

INSPECTION REPORT

FITZHARRYS SCHOOL

Abingdon

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123257

Headteacher: Dr P Bloomfield

Reporting inspector: Mr R Palmer
31198

Dates of inspection: 30th September – 3rd October 2002

Inspection number: 249752

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Northcourt Road Abingdon Oxfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs C Bullock
Date of previous inspection:	3rd February 1997

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Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
31198	R Palmer	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and achievements How well are pupils taught? What should the school do to improve further?
13786	S Walsh	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
19913	R Garrett	Sixth form co-ordinator	Educational inclusion English (Sixth form)	How well is the school led and managed?
28178	J Connor	Team inspector	Modern languages (Key Stages 3 and 4)	
3943	D Innes	Team inspector	Physical education (Key Stages 3 and 4) Provision for pupils with special educational needs The work of the learning support unit	
22524	S Innes	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
30518	M Johnson	Team inspector	Art and design (Key Stages 3 and 4)	
23188	V Maunder	Team inspector	Science (Key Stages 3 and 4) Chemistry (Sixth form)	
15576	D Nebesnuick	Team inspector	History (Key Stages 3 and 4)	
31850	D Nevens	Team inspector	Music (Key Stages 3 and 4)	
19214	G Price	Team inspector	English (Key Stages 3 and 4) Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
22491	L Small	Team inspector	Design and technology (Key Stages 3 and 4)	
10666	P Wheeler	Team inspector	Geography	
3753	H Wilkie	Team inspector	Mathematics	

18673	R Wilkins	Team inspector	Religious education (Key Stages 3 and 4)	
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REPORT CONTENTS

Page

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

7

Information about the school
How good the school is
What the school does well
What could be improved
How the school has improved since its last inspection
Standards
Pupils' attitudes and values
Teaching and learning
Other aspects of the school
How well the school is led and managed
Parents' and carers' views of the school

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

15

The school's results and pupils' achievements
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20

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

24

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

28

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

30

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

31

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

35

THE LEARNING SUPPORT UNIT

36

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

37

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

43

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

66

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Fitzharrys School is a community, comprehensive school for boys and girls aged 11 to 18 years, one of three such schools in the town of Abingdon. The school is undersubscribed in most years and is below the average size of secondary schools in England. It has 827 pupils, (489 boys and 338 girls), compared with 876 pupils at the time of the previous inspection in 1997. Boys outnumber girls in all Years 7 to 11. The attainment of pupils on entry at age 11 is average. Three local independent schools and a nearby specialist college for girls attract many of the high attaining pupils in the area, especially girls. Pupils come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds that are above average overall. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (about one in every 11) is below the national average. The proportion (about one in 70) of pupils who speak English as an additional language is a little higher than in most secondary schools. Very few pupils are at an early stage of learning English. A small proportion, about one in 40 pupils, is of non-white ethnic background. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs, just under one in every five, is average. About half of these pupils have emotional or behavioural difficulties. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs, just over one in 50, is average. Three pupils attend the special base for pupils with speech and language difficulties that was opened in September 2002. In recent years, the school has experienced difficulty in recruiting specialist teachers in several subjects. In the view of the governing body, this is due largely to the high cost of housing in the area.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school provides a satisfactory quality of education. It enables the large majority of pupils of all backgrounds and levels of attainment to reach the standards of which they are capable in most subjects. The satisfactory quality of teaching helps pupils in Years 7 to 11 to make appropriate progress in lessons and over time. The satisfactory leadership and management of the head teacher and senior staff provide a suitable programme for the school's improvement. Provision for pupils' personal development is adequate. Difficulties recently in recruiting specialist teachers have hindered the school's attempts to raise achievement from satisfactory to good. The school has more strengths than weaknesses. It manages its adequate resources well and provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- The proportion of pupils attaining five or more GCSE results at grades A*-G is above average.
- Much of the teaching seen was good and helped pupils to make good progress in most lessons observed.
- Achievement in the sixth form is good.
- Pupils' good attendance contributes positively to the continuity of their learning.
- The few pupils in the small, special base make very good progress as a result of very good support.

What could be improved

- GCSE results at grades A*-C are unsatisfactory in science, design and technology, history, and ICT.
- Unsatisfactory behaviour by a few pupils, mainly boys, hinders learning in many classes.
- Procedures to monitor and improve performance are not used consistently across all subjects.
- Unsatisfactory provision for spiritual development, limited use of the library and inadequate provision of careers education restrict pupils' personal development.
- Difficulties in recruiting suitably qualified teachers have affected standards adversely.

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 satisfactory improvement since its previous inspection in 1997. Standards have improved at a suitable rate overall, although GCSE results have recently declined, largely as a consequence of difficulties in recruiting teachers. Standards in the sixth form have improved well. The quality of teaching and learning observed has improved slightly. The quality of leadership and management remain satisfactory overall. In respect of the key issues identified for action, improvement is satisfactory. The school now has the capacity and the commitment to make good improvements.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	B	C	C	E
A-levels/AS-levels	D	A	A	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Attainment at the end of Year 9 matches the national average. Results in the National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science have been average overall in all of the past four years. In 2001, results were well below the average compared with those of similar schools. They show satisfactory achievement for boys and girls of all levels of attainment compared with pupils' previous average attainment when they joined the school in Year 7. Results are improving at the same rate as the national improvement. Over the past three years, boys and girls have attained similar standards in the national tests. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are currently average in English and mathematics and science. They indicate satisfactory achievement in all three subjects.

GCSE results at the end of Year 11 matched the national average in 2001. They were well below average compared with those of similar schools, but indicate satisfactory achievement compared with pupils' previous average levels of attainment at the end of Year 9. Over the past three years, boys' results were the same as those of boys' nationally. Girls' results were slightly above the national average for girls. Results at grades A*-G were above the national average in 2001 but results at the higher grades of A*-C were, unusually, below average. The trend in GCSE results over the past three years is below average because results in 2001 were lower than in 2000, when the school's results represented very good achievement. Well below average results in science caused this decline. Results in 2001 were particularly good in English literature, geography and home economics. Standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 confirm the average standards indicated by the test and examination results in 2001. The school was well short of its challenging targets set for performance in GCSE examinations in 2001. This was partly due to the poor results in science and partly because five pupils of Year 11 age were in Year 10 and sat very few GCSE examinations.

In Years 7 to 11, pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, made at least satisfactory progress in most of the lessons seen. The few pupils of minority ethnic heritage also made satisfactory progress. The three pupils in the new, language resource base, made particularly good progress as a result of the considerable

amount and good quality of support that they receive in all lessons. Standards in literacy and numeracy are average. Pupils do not make enough use of their average ICT skills to enhance work in most subjects.

In the sixth form, standards of work seen are currently above average. Students are making good progress in most lessons. In 2001, A-level results for the school's students within the local partnership were well above the national average. They indicate good achievement when compared with students' previous results at GCSE.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Satisfactory. Most pupils have positive attitudes, work hard and are keen to do well. A sizeable minority of boys, especially in Year 11, have negative attitudes to work and try to influence other pupils not to work hard.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Unsatisfactory. The large majority of pupils behave well, are tolerant and show respect to staff and other pupils in lessons and around the school. Poor behaviour by a few boys in several of their lessons hinders the learning of other pupils.
Personal development and relationships	Satisfactory. Most pupils get on well with each other and with the staff. Personal development is satisfactory. Limited access to such facilities as the library and ICT restrict the development of pupils' study skills.
Attendance	Good. Pupils attend regularly and show an enthusiasm for coming to school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching and the quality of learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form. Teaching is often good and occasionally very good. A small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was seen in which teachers did not manage the pupils well and did not engage the pupils actively in the work. Teaching adequately meets the needs of boys and girls of all levels of attainment. The teaching of literacy and of numeracy is satisfactory across subjects. The use of assessment to help pupils to improve is inconsistent across subjects. Teaching and learning are good throughout Years 7 to 11 in English and mathematics and are satisfactory in science. Teaching and learning are good in physical education and religious education in Years 7 to 11, geography and ICT in Years 7 to 9 and in art and design in Years 10 and 11. They are unsatisfactory in design and technology in Years 10 and 11 largely as a result of ineffective management of pupils' behaviour. They are satisfactory in other areas. Poor behaviour by a few pupils restricts progress in several classes.

The main strength in teaching is teachers' good use of their knowledge in a subject to plan lessons well and to provide work of suitable difficulty for all pupils. In Years 7 to 9, many teachers make good use of a wide range of learning activities, including work in groups and pairs to motivate pupils to do well. The main weakness in teaching is the inconsistent approach to the management of pupils' behaviour with the result that pupils' learning is affected adversely in about one in every ten lessons.

Pupils acquire satisfactory skills, knowledge and understanding in the large majority of lessons. They work at a reasonable pace to complete the work set. The main weaknesses in learning are the lack of concentration, an unwillingness to work hard and poor behaviour by a few pupils. A further hindrance to learning is the inadequacy of the library and other learning resources, such as information and communication technology (ICT), to promote pupils' skills of independent study.

In the sixth form teachers make effective use of their expertise in the subject to help students to achieve well. Students contribute positively to their own learning by working hard and with enthusiasm. Good relationships between teachers and students ensure good learning in lessons.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The broad range of learning experiences meets the needs of all pupils. Active participation in a suitable range of activities outside of lessons enriches learning. Careers education is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Pupils with learning difficulties achieve good GCSE results. The few pupils in the special base make very good progress in lessons. A few pupils who have behavioural difficulties underachieve.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. The few pupils who speak English as an additional language have an adequate knowledge of English. Their achievement matches that of other pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory. Provision for social, moral and cultural development is satisfactory. That for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. Since the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship, opportunities for spiritual development are restricted. Pupils acquire a satisfactory understanding of life in a multicultural society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory. The quality of care is satisfactory. Teachers use their good knowledge of the pupils to provide appropriate support for pupils' personal and academic development. All pupils are valued equally. The use of assessment to help pupils to improve their work is satisfactory but varies across subjects. Suitable procedures for child protection and for health and safety are in place.
How well the school works in partnership with parents.	Satisfactory. Parents have generally positive views about the school. They receive appropriate and informative documentation about the work of the school and good information about pupils' progress and attainment.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Satisfactory. The headteacher and senior staff provide clear direction for the school through a shared commitment to raising standards. Monitoring and following up on the performance of departments and policies is not always rigorous enough to achieve the desired improvements.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Satisfactory. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. They play a supportive role in planning for improvement and are effective in carrying out their duties. The school does not meet statutory requirements for the provision of a daily act of collective worship or for religious education in Years 12 and 13.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. The school analyses assessment data thoroughly to assess how well it is doing and to set suitably challenging targets for improvement. It has appropriate systems in place to monitor teaching and learning.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Financial management is good. The school makes effective use of its adequate staffing, accommodation and learning resources to support pupils' learning. It considers spending decisions carefully to seek best value and to meet the school's educational priorities. The use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning is insufficient in several subjects.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School expects pupils to work hard, • Pupils like the school and make good progress. • Much of the teaching is good. • Pupils become mature and responsible. • Parents can raise concerns easily with staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of homework is inadequate. • Links between school and home are not close. • A few have concerns about behaviour. • Shortages of teachers hindered learning.

