of the programme. Evaluation of the programme will no doubt bring about further refinements.