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. However, a few teachers do not manage their classes effectively to ensure that all pupils work hard. Most pupils develop mature attitudes but few have enough opportunities to exercise responsibility. With regard to parents' points for improvement, the quality and amount of homework are satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form. Not all pupils are conscientious in completing their homework. Links between the school and parents are close. Inspectors agree with those parents who feel that the quality of behaviour is not good enough, even though the large majority of pupils behave well. Inspectors confirm that the school's difficulties in recruiting and retaining specialist teachers have affected standards adversely in a few subjects.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is smaller than in most other schools and has decreased in size since the previous. It has 68 students (32 boys and 36 girls), of whom just over one half are in Year 13. There were 85 students at the time of the previous inspection. Very few students come from non-white ethnic backgrounds. A very small number of students have special educational needs. The proportion of students entitled to free school meals is below the average for all sixth forms nationally. Students' attainment on entry to the sixth form is average overall. All students study AS-level and A2-level courses in Years 12 and 13. The school operates a sixth-form partnership with two other local schools and the nearby college of further education. Together, they provide access to a wide range of AS/A2-level courses. About three pupils in every ten stay on from Year 11 into the school's sixth form. All courses of study at the school have suitable requirements for entry.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provides a good quality of education. It is cost-effective. Leadership and management are good. Students learn well and achieve good results. They receive good advice, support and guidance. They choose from a wide range of courses through the partnership scheme and take advantage of the extra facilities that the partnership offers. Teaching and learning are good in most subjects and very good in ICT. Standards have improved since the previous inspection and are above average. They indicate good achievement. A-level results in 2001 were well above the national average and showed good achievement based on students' previous attainment in GCSE examinations. The sixth form meets well the needs of its students, who all study AS-level or A2-level courses.

Strengths

- A-level results were well above average in 2001.
- Achievement is good. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result.
- Students respect teachers' knowledge and appreciate the good relationships with them.
- Good management ensures that students follow suitable courses and achieve well.
- The partnership arrangement enhances the range of learning experiences available to students.

What could be improved

- Insufficient use of the library and a limited provision and quality of facilities for study at the school's site hinder attempts to raise achievement from good to very good.
- The lack of provision of religious education and collective worship restricts the range of activities to enrich students' learning.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Standards are above average and indicate good achievement. Good teaching and leadership lead to good learning. Few girls take the subject at advanced level.
Chemistry	Satisfactory. Standards are improving, following a recent decline caused by staffing problems, as a result of new and enthusiastic leadership and good management.
ICT	Good. Standards are above average. Very good teaching and very good support for learning help students to achieve very well. Students do not have enough access to ICT outside lessons.
Geography	Good. Current standards are above average. Teaching is good and leads to good learning and good achievement. Teachers are well qualified and knowledgeable. Management is good.
English	Good. Standards are above average. Good teaching helps students to achieve well. Teachers occasionally do not involve less confident students actively in their learning.

In other subjects, work was sampled. Teaching was satisfactory in French and good in music, history and physical education. It was very good in photography, in which the teacher's high expectations helped students to make very good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good. Students receive a good quality of guidance and support. Teachers prepare students carefully for entry to the sixth form. They match the choice of courses suitably to students' aspirations and potential. Students know at an early stage what they are expected to achieve. Teachers check students' progress closely and frequently. They provide good support throughout the courses that enables students to achieve success. Students receive good information and help about opportunities beyond school.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. Leadership and management of the sixth form play an important and positive part in students' good achievement. Teachers track the progress of students carefully and provide suitably challenging targets for improvement. The school works efficiently within the partnership. The governing body is supportive. The school does not fulfil its statutory responsibility for the provision of religious education and a daily act of collective worship in Years 12 and 13.

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">• They appreciate the good teaching.• They learn independently and also receive good support in their learning.• They can achieve well.• The partnership arrangement gives good access to additional facilities.• The sixth form lives up to expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The programme of personal and social education does not meet their needs.• Occasionally, communications within the partnership's institutions were inadequate.• The quality of teaching varied among subjects.

Inspectors agree with students' positive views. Inspectors were not able to test students' perceptions of what could be improved directly because of timetabling restrictions. The school's documentation indicates that its provision for personal and social education is satisfactory.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils' attainment when they join the school in Year 7 is average. Attainment in the National Curriculum tests taken in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 matches the national average. Attainment in GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11 also matches the national average. Standards in the sixth form are above average and represent good achievement.

2. The overall improvement in standards since the previous inspection in 1997 is satisfactory. Standards by the end of Year 9 have risen at the same rate as the national improvement. Standards by the end of Year 11 were rising at the same rate as the national improvement until 2000. The trend is now below the national trend mainly as a result of the school's difficulties in recruitment of teachers. When compared with national averages, the school's results are distorted adversely because of the large proportion of boys and the loss of many girls of high attainment to local independent schools. Standards by the end of Year 13 have improved and are now above average.

3. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory for boys and girls of all levels of attainment and different backgrounds by the end of Year 9 in all subjects apart from ICT and religious education where it is good.

4. Achievement is satisfactory overall by the end of Year 11. However, the quality of achievement from the end of Year 9 to the end of Year 11 varies considerably among subjects. It is good in English, physical education and religious education. It is unsatisfactory and improving in science, ICT and history. In design and technology it is unsatisfactory overall but good in the courses for food technology and engineering. Achievement in mathematics and all other subjects is satisfactory.

5. A few stumbling blocks are hindering the school's attempts to raise standards at the end of Year 11 from average to above average and to remove underachievement in a few subjects. These include staffing difficulties, the unsatisfactory behaviour of a few pupils, an inconsistent quality of support provided by senior managers to help different subjects to improve and the limited provision of resources to help pupils to study independently.

6. Staffing difficulties, especially in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced teachers, have adversely affected standards in several subjects, mainly in Years 10 and 11. This is shown, for example, by the fall in mathematics standards in GCSE examinations a year or so ago when the department was enduring staffing problems. Currently, the mathematics department is suitably staffed and managed. Accordingly, pupils are now achieving satisfactorily and showing good signs of further improvement. GCSE results are now satisfactory. In science, the department's staffing difficulties have contributed to the underachievement that has occurred in GCSE examinations in the past two years. Currently, under new and suitably experienced management, standards in science classes in Years 10 and 11 are improving so that pupils are making satisfactory progress in many classes. In subjects such as music and religious education, standards are currently improving and are average because the school has recently managed to recruit suitably qualified and experienced teachers. By contrast, standards in English are above average and represent good achievement in a department that has not experienced the same difficulties as those in mathematics and science.

7. A second and important factor that is hindering better achievement is the unsatisfactory behaviour of a few pupils of above average, average and below average attainment that occurred in about one lesson in every 10 observed. This unsatisfactory behaviour often took place when several pupils with behavioural difficulties were present in the same class, as seen, for example in Year 11 classes in ICT and geography, where there was insufficient in-class support.

8. Another restriction on improvements in standards is the variation in the quality of tracking the performance of different subjects and helping them to improve. For example, senior managers have worked hard and effectively to put in place systems and activities to promote improvements in mathematics and science and to maintain good standards in English. However, senior managers do not keep such a careful and effective watch on developments in design and technology and history in which GCSE results are well below average and unsatisfactory.

9. Inadequate provision of facilities to encourage pupils to develop their skills of independent learning restricts progress in several subjects. Resources in the library and access to them are too limited. Similarly, pupils do not have sufficient access to ICT resources in many subjects and so their learning is restricted.

10. The main reason that attainment at the highest grades of A* and A in GCSE examinations is below average in most subjects is that several pupils of high attainment, particularly girls, who live in the school's area, attend local independent schools and other nearby, specialist schools in the state sector. Comparisons of the school's performance in GCSE examinations against national averages and against similar schools are a little distorted because boys considerably outnumber girls.

Achievement at the end of Year 9

11. In 2001, pupils' results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 were above average in science and average in English and mathematics. The overall results matched the national average as they have done for the previous three years. Results in 2001 were well below those attained in similar schools. They were as expected based on pupils' previous attainment in the national tests taken at the end of Year 6. They indicate satisfactory achievement in all three subjects. Since the previous inspection, results in these tests have improved at the same rate as the national improvement overall. During the past three years, results have improved faster than the national improvement in science. The trend in English, apart from a dip in 2000, and in mathematics has matched the national trend. Boys and girls have attained broadly similar results over this three-year period.

12. By Year 9, standards seen in classes and in scrutiny of work are average in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science. In all other subjects, standards are currently average. Taking all subjects into account achievement is satisfactory. The considerable improvement in the provisional results at the higher levels in mathematics in 2002 reflects the good quality of mathematics teaching seen in Years 7 to 9.

Achievement at the end of Year 11

13. In 2001, the school's GCSE results, in terms of the average number of points scored by pupils, matched the national average. They were well below the results of similar schools. When compared with pupils' previous attainment in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9, the results indicate satisfactory achievement.

14. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A*-C in 2001 was below average and below expectations based on previous attainment. Over the past three years, the trend in the school's results is below the national improvement. This underachievement was due mainly to the well below average results in dual-award science.

Achievement among different groups of pupils

15. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-G in 2001 was above average and well above expectations based on pupils' previous attainment. This indicates that pupils of below average attainment achieved very well in those examinations.

16. Over the three-year period 1999 to 2001, boys' GCSE results have matched those of boys nationally and represent satisfactory achievement. Girls' GCSE results were slightly above those for girls nationally and indicate good achievement. The unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes of a few boys is the main reason that boys' achievement is not as good as that of girls. Another factor that contributes to girls' better achievement is that proportionally more girls than boys are in top classes.

17. Pupils on the register of special educational needs, including those who have statements, make satisfactory progress in lessons. Often they make good progress. This is because teachers and classroom assistants prepare work of suitable difficulty, support them well and help them to achieve the targets set in the individual education plans. The achievement of these pupils in GCSE examinations in 2001 was good, as shown by the good proportion of GCSE grades at A*-G.

18. The very few pupils in the special language base based at the school make very good progress in lessons. They benefit from the very good support and care and from the very good quality of resources for learning. They work well in lessons in the main school as well as in the base.

19. Pupils who are gifted or talented achieve satisfactorily throughout Years 7 to 11. The achievement of pupils for whom English is an additional language and of pupils of ethnic-minority heritage is satisfactory at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11.

Standards of literacy, numeracy and ICT across subjects

20. Pupils' skills in literacy are average throughout Years 7 to 11. They are adequate to meet pupils' needs in all subjects. Pupils demonstrate good speaking and listening skills in most subjects. In art and design, religious studies, physical education and design and technology, pupils develop these skills well through frequent opportunities for speaking and listening in class. Oral work in science is too often restricted to a minority of more vocal students who are prepared to answer questions in class. Pupils read competently and cope well with the demands of all subjects. In modern foreign languages, the limitations of the library are having an adverse effect on pupils developing their skills in reading. Pupils usually present their writing well and accurately. In geography, many pupils have problems in spelling and punctuation.

21. Standards of numeracy are average by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11. Pupils of average and above average attainment have mathematical skills that are adequate for their work in all subjects. Although many lower-attaining pupils enter the school with inadequate numeracy skills, they gain mathematical skills appropriate to their capabilities by Year 9. This is a result of the good teaching in mathematics that follows closely the National Numeracy Strategy. Pupils use numeracy skills well in science for handling and interpreting data and in work involving formulae. In geography, pupils analyse and present statistical data effectively to enhance their work. In ICT, pupils are confident and competent in using

formulae in spreadsheets. In design and technology they make satisfactory use of skills in measuring and estimating.

22. Pupils' skills in ICT are average in Years 7 to 9 and below average in Years 10 and 11. They use and develop their ICT skills well in a few subjects such as design and technology in which they use computers to model electronic circuits and for computer-aided design and manufacturing. However, in most subjects, pupils have insufficient planned opportunities to make appropriate progress in using computers to extend their skills and knowledge of basic applications.

Sixth form

23. Many of the courses available for students are taught partly in this school and partly in the other institutions in the local sixth-form partnership. The inspection focussed on five subjects that were taught wholly or in part at this school. In 2001, and in the previous year, overall results at AS/A-level for the school's own students in all subjects studied within the partnership were well above the national average. These results represent good achievement and reflect the good teaching observed in classes observed on the school's site. They indicate that the school and the partnership meet students' needs and aspirations well. Standards have improved from the broadly average standards reported at the previous inspection.

24. Although direct comparisons are not possible because the examination system has changed, provisional results for the new A2-level examinations indicate that the school has maintained its recent improvement in attainment at the end of Year 13.

25. Students in Years 12 and 13 follow courses that lead to AS/A2-level examinations. By Year 13, standards in the five subjects inspected in detail, are above average overall. They indicate good achievement compared with students' earlier attainment in GCSE examinations. Results at AS-level taken at the end of Year 12 in 2001 indicated good achievement.

26. Standards of work seen in the sixth-form classes of subjects inspected and sampled, in scrutiny of coursework and written work, and in discussions with students are similar to the levels of attainment in recent A/AS-level examinations in most subjects. The current good achievement is a result of much good teaching, students' positive attitudes and their willingness to work hard.

27. Standards of literacy and numeracy are appropriate for students' work in all subjects. Students have satisfactory skills in ICT, but, generally have too few opportunities to make the most of these skills to enhance and extend their work in most subjects. Students do not extend their skills of research and independent study as much as they should because the use of the library and the opportunities to use ICT are restricted.

28. The school has a good record for retaining the students who embark on courses. Most students complete the courses they begin. After AS-level courses, most students move on to A2-level courses in Year 13.

Targets

29. The school sets challenging targets for pupils and departments. It bases the targets for performance in external examinations on pupils' prior attainments and comparisons with appropriate national data. It was well short of its very challenging target for 50 per cent of pupils to gain five or more grades A*-C in GCSE examinations in 2001, mainly because results in science were not good enough.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

30. Pupils of all backgrounds and levels of attainment have satisfactory attitudes to school. They attend school regularly and appear to like school. As one parent said at the pre-inspection meeting, 'attendance is good because pupils like going to school'. Pupils appreciate the opportunities outside lessons especially the sporting and musical activities.

31. Year 7 pupils have good attitudes to learning. For example, they are very keen to do well in ICT lessons. During a long English lesson on the use of the semi-colon, young pupils managed to sustain interest and work hard despite the rather narrow subject matter.

32. However, particularly in Year 11, a few pupils, usually boys, have unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour. Most teachers manage these pupils well. For example in a Year 11 science lessons, one or two boys attempted to show off and made it difficult for other pupils to keep their concentration. The good relationships between pupils and the teacher and good management of the class indicated clearly that the teacher was in charge. By involving pupils actively in a good variety of practical activities and using humour to defuse awkward situations the teacher ensured that pupils made appropriate progress in the lesson. By contrast, in a few lessons, teachers are ineffectual at managing behaviour and allow disruptive pupils to dominate the lesson thus making it very difficult for other pupils to learn. The school tries hard to cater for the needs of all pupils. It uses exclusion for pupils who behave badly only as a last resort. Accordingly, the rate of permanent exclusions is very low and that for temporary exclusions is below average for a school of this size. However, current policies to manage the behaviour of disruptive pupils in class are not effective. As a consequence, the behaviour of a small number of pupils who have emotional or behavioural difficulties, particularly when several are together in the same class, has a detrimental effect on the learning of a much larger number of pupils in several classes.

33. Behaviour is unsatisfactory in class. It is satisfactory around the school. The vast majority of pupils behave well in class and cooperate willingly with each other and with the staff. A small number of pupils, particularly boys in Year 11, behave badly in class and disrupt learning. Pupils behave much better as they move around school. For the most part, they are sensible and orderly and have good manners towards adults and each other. Year 7 pupils listened respectfully in assembly and responded enthusiastically to the teacher's questions and moral points about differences in food supply in Europe and third-world countries. However, Year 9 pupils were rowdy while waiting for assembly to begin and disrespectful to their teachers and each other. Pupils and parents report little bullying and issues are usually restricted to name calling.

34. Relationships between teachers and pupils are satisfactory. Most teachers are able to diffuse difficult situations and gain the respect of their pupils. When relationships are good pupils feel valued and are confident to speak out. Occasionally, a few pupils show a distinct lack of respect for their teachers and each other. Younger pupils usually listen respectfully to the contributions of others. A few older pupils have little interest in what others have to say. At times, teachers allow boys to dominate lessons to the detriment of girls' learning. For example in a Year 9 design and technology lesson, girls found it difficult to understand the concepts involved in designing circuits. They lacked the confidence to ask questions of their teacher in an atmosphere in which boys were noisy and monopolised discussions.

35. Personal development is satisfactory overall but has a few shortcomings. In many lessons in subjects such as English and history, pupils work together well in paired and group work to carry out research and investigations and to discuss and debate their work. Pupils are acquiring mature attitudes towards issues of race and religion. They have a satisfactory understanding of how to distinguish right from wrong. A few pupils do not

appreciate the adverse impact their poor behaviour has on the learning of others. Pupils of different backgrounds and levels of attainment mix well with each other. Pupils who have learning difficulties develop good social skills. Pupils often find it difficult to research independently. In a few subjects, they do not have enough opportunity to develop their ability to work independently. For example, in geography older pupils are not required to make their own notes. In science, pupils do not always have enough involvement in practical work. Year 9 pupils had to watch the teacher performing an experiment about digestion rather than being able to carry out their own experiments. On a few occasions pupils get the chance to take responsibility for their own learning as seen in a Year 10 English lesson looking at the use of language in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. For the most part, pupils work well in small groups but find it difficult to organise themselves and to share information when they work in larger groups. Pupils have many good opportunities to develop initiative and responsibility through such activities as the School Council, the Vale Youth Forum, peer counselling and the Young Enterprise scheme.

36. Attendance is good. In the school year 2000/2001, the rate of attendance of 92.3 per cent was above the national average. The rate of unauthorised absence is average and rising because the majority of pupils had at least one unauthorised absence in the previous school year.

Sixth form

37. Sixth-form students have good attitudes and want to achieve well. They appreciate the good teaching and the good support they receive. Students in ICT are very enthusiastic about their course. These good attitudes play an important part in students' good achievement. Students' personal development is good overall. They are used to working together and value opportunities for independent learning. They have opportunities to take responsibility and show initiative through, for example, the sixth-form committee or Young Enterprise. Though the programme for personal and social education is satisfactory, students do not feel that it fully meets their needs.

38. Attendance is good. The system for monitoring attendance across the partnership is co-ordinated well. Attendance is checked frequently and regularly. The low rate of absence speaks well for the way students take personal responsibility for their learning and reinforces the positive judgement about their attitudes.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

39. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. Teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 to 11. It is good in the sixth form. Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching has slightly improved. In two out of every three lessons observed, teaching was good or better. The proportion of lessons observed that were very good or better has improved from about one in 12 to one in every seven. In recent years, staffing problems have hindered the school's attempts to improve the quality of teaching further. The school has experienced considerable difficulties in recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and experienced teachers in several subjects, especially mathematics, science, ICT and music. Currently the school has an adequate number of appropriately qualified teachers in all subjects.

40. The quality of learning is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11. It is good in the sixth form. Pupils' learning in Years 7 to 11 is of a slightly lower quality than the teaching they receive. This is because the poor behaviour of a few pupils is allowed to hinder progress in a range of classes, particularly in Year 11.

41. The quality of teaching is not as good in Years 7 to 11 as it is in the sixth form, because teachers generally have higher expectations of sixth-form students. Teachers manage classes better in Years 12 and 13 than in the rest of the school. They set more demanding homework to these older students. A major reason that teaching in Years 7 to 11 is satisfactory rather than good is that a few teachers do not control their classes effectively. This hinders pupils' achievement. In the sixth form, teachers make more effective use of information from marking and tests to help students to improve their work than is generally the case in Years 7 to 11.

42. The quality of learning is better in the sixth form than it is in Years 7 to 11 largely because the behaviour and attitudes to work of sixth-form students are good and they concentrate well on the tasks set in class. Although the large majority of pupils in Years 7 to 11 concentrate well and work hard, a few pupils do not. This was particularly noticeable in those double lessons that did not have a good and interesting variety of activities. However, when teaching is good in Years 7 to 11, as in English, for example, pupils of all levels of attainment respond positively, work at a fast pace, gain a good understanding of the work and complete their homework well.

43. Teaching and learning were good in about two out of every three lessons observed in Years 7 to 11. In these lessons, pupils made good progress in gaining knowledge and in improving their skills and understanding of the subject. The overall judgements on the quality of teaching took into account such additional evidence as that obtained from the scrutiny of pupils' written work, homework and coursework, procedures for the marking and assessment of pupils' work, and discussions with pupils about their work and progress. This evidence indicates that the quality of teaching and pupils' learning over time is satisfactory. The use of assessment and marking to help pupils to improve their work is very good in religious education, good in mathematics and art and design and satisfactory in most other subjects. It is unsatisfactory in science and design and technology.

44. Teaching and learning were less than satisfactory in about one lesson in every twenty seen. This indicates a slight improvement since the previous inspection when one lesson in every 14 was less than satisfactory. A common feature of the few lessons that were less than satisfactory was the teacher's ineffective management of pupils' behaviour. This resulted in unsatisfactory relationships between the teacher and the class and pupils shouting at each other, as seen in one science lesson. Other factors were the tendency of the teacher to dominate and to give pupils too few opportunities to participate actively in the lesson.

45. In the core subjects, teaching is good throughout Years 7 to 11 in English and mathematics. It is satisfactory in science, but varies from very good to occasionally very poor. In English, the teaching is good because the staff work together well as a team and share good practice. In mathematics, teaching has improved because the department is now staffed appropriately and teachers are making effective use in Years 7 to 9 of the activities for learning suggested in the National Numeracy Strategy. In science, teaching is improving as a result of the higher expectations demanded of teachers and pupils by the new leadership in the department. In the very poor lesson seen in science, the work was not suited to the capabilities of pupils, relationships among pupils and with the teacher were unsatisfactory and pupils' bad behaviour was not controlled. In recent times, pupils' learning in science has been hindered considerably by problems of recruiting specialist teachers.

46. The main strength in teaching in Years 7 to 11 is teachers' use of their good expertise in their specialist subjects to provide pupils with work of appropriate difficulty. This helps pupils to increase their competence and confidence in the subject. Many teachers,

particularly in subjects such as English, make effective use of paired and group work to enable pupils to discuss and debate their work openly.

47. In Years 7 to 9, a further strength is teachers' good planning of lessons to ensure a good pace of learning through a good variety of suitably difficult and interesting learning activities. In a good history lesson for a class of high-attaining pupils in Year 9, for example, good planning and confident use of the teacher's knowledge of the subject meant that learning was good and pupils kept their concentration and interest until the end of the double lesson. Although the teacher's explanations were a little long at times, pupils made many thoughtful, plausible and astute oral contributions in discussions in groups and in class about the causes of certain events during the time of Henry the Eighth. The lesson helped pupils to consolidate their learning by making them think hard about why people held different views. Boys and girls played an equally prominent role in the discussions and were able to draw interesting parallels with topical issues such as the Afghanistan War, the crisis in the Middle East and the influence of economic pressures on decision-making. Pupils made good progress so that by the end of the lesson they had improved their skills of enquiry and analysis and recognised the need to trace causes and link them to events.

48. Teachers make satisfactory use of homework to extend pupils' learning with an appropriate range of tasks including research and revision. This helps pupils to develop their skills of independent learning.

49. The main shortcoming in teaching is the inconsistent approach across and within subjects to the management of behaviour. The same pupils were seen behaving well in some lessons and poorly in others.

50. There were no significant strengths in pupils' learning. They develop satisfactory skills, knowledge and understanding in the large majority of lessons. They make a reasonable effort to improve their standards and generally work at an appropriate pace to complete the work set. Most have an adequate awareness of how well they are doing. The main weakness in learning is the lack of concentration of a small number of pupils that leads to disinterest in a few lessons and an unwillingness by a few boys, particularly in Year 11 to work hard. A further hindrance to learning is the insufficient availability of the library and other learning resources to promote pupils' skills of independent study.

51. In the good and very good lessons, teachers provide a good range of interesting and challenging activities that are matched well to pupils' individual needs. Pupils quickly become aware of the aims and relevance of the work. A good review of previous work consolidates pupils' learning and gives them a clear understanding of the work to be done. During and usually at the end of these lessons, pupils check their understanding of the work through good discussions among the whole class. Pupils' learning is, therefore, often good or better because they are interested in the work, keen to succeed, concentrate well and work hard.

52. Teaching was satisfactory in around three lessons in every 10 seen. These lessons contained several of the features that were present in the good lessons. They also had a few shortcomings that prevented them from being good. For example, in such lessons, teachers sometimes talked for too long or provided a limited range of activities to make pupils think hard about the work. This meant that pupils did not always play a sufficiently active part in their own learning. Accordingly, although they gained an adequate knowledge of the work and could generally recall previous work they could not always explain why or how to apply this knowledge in relevant situations. In a science lesson in Year 11, for example, although the teacher gave an accurate and detailed explanation of enzymes, pupils did not show a good enough understanding of the properties of enzymes and how they work. This was because

the teacher's questioning was superficial and did not cause the pupils to think deeply enough about the topic.

53. Teaching in Years 7 to 11 satisfactorily meets the needs of pupils of all levels of attainment, including pupils who are gifted or talented. However, at times, the teaching of pupils who have behavioural difficulties is unsatisfactory because the teacher's skills in managing these pupils are not good enough. In a few classes in which several pupils who have behavioural difficulties are grouped together, as seen in geography in Year 11, learning is inadequate despite the teacher's good efforts to manage these pupils. Good support from teachers and learning assistants helps pupils who have special educational needs to make at least satisfactory progress in most lessons. Teaching assistants provide good support to pupils with statements of special educational needs. The few pupils for whom English is an additional language and the few of minority ethnic heritage receive the same quality of teaching as other pupils and make satisfactory progress in lessons.

54. The teaching of literacy and oracy is satisfactory throughout the school. Pupils improve their satisfactory reading skills through good opportunities to read aloud in English and modern foreign languages. They have few opportunities to read aloud in many other subjects. In English, teachers help pupils to improve their skills through frequent and regular homework in reading. In modern foreign languages, inadequate resources and access to the library restrict the development of pupils' skills in reading. The teaching of speaking skills is satisfactory. In subjects such as English and history, pupils have good opportunities to discuss and debate their work in small groups and in class. In science, teachers tend often to restrict oral work to a few of the more vocal pupils. In geography, teachers rely on sessions of question and answer and do not make enough use of pupils' adequate skills in class discussion to extend their learning. Pupils' reading experience in lessons is generally limited in most subjects. Teachers succeed in getting most pupils to present their written work well and accurately. They provide good prompts to assist pupils to arrange their written work well in English, geography, design and technology and modern foreign languages. In many teaching areas, good displays of technical words help pupils to spell and to increase their vocabulary. In art and design, pupils enhance their literacy skills through the consistent emphasis on using and developing skills of language. In mathematics and geography, pupils experience difficulties in spelling and punctuation.

55. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory across subjects. In mathematics, the effective use of methods suggested in the National Numeracy Strategy helps pupils, particularly the low attainers, to develop their mathematical skills. Pupils use and develop their numeracy skills well in science for data handling and evaluation of formulae. In geography, teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to apply mathematical skills through statistical analysis and the interpretation and display of data. In ICT, pupils extend their learning through good opportunities to evaluate formulae in spreadsheets. In design and technology pupils develop and apply their skills in measurement and estimation.

56. The teaching of the basic skills appropriate to each subject is satisfactory. However, teachers provide insufficient opportunities for pupils to develop and use their skills in ICT to extend their learning in many subjects. Most teachers make use of ICT but on an unplanned and occasional basis. Since the previous inspection, teachers have become more confident in using ICT. Problems of access to specialist rooms prevent teachers from using ICT resources at times appropriate to their needs.

Sixth form

57. The quality of teaching in the sixth form and of the learning that it supports is good. Students learn well as a result. In just over four out of every five lessons observed, the quality of teaching and learning was good. Teaching was particularly effective in ICT. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed in the sixth-form lessons seen. The good quality of teaching has been sustained since the previous inspection.

58. A strong feature of the good teaching is teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects. They use these effectively to guide students' learning. This was apparent in ICT when teachers explained difficult concepts clearly and in context so that students understood the work. It was also the case in English in which Year 12 students learned much about aspects of Webster's 'White Devil' from their teacher's knowledgeable, supportive and challenging contributions to their discussions. In geography, teachers' very good subject knowledge and expertise motivate and inform students. Similar subject expertise benefited students in sampled lessons in physical education, music, performing arts and photography.

59. Teachers combine their good subject knowledge with well-planned lessons that effectively meet the needs of their students. In mathematics, for example, teachers plan lessons very well to challenge each individual. Geography teachers plan lessons well, and use every opportunity to reinforce geographical skills and to build on earlier learning. Usually teachers question students well to ensure that they participate actively and to improve understanding. Teachers used this approach effectively in Year 13 lessons in ICT and English and in a sampled lesson in performing arts. Teachers' assessments are generally helpful to students. In mathematics, students appreciate the good marking and the regular and frequent recording of grades for each module of work. Similarly, in geography teachers mark homework tasks regularly and give students clear judgements on the quality of their work with helpful comments on how to improve it.

60. Good relationships between teachers and students and among students themselves reinforce these attributes of good teaching. As a result, most students have good attitudes to their work and want to achieve well. In mathematics, students are very well motivated and work as a team in lessons. Relationships are very positive and students are eager to learn. In ICT, the very good relationships between teachers and students and their high expectations do much to promote learning. Students' positive attitudes and behaviour assist their learning in chemistry. In English, students appreciate the way that good relationships with their teachers provide a good foundation for their independent learning.

61. Teaching is not as effective as it could be in chemistry because the teaching of theory is narrow in its approach, lacking stimulus, excitement and relevance. Much of the teaching is instructional, directed at the whole class, without adaptation to the upper and lower attaining students. Students have insufficient assessed work to enable teachers to monitor their progress and students are unaware of how they can improve their work.

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

62. The quality and range of learning experiences are satisfactory throughout the school.

63. The school provides a broad curriculum that gives pupils appropriate opportunities for learning. Pupils with special educational needs enjoy access to a full range of subjects. Opportunities for learning provided by activities outside of lessons are satisfactory.

64. Since the previous inspection good improvements to the provision of teaching in design and technology, ICT and religious studies have ensured that the curriculum now meets statutory requirements for pupils in Years 7 to 11, apart from the provision of a daily act of collective worship. Provision for teaching ICT is inadequate in subjects such as English, mathematics, science, history, expressive arts and music. However, daily clubs at lunchtime and after school are helping to broaden the overall provision of ICT to pupils. In design and technology the curricular provision is good, despite some shortcomings in the provision of control technology.

65. The curriculum benefits from the direct involvement of governors. They hold regular meetings with heads of departments to learn about the work of teachers and pupils. Each subject has a link governor who takes a particular interest in the work of that department. Opportunities for pupils' learning are extended by the schools' partnership with two other local secondary schools, for example in the current joint bid for specialist status.

66. The timetable gives all subjects appropriate amounts time in Years 7 to 9 to teach the National Curriculum. For pupils in Years 10 and 11 a good choice of three optional subjects has the effect of reducing time available elsewhere. Time for English, mathematics, science, geography and religious studies is consequently a little below that found in many schools. The double lessons of 110 minutes occasionally lead to pupils' pupils becoming bored because work is insufficiently varied to hold their interest for the whole lesson.

67. The school has made satisfactory progress with the introduction of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy for improving the curriculum for pupils in Years 7 to 9. Summer schools for Year 6 pupils have been run successfully for four years. In 2001, about 100 pupils in total benefited from attending the special classes for literacy and numeracy, or the class for extension work for higher-attaining pupils. The curricular links created with local primary schools through running these summer schools have a positive impact on pupils' learning. In all years, planning to meet the special needs of the lowest and highest-attaining pupils is good.

68. Valuable opportunities are provided for vocational education through a GCSE engineering programme, leading to a double award. In addition, 16 pupils in Year 10 follow a special curriculum that includes vocational courses at a nearby college on one day a week. Foundation courses leading to awards in building craft occupations and child-care and a course leading to a first diploma in countryside and environment are available. Work experience further enriches this programme of vocational education.

69. The school provides a satisfactory programme of additional activities outside of lessons that gives pupils opportunities in all years to improve their learning. In physical education, opportunities for additional activities in sports such as rugby, badminton and netball help to enrich pupils' learning. Around one in four pupils are involved in additional sporting activities. Many are involved in team sports for the local area. Additional enrichment of pupils' learning in expressive arts, English and music takes place through school musical productions such as 'Grease' and 'Guys and Dolls' and through regular theatre visits and an annual poetry competition. One good example of additional dramatic activities was seen in rehearsals for a Year 7 Christmas production of 'Odysseus' involving over thirty enthusiastic pupils. Only limited opportunities to play or sing in musical ensembles are currently available to pupils, although an opera workshop is a valuable addition. 'Fitzactive Week' in the summer term provides pupils with a useful and varied programme of additional activities both locally and afar. In modern foreign languages, pupils have opportunities to participate in exchanges with counterparts from other countries. A small number of higher-attaining Year 9 pupils receive advanced tuition at a local university.

70. The library offers limited opportunities for pupils to develop skills in independent learning. Accessibility, for example, before and after school, is very restricted. Many books are out of date and ICT resources are modest. The area is large but the room is unappealing and not used enough by pupils.

71. The school's contribution to pupils' spiritual development is unsatisfactory. Important issues were raised in the previous inspection report on the need to provide a daily act of collective worship and to provide more time in registration for discussion and reflection. There is a full programme of year group assemblies. Form tutor periods are used mainly for social and administrative purposes. Most teachers read out the 'Thought for the Day' without adding to the spiritual and moral development of pupils. Within the curriculum, the spiritual development of pupils is fostered well in religious education, in which pupils have scope to explore ideas and feelings. In subjects such as music, pupils are sometimes moved by their own and others' performances and by their experience of listening to music. Some sensitive autobiographical writing in English has an implicit spiritual dimension. In science, pupils experience the magic of discovery. In other curricular areas, however, this important aspect of pupils' development is insufficiently developed.

72. The provision for moral development is satisfactory. There is a general sense of shared purpose and respect in the school, apart from the few pupils who have negative attitudes. Fair disciplinary procedures are in place to help pupils to distinguish right from wrong. An increasingly effective system of merit awards is used to celebrate pupils' achievement. Issues of bullying are dealt with effectively. Teachers and sixth-form students provide good role models throughout the school. Teaching in physical education develops pupils' self-confidence and respect for rules and fair play. In art and design, pupils show respect for each other's work. In science, pupils learn to respect living things and the importance of conserving natural resources. Lessons in personal, social and health education offer opportunities to discuss moral issues such as racism. The activities of the school council and of peer counsellors encourage pupils to express their views rationally. When pupils consider literature, anti-Semitism or advertising strategies, subject teachers exploit the opportunities to develop a sense of right and wrong.

73. The school makes a satisfactory contribution to pupils' social development. Relationships are mainly good throughout the school. Suitable opportunities exist for pupils to take responsibility through the school council system. Lunchtime and after-school activities enhance the social development of pupils, including through open days for feeder schools and in the summer schools. Pupils improve their social skills through good opportunities to work in pairs and in groups in many classes as seen in subjects such as English, drama, music, physical education and art and design. In music, pupils work together well in groups, promoting team and leadership skills. Poetry evenings for pupils and parents and school productions enhance pupils' social development. Links with activities and organisations outside school have been developed to enhance pupils' awareness of the responsibilities of citizenship.

74. Cultural and multicultural enrichment is satisfactory with good provision in a few subjects. Pupils gain in aesthetic awareness of the arts through theatre visits and drama productions. They broaden their outlooks and enhance their cultural understanding through the programme of exchanges, visitors to the school, the *artist in residence* scheme and master classes for gifted and talented pupils in modern foreign languages. Cultural awareness is also fostered through sports clubs, architectural study in art and design and drama productions. Pupils have good opportunities to celebrate the cultural diversity of British society and that of the wider world, especially in religious education lessons that have a strong emphasis on multi-faith issues. This area of cultural provision is, however, developed insufficiently in other subject areas and, in terms of display work, throughout the school.

75. Provision for personal development is satisfactory. Heads of year are responsible for coordinating the teaching of the programme for personal, social and health education within their year groups. This has the benefit of allowing heads of year to spend more time on issues relating to their particular year group. However, the lack of planning on a whole-school basis and a tendency to rely on a commercial scheme of work hinders slightly the continuity and progression in learning. The flexible programme provides very well for the teaching of health education and sex education, especially in Years 7 to 9. The school makes good use of specialists from the local community and drama productions to raise awareness of health issues. Education about the use and misuse of drugs is very good and is supported well by extensive use of appropriate outside agencies.

76. The school is at a very early stage of teaching citizenship. It has made an audit of subjects in which a contribution could be made to the teaching of citizenship. Suitable topics form part of the programme for personal, social and health education such as bullying in Year 7, conflict resolution and community in Year 9 and rights and responsibilities in Year 10. From autumn 2002 citizenship in Years 10 and 11 is taught as part of religious education. Planning for the development of citizenship is satisfactory with a clear commitment to the subject's further development

77. Provision for careers education is unsatisfactory. Currently it is difficult for pupils to access suitable materials to assist their careers education. Most information is held in a careers room that is often locked. A small amount of careers material is available in the library. Form tutors teach the programme of careers education as part of the commercial programme used for personal, social and health education. Pupils value the interviews held with the careers service but many do not have a good awareness of future careers options. The school has recognised the need to improve facilities for careers education and has begun a suitable programme of refurbishment and improvement of resources.

78. The school makes good provision for pupils with special educational needs. These pupils are identified by information from primary schools, results of standardised tests taken soon after arrival and repeated in later years, and by the concerns of parents and teachers. In Years 7 to 11, pupils have access to all subjects of the curriculum with in-class support when appropriate. Withdrawal from lessons for necessary help with basic literacy and numeracy skills is kept to a minimum. When the need is unusually serious, pupils are withdrawn from modern foreign languages. In Years 10 and 11, these pupils have opportunities to reduce the number of GCSE courses they take. A few follow, suitably, a course that includes vocational subjects at the college of further education, work experience together with English, mathematics and science. Reviews of progress are held at appropriate times and parents and pupils are encouraged to contribute to discussion of future provision.

79. Provision for literacy is satisfactory. The implementation of the Key Stage 3 National Literacy Strategy is satisfactory. It varies across subjects. Good opportunities for speaking and listening occur in subjects such as English, art and design, history, religious studies, physical education and design and technology. In a few subjects such as science, opportunities for pupils to speak are restricted. Pupils have few planned opportunities to read aloud except in English and modern foreign languages. Reading homework is set in regularly in English. The limitations of the library have an adverse effect on pupils' developing their reading skills in subjects such as modern foreign languages. Pupils' reading experience in lessons is limited in most subjects. Good prompts to assist pupils' written work are used well in English, geography, design and technology and modern foreign languages. Across the curriculum the effect of literacy initiatives is limited even though references to literacy appear in most departmental handbooks.

80. Provision for numeracy is adequate in mathematics but is haphazard across subjects. The school has sensibly audited the numeracy requirements of all subjects and is planning to introduce an overall numeracy policy. Currently, pupils have suitable opportunities to use and develop their mathematical skills in a few subjects such as science, geography ICT and design and technology.

81. Since the previous report, teachers have become more confident in using ICT in their lessons in other subjects. Most have undertaken a training course to improve their skills and knowledge and a small proportion of the staff have completed it. Currently, a few subjects refer to ICT in their documentation. Most departments use ICT for teaching and learning but on an unplanned and occasional basis. Problems of access to specialist rooms prevent teachers from using ICT resources at times appropriate to their needs. Pupils have good opportunities to use ICT in subjects such as design and technology. There has been unsatisfactory progress in the co-ordination and monitoring of the quality of provision and standards reached by pupils in ICT across the subjects of the curriculum.

Sixth form

82. The range and quality of the curriculum in the sixth form are satisfactory overall. The partnership arrangement provides students with the choice of a wide range of courses and access to additional facilities. These are good features of the provision that enable students to match courses to their needs and take best advantage of local circumstances. The range of courses at the school is restricted to an extent by the fact that no vocational courses are offered.

83. Careers guidance in the sixth form is good. Students have a programme of preparation for applying to further or higher education including a 'Higher Education Evening'. A 'Careers Fair' is held in February each year. Individual guidance is available through the 'Connexions' programme. Students visit higher education institutions, and former students talk about their experiences at the school's valedictory dinner. They have access to a good quality of careers information from the form tutors and booklets available in the sixth-form area.

84. The programme of enrichment activities is satisfactory. A large group of students participate in the *Young Enterprise* scheme and an *Activities Week* at the end of the school year is popular. The main provision for students' continuing spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is made through weekly assemblies and personal and social education lessons. A good assembly on media attitudes to refugees and asylum-seekers encouraged students to be open-minded and tolerant, but lacked opportunities for students to be involved or to reflect on what they heard. The school does not provide for religious education and collective worship in the sixth form. This lack of provision restricts the range of activities to enrich students' learning. The personal and social education programme is satisfactory.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

85. The quality of care is satisfactory overall. The school cares well for individual pupils who have problems such as special educational needs, behavioural difficulties or attendance problems. The pastoral system by which heads of year and form tutors usually move up through the school years with their pupils is effective. It results in staff having good knowledge of pupil's personal qualities and backgrounds. Heads of year are generally effective and each brings individual strengths to the job. Procedures for child protection including looking after children in the care of the local authority are effective.

86. The monitoring of attendance is satisfactory. The school is good at identifying pupils who are poor attenders and providing support. Although the school has good rates of attendance, rates of unauthorised absence are average and rising. This is because the school has tightened up its procedures and, for example, expects written notes to explain absences.

87. Unsatisfactory management of behaviour depresses learning in a number of classes. The behaviour policy is ineffective in these classes. A few of the minor sanctions, such as staying for one minute after lessons, have very little effect. The policy is applied inconsistently. Many staff have good skills in management of behaviour that they have developed with experience. A few teachers are less effective at managing behaviour and lack the support of a rigorous whole-school approach to the management of behaviour. Pupils and parents report that issues of bullying are dealt with well.

88. The school makes good provision for the care of pupils with special educational needs. Withdrawal from lessons for necessary help with basic literacy and numeracy skills is kept to a minimum so that pupils can develop their social skills by mixing with all other pupils. Reviews of progress are held at appropriate times and parents and pupils are encouraged to contribute to discussion of future provision. The individual education plans contain suitable targets for pupils' improvement.

89. There have been considerable improvements to assessment since the previous inspection. Procedures are now satisfactory. Departments now use National Curriculum levels when appropriate. In a few departments such as ICT and design and technology teachers sometimes overestimate the levels that pupils are working at.

90. Teachers use the information from assessment satisfactorily to plan what and how to teach in most subjects. In design and technology and science, teachers do not always use assessment effectively to plan lessons or to meet the needs of individual pupils. Marking of work is inconsistent across subjects. It does not always give pupils enough information about how they can improve their work in a few subjects.

91. The monitoring of pupils' academic progress and personal development is satisfactory. The school has improved the ways in which it tracks pupils' progress. It has very good information about each pupil's attainment, potential and achievement. This useful information is supplied to every class teacher, form tutor and head of year. The system has the potential to track and support every pupil's academic progress and personal development carefully. However, the use of assessment to support pupils' learning varies across subjects. The role of the form tutor and the head of year in this process is at an early stage of development. An appropriate system of regular reviews and interviews has just been implemented. Not all subject departments are making full use of this data to ensure that pupils achieve well.

92. The school provides a safe environment. Policies for health and safety are in place and operate satisfactorily. One matter about health and safety was drawn to the attention of the school and appropriate action was taken. A few areas are untidy. This is especially true in science in which risk assessment needs to be improved.

Sixth form

Assessment

93. The use of assessment to promote students' learning is good. The school analyses GCSE performance carefully and uses this information to guide students effectively towards suitable courses. There is a good match between courses and students' aspirations and potential. The school gives each student a target grade at which to aim. This helps students to achieve well because they know from an early stage what is expected of them. Tutors and teachers also receive this information so that students' progress can be checked. Formal checking of progress takes place three times a year. Teachers' assessments are helpful, both in relation to marking of essays or assignments and in feedback to students in lessons. Reports give good information about students' progress.

Advice, support and guidance

94. On balance, the advice, support and guidance given to students in the sixth form are good as they were at the time of the previous inspection. They motivate students to work hard to achieve good results in examinations. Provision ranges from a good induction programme to help with careers and higher education opportunities. Teachers are approachable and helpful. Students value the good support they receive.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

95. The school's partnership with parents is satisfactory as it was at the time of the previous inspection. Parents have positive views about the school and are generally pleased with the standards and quality of education provided. They feel that teaching by permanent teachers is usually good and that their children are expected to work hard and do their best. Parents report that their children like school and are making good progress. Their children are starting to become mature and responsible. Parents find the staff easy to approach if they have questions or problems. The parent governors play an effective part in the work of the whole governing body and on its committees.

96. Parents have a few concerns about homework. A few parents feel that their children get too much homework and others feel that their children do not get enough. Parents also report that the setting of homework can be sporadic with too much homework on some days and insufficient on others. In most subjects, inspectors found that an appropriate amount of homework of suitable quality was set at suitably frequent intervals and that many pupils improved their standards of work as a result. However, a sizeable minority of pupils fail to complete their homework satisfactorily. Parents also raised concerns about the adverse effect on pupils' learning when substitute teachers taught too many lessons. The school has managed recently to overcome most of its difficulties in recruiting specialist staff. New staff have been appointed in a number of subject areas so that substitute teachers currently teach fewer lessons.

97. A small number of parents indicated concerns about unsatisfactory behaviour in some lessons. The inspection team agreed with these parental concerns and found behaviour to be unsatisfactory in about one in every ten lessons observed. However, the school does try to make all pupils feel valued, even if they misbehave. As a result, the school has a low rate of exclusion and good rates of attendance.

98. The school provides appropriate information for parents. The prospectus and the governors report to parents are of a good quality. Frequent and regular newsletters of good quality keep parents informed well and celebrate many aspects of school life and the

personal successes of many pupils. The use of homework diaries has improved since the previous inspection and is now satisfactory.

99. There are regular parents' evenings including one early in Year 7 at which parents have a good opportunity to discuss with the form tutor how their children are settling in. Parents receive suitable information in Year 9 about which GCSE courses their children are going to study. The special meeting for parents of pupils interested in following the vocational course in Years 10 and 11 was well attended.

100. Written reports to parents about pupils' attainment and progress are good. The reports produced in Years 7 to 9 are of especially good quality. They give parents a clear indication of the level of the National Curriculum at which their children are working and the subjects they have studied. Comments by subject teachers are usually astute and often contain a clear indication of what pupils need to do to improve their levels of attainment. However reports in Years 10 and 11 often contain more limited information about how pupils can improve their GCSE grades.

101. A few of the parental questionnaires returned suggested that the school does not work closely enough with parents. Inspection findings are that the links with parents are satisfactory and about the same as those found in many similar schools. The school often works closely with parents on issues such as behaviour and welfare. It works particularly closely with parents of children with special educational needs. All parents, staff and pupils belong to the Fitzharrys School Association, which is involved in holding social events to raise funds for the school.

102. Students in the sixth form hold generally positive views about the school. Most feel that the quality of education in Years 12 and 13 lives up to their expectations. They value the extended range of courses available through the partnership arrangements. They appreciate the good quality of teaching and the good support and guidance they receive.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

103. The quality of leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff is satisfactory. The headteacher maintains a good overview of the school and sets a clear direction for the school's improvement in terms of raising standards and increasing the numbers on roll. Tough decisions are made in a compassionate manner, as the need arises, for example, to deal with unsatisfactory performance by staff or pupils. The deputy heads provide good support. For example, one deputy has developed a comprehensive and increasingly effective system for assessing the performance of staff and pupils, analysing data and setting the course for raising standards. Other members of the senior leadership team share the same commitment to raising standards. In recent years, serious difficulties in recruiting specialist staff in key areas have hindered the school's attempts to raise achievement from satisfactory to good.

104. The school's laudable aim of making all pupils feel equally valued is evident in much of its work. It is largely successful in achieving this aim, as seen, for example, in the successful introduction of the special base for pupils with language difficulties. Pupils with special educational needs and the few pupils of minority ethnic backgrounds integrate well. However, because systems to manage the poor behaviour of a few disruptive pupils, particularly in Year 11, are not as effective as they should be, this aim backfires when these pupils adversely affect the learning of other pupils in a sizeable number of classes.

105. Governors fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and the challenges that it faces. They play a supportive and co-operative role in planning for the school's improvement. Several have a long-standing relationship with the school. One governor's links with Uganda have brought curricular benefits to the school. Individual governors have links with departments and visit them from time to time. This good arrangement keeps the governing body informed suitably about the performance of subjects. Governors value the guidance of the senior leadership team on financial matters and work closely with senior staff to make decisions about spending. They particularly welcome the good information about value-added performance received from senior staff when considering the setting of targets and the evaluation of the school's performance. The school development plan contains suitable priorities for raising standards. The various committees of governors work well in partnership with staff. The nominated governor for special educational needs keeps the governors informed of the work of the department. The governing body meets all of its statutory responsibilities apart from the provision for religious education in the sixth form and for a daily act of collective worship.

106. The quality of leadership and management in subjects and among heads of year is satisfactory overall. Leadership is currently good in several subjects including English, science, geography, music, physical education, and religious education. The outcomes of leadership and management have been unsatisfactory in a few subjects in recent times mainly as a result of staffing and recruitment difficulties. Several departments such as mathematics, science, ICT and music are under leadership that has been in place for a short time. In all of these subjects, the departments now have the capacity and commitment to raise standards. The departmental development plans are linked carefully to the priorities of the school's improvement plan. The issue of unsatisfactory management in design and technology identified in the previous report has been dealt with suitably. The current leadership of the department has the capacity to make good improvements. However, attempts to improve standards in design and technology have been hindered by staffing difficulties over several years.

107. The leadership of the department for special educational needs is good. All the appropriate policies, including the requirements for the Code of Practice are in place. The individual education plans have appropriate information and targets that are effective in meeting pupils' needs. Learning support assistants make a valuable contribution to the quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs and to the classes generally in which they work.

108. Systems for managing staff are appropriate and are recognised by the award of 'Investor in People'. The school has implemented successfully the system of performance management. Teachers have accepted the procedures well. As a result, they have a clearer understanding of how to use information about pupils' previous attainment and potential to set suitably challenging targets to raise standards. Members of the senior leadership team are attached to individual departments. Heads of department have the immediate responsibility for maintaining a regular and frequent check on the quality of teaching and learning through the performance management process, and receive time to do this. The school analyses its data from examinations and tests carefully and uses suitable systems to assess and predict achievement. Departments use this information to set targets for pupils. These systems are effective in helping pupils to achieve satisfactorily overall. Less formal arrangements such as 'link governors' and the 'on-call' system keep the management team in touch with day-to-day aspects of school life.

109. Senior management is satisfactory rather than good mainly because of inconsistency in checking on the effectiveness of a few departments and a few key policies and following them up. The quality of teaching is not consistently good largely because senior managers do

not ensure that sharing of good practice occurs routinely in all departments. In history and design and technology, senior managers have not tackled the problems of underachievement in GCSE courses in these subjects with enough rigour. The school's policy for behaviour has not been effective enough to ensure a good climate for learning in all classes. One of the reasons that underachievement occurs in a few classes, is that a few disruptive pupils hinder the learning of other pupils. Senior staff have not monitored these classes closely enough, nor provided sufficient support to improve the learning situation in these classes.

110. When senior managers do take a matter on board they follow it up with determination until a successful outcome appears. For instance, the head teacher, senior staff and governors have worked hard to overcome most of the problems caused by difficulties in recruiting staff. As a direct result of their actions and support, departments such as mathematics are now staffed more appropriately and already showing improvements in standards. The more widespread and effective use of assessment to set meaningful targets is an important contribution from senior managers in an attempt to raise standards and to improve teaching and learning. However, the use of assessment is inconsistent across subjects.

111. The professional development of teachers is linked appropriately to priorities in the school development plan and to needs identified in the reviews of teachers' performances. A member of the senior leadership team manages the process well. Many teachers have received good support to develop their skills in aspects such as behavioural management, target setting and the use of assessment to support learning. A suitable programme of induction enables new and newly qualified teachers to settle in quickly to the school's routines. The school takes students for initial teacher training from two local universities. This arrangement helps teachers to develop a wider range of teaching methods.

112. The school's financial planning is good. It deploys resources effectively. The school makes effective use of advice and information from the local authority. Suitable checks and comparisons are made to ensure that the school spends its money wisely and to get good value. Specific funds coming into the school, such as those for staff development and special educational needs, are used for their designated purposes. Additional sources of finance for special educational needs are used well, for example in the Language Resource Base.

113. Taking into account the funding received by the school, the social and economic backgrounds of pupils and the current quality of education and achievement the school provides satisfactory value for money.

114. The school manages its satisfactory resources of staffing, accommodation and resources for learning adequately. The number, qualifications and experience of the teachers satisfactorily match the requirements of the curriculum. Most teachers use their good expertise in a subject to plan lessons well. Recently, the school has experienced considerable difficulties in filling some permanent and temporary vacancies. This has had an adverse effect on learning and examination results in a few subjects. The school has a generally adequate amount of technical, clerical and other support staff, but provides insufficient support for pupils in Years 10 and 11 who have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

115. Accommodation is adequate overall. However, not all areas of the school are accessible by wheelchair. In a few areas, such as science, the rooms suffer from lack of maintenance and insufficient cleaning. Pupils do not have sufficient access to the library.

116. The amount and quality of learning resources are satisfactory to meet curricular needs. However, despite good provision for ICT, access to computing facilities is limited so

that pupils' learning is restricted in several subjects. In science, the shortages of a few pieces of equipment such as large microscopes and incubators limit the range of learning activities. The stock of books in the library is inadequate to meet the learning needs of pupils in subjects such as geography and modern foreign languages. The library is not used well by pupils to support their study.

117. The school has made satisfactory overall improvement since its previous inspection in 1997. Standards have improved at a satisfactory rate overall. The quality of teaching and learning observed has improved slightly. In respect of the key issues identified in the previous inspection improvement is satisfactory. Attainment in GCSE examinations still requires further improvement. Staff are now engaged more fully in planning for improvements in subjects that match the school's priorities. Very good improvement has occurred in developing systems of assessment to promote pupils' learning. Improvements in the management of design and technology have taken place, though outcomes are not yet good enough. Suitable modifications have now been made to the programme for personal and social education.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

118. The sixth form is led and managed effectively. Students benefit from the efficient management of the local sixth-form partnership arrangements so that they have access to a wide range of courses and additional facilities. The analysis of examination data is thorough and sophisticated, so that students are guided carefully towards suitable examination courses and know what they need to do to achieve success. This strong focus on achievement is reinforced by checks on progress three times a year. It plays an important part in students' good achievement overall. Though numbers in the sixth form have been falling, the school manages this reduction effectively within the partnership to ensure that students follow courses that suit their aspirations and needs. Leadership is actively pursuing ways forward for the partnership by examining how potential new students should take up the opportunities provided. The governing body is supportive of developments in the sixth form and is kept fully informed. The school does not meet statutory requirements for the provision of religious education and for a daily act of collective worship. This restricts the range of activities to enrich students' learning.

Resources

119. The financial aspect of the sixth-form partnership is worked out carefully so that the school receives good value for money. The sixth form is cost-effective in relation to the school's expenditure as a whole. Resources available for learning in the sixth-form broadly match those in the rest of the school. Provision and access to ICT and to learning resources in the library are limited and restrict the development of students' study and research skills. The accommodation available to sixth-formers on the school's site is satisfactory. Teachers have good qualifications for the sixth-form courses they teach and use their expertise well to encourage good standards. Difficulties in recruitment of staff in subjects such as chemistry have now been overcome.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

120. In order to raise standards and to make further improvements to the quality of education the school should include the following key issues in its action plan.

- (1) Raise standards at the end of Year 11 from average to above average by:
 - increasing the proportion of GCSE results at grades A*-C in science, design and technology, ICT and history so that they represent at least satisfactory achievement in these subjects;
 - making further improvements to the quality of teaching and learning in science, design and technology, ICT and history.
 - improving the quality of management of history and of design and technology.(Paragraphs: 5, 6, 14, 29, 151, 173, 174, 182, 193, 196, 197, 202, 205)
- (2) Improve the behaviour of the few pupils, mainly boys, whose behaviour in class adversely affects the learning of other pupils by:
 - implementing a policy for behaviour that provides an appropriate range and sequence of sanctions and rewards;
 - ensuring consistency in the use of the school's guidelines for managing behaviour;
 - providing a good variety of activities that enable pupils to play a positive and active part throughout lessons, particularly double lessons.(Paragraphs: 5, 7, 16, 32, 33, 40, 44, 49, 53, 87, 114, 146, 178, 180, 185-187, 193, 202, 203, 214)
- (3) Develop more effective and rigorous monitoring and follow-up procedures for senior staff to ensure that school policies, such as those for behaviour and assessment, are applied in a consistent manner and that good practice in teaching and learning is shared within departments and across the school.
(Paragraphs: 5, 91, 109, 110, 181)
- (4) Promote pupils' personal development by:
 - improving the quality of careers education in Years 7 to 11;
 - making better provision and access to the library to enhance pupils' learning;
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to use ICT in all subjects;
 - introducing more activities to promote pupils' spiritual development.(Paragraphs: 5, 9, 20, 22, 35, 50, 70, 71, 77, 81, 115, 116, 134, 163, 202, 226)
- (5) Maintain efforts to recruit sufficient, suitably qualified teachers in all subjects.
(Paragraphs: 5, 6, 39, 96, 103, 141, 256, 270)

In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Meet statutory requirements for the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and students.
(Paragraphs: 64, 105)

Sixth form

- (1) Help students to develop their skills of independent learning by providing better resources and access to them in ICT and the library.
(Paragraphs: 84, 105, 118)
- (2) Enrich the learning experiences of sixth form students by meeting statutory requirements for the provision of religious education in Years 12 and 13.
(Paragraphs: 27)

THE LEARNING SUPPORT UNIT

121. The learning support unit, known as the language resource base, opened at the start of this term. It is intended to meet the learning needs of pupils with complex speech and language difficulties who live in southern Oxfordshire or in the city of Oxford. The unit has places for up to eight pupils. Currently, there are three, all in Year 7.

122. An excellent start has been made. The agreement between the local education authority and the school's governors is clear and forms a good basis for present and future development. Pupils and teachers with whom pupils work when outside the unit have been prepared sensitively. The school provides a positive environment for members of the unit, who are adjusting well to their new surroundings.

123. Pupils are taught basic skills of literacy, communication and numeracy in the unit by specialist teachers and support assistants. They join a class for all other subjects except modern foreign languages and are always supported by staff attached to the unit. These arrangements enable pupils to have full access to the curriculum with very good support. At break times, they join other pupils. This is helping to develop their personal and social skills. The high levels of support for pupils are appropriate to their needs at this stage of the development of the unit.

124. Pupils show good levels of interest and make good progress when taught within a full class. This was particularly evident in a science lesson learning about the characteristics of insects and in a gymnastics lesson when learning to perform sequences of movements. Because the specialist staff have very good understanding of pupils' needs and have very good teaching skills, pupils make very good progress when working in the unit. They are also gaining in confidence and self-esteem.

125. Although the unit is a very recent addition to the school, the quality of progress made so far indicates that the aim to return pupils fully to mainstream provision when appropriate is realistic. The unit is led and managed very well and the quality of collaboration between its staff and with the school is very good.

126. Pupils in the unit are benefiting from the very high professional standards of all those involved and from their own positive response to the opportunities the school offers.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	126
	Sixth form	26
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		42

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	0	18	64	37	5	0	1
Percentage	0	14	51	30	4	0	1
Sixth form							
Number	0	4	18	4	0	0	0
Percentage	0	15	69	15	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	725	68
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	50	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	14	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	103	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	12

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	31
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	23

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.7
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	61	46	107

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	44	45	53
	Girls	32	28	26
	Total	76	73	79
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	71 (48)	68 (67)	74 (56)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	16 (21)	41 (51)	34 (33)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	27	47	42
	Girls	27	31	26
	Total	54	78	68
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	55 (63)	74 (61)	63 (65)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	10 (33)	46 (50)	30 (37)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	75	56	131

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	25	69	73
	Girls	26	52	54
	Total	51	121	127
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	39 (42)	92 (92)	97 (97)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	36.5 (40.0)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	19	22	41
	Average point score per candidate	21.4 (19.7)	22.7 (21)	22.1 (20.5)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.8)	18 (18.6)	17.5 (18.2)

		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	19	22	41	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Average point score per candidate	21.4	22.7	22.1	N/A	N/A	N/A
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

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	745	31	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	25	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	3	1	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	43.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.3

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	441

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	27.0
Key Stage 4	21.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	2 278 243
Total expenditure	2 388 924
Expenditure per pupil	3 012
Balance brought forward from previous year	232 103
Balance carried forward to next year	121 422

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	15.45
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	17.8

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent

* Includes teachers on temporary contracts.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	793
Number of questionnaires returned	159

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	58	3	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	44	49	6	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	17	60	9	1	13
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	56	18	4	5
The teaching is good.	23	69	2	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	48	11	2	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	38	2	1	6
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	55	41	1	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	22	55	16	3	4
The school is well led and managed.	40	45	4	1	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	55	5	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	30	52	9	1	8

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Good teaching helps pupils to achieve standards that match the national average.
- Almost all pupils have positive attitudes towards their work in English lessons.
- Pupils make good gains by the end of Year 11 compared with their levels of attainment when they begin Year 10.
- Good leadership and management have led to substantial improvement in areas for development identified at the previous inspection.

Areas for improvement

- Poor behaviour by a few pupils in a small number of lessons holds back the progress of others.
- Schemes of work in Years 7 to 9 do not set out clearly what all pupils must learn in each year
- Pupils have few opportunities to develop the skills of independent study, especially those involving the use of ICT and the library.

127. Overall, pupils achieve well in English because they care about their learning and because teaching is good. Pupils of all levels of attainment make satisfactory gains by the end of Year 9 compared with levels of attainment on entry to the school. They make good gains by the end of Year 11 compared with their levels of attainment at the beginning of Year 10. Work seen and recent examination results in English match the national average by Year 9 and by Year 11.

128. Pupils enter the school with average levels of attainment in English. Standards of work seen were also average. Pupils are usually keen to answer oral questions in class. They cooperate well when asked to discuss work in small groups. Pupils generally express themselves clearly and effectively when speaking. They present written work well but do not use ICT as extensively as in many schools. Levels of accuracy are satisfactory. Pupils read a wide range of texts with good understanding and are sensitive to poetic language.

129. Results in National Curriculum tests in 2001 for pupils at the end of Year 9 were at the national average, though they were well below average compared with similar schools. Compared with pupils' attainment on entry to the school, the results indicated satisfactory achievement. Results have been erratic over the last four years but show an overall improvement similar to the national trend. Results were similar to those in mathematics and slightly below those in science. Provisional test results in English for 2002 are below those of the previous year.

130. GCSE results for English in 2001 were at the national average. Almost all pupils also entered for GCSE English literature in which results were above average. In both subjects, boys' attainment was closer to that of girls than is seen nationally. English GCSE results overall were better than those achieved in mathematics and well ahead of those in science. Results have been consistently around the national average in recent years. Provisional GCSE results in both subjects for 2002 are slightly lower.

131. By the end of Year 9 pupils make gains at expected levels. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, however, achieve well. Comparing GCSE English grades in 2001 with the levels that pupils achieved in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 shows that most pupils made gains well above the national average. Over the two years this represents very good achievement and substantially better than that in mathematics and science. This was due to the consistently good teaching that pupils receive and to teachers' effective use of their very good expertise in the subject to help pupils to meet the requirements of the examination syllabuses. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress by the end of Year 11. The quality of teaching is often very good for these pupils and they work well in small groups. Pupils of all levels of attainment are generally keen to learn. Only in very occasional lessons when a few pupils misbehave is the progress of the class less than satisfactory. The few pupils for whom English is an additional language make similar progress to that of other pupils. Pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory rather than good because the schemes of work do not set out clearly enough what all pupils must learn in each of these years. In Years 10 and 11, teachers' planning of lessons is better than in Years 7 to 9 because they know exactly what every pupils needs to learn.

132. Teaching and learning are good. All teachers plan their lessons carefully to ensure that pupils have a good range of activities to keep them motivated. Relationships with teachers are cordial so that pupils usually enjoy their lessons and learn well. Teaching was good or very good in two thirds of lessons observed. In about a third of lessons it was very good. Learning was unsatisfactory in one lesson, in which the teacher allowed a minority of pupils to become too unruly for the class to learn effectively. Elsewhere teachers manage all pupils well. Teachers often choose engaging and appropriate materials that appeal to pupils.

133. In the best lessons, pupils learn quickly and progressively as they move from task to task. In one very good lesson, lower-attaining Year 11 pupils were learning how to write a news article. An initial discussion laid down essential requirements for a good article. The teacher then gave pupils a prompt sheet for their writing to encourage them to write good opening paragraphs. They were then challenged to write the second paragraph on their own and produced very good results in a short space of time. In another lesson in Year 11, higher-attaining pupils learned to develop skills of inference and deduction by discussing and analysing whether Jack's qualities in William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies' were good or bad. The teacher had very high expectations of these pupils and encouraged them to deepen their understanding by considering ambiguous qualities. In these best lessons, teachers plan for the needs of the highest and lowest attaining pupils in the class. Pupils learn less well when teachers do not make objectives clear, spend too long on basic rules for language or fail to link activities together in a meaningful way.

134. Teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously and often set targets for improved writing. However, in Years 7 to 9 they make little reference to levels of the National Curriculum in marking so that pupils do not have a clear picture of their progress. The inadequate facilities of the school library restrict opportunities for pupils to develop skills for independent learning. Pupils have few chances to extend their basic skills because ICT is not fully integrated into schemes of work. Pupils have limited access to drama teaching because the curriculum does not include separate drama lessons in any year.

135. Pupils' skills in literacy are adequate for their work in subjects across the curriculum, though pupils have a few difficulties with spelling and punctuation in geography. The teaching of literacy is satisfactory across all subjects.

136. Good leadership of the department sets a clear vision for English teaching that is shared by all teachers of English. The department is appropriately revising its schemes of work and the departmental handbook to set out more clearly what every pupil in Years 7 to 9 needs to learn. Plans for the development of the department have a clear emphasis on raising standards. Since the previous inspection good improvement has been achieved in areas identified for development, such as standards in GCSE English literature and pupils' use of homework. This confirms the good work that is being done in the English department.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Good teaching is helping to raise standards.
- Dynamic new leadership and improved schemes of work have led to improvements in the quality of teaching and learning.

Areas for improvement

- Staffing difficulties have hindered learning in mathematics in recent years.
- Pupils do not have sufficient opportunities to use ICT to enhance their work in mathematics.

137. Pupils enter the school with average standards in mathematics. Standards are average by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11. These standards represent satisfactory achievement.

138. In 2001, results in the national tests for pupils at the end of Year 9, were similar to the national average and well below average compared with those of similar schools. They indicate satisfactory achievement compared with pupils' prior attainment at the end of Year 6 and are similar to the results of the previous year. There is little difference between the results of boys and girls. Results were similar to those in English and slightly below those in science. The provisional results for 2002 show a significant improvement with over one third of pupils attaining Level 7 or higher. The improvement in results over the period 1999 to 2001 matches the national improvement.

139. In 2001, GCSE results at grades A*-C were just below the national average. Girls attained better results than boys. The overall results matched expectations based on pupils' previous attainment at the end of Year 9. Boys and girls attained better results in mathematics than in science and most other subjects but attained lower results than in English. The results are similar to those for the previous year. The provisional results for 2002 are similar to those of 2001 with girls again gaining higher results than boys.

140. In classes seen and in scrutiny of work standards are average by Year 9 and by Year 11. Currently boys are achieving satisfactorily and girls are achieving well. Levels of attainment in examinations until recently have not been as high as they could have been. This was probably a consequence of staffing instability in previous years. The improved results in the national tests in 2002 reflect the influence of the new leadership of the department.

141. The department has endured major staffing difficulties in recent years. Currently, the head of department, who has been in post for just over a year, and a new team of committed teachers are succeeding in raising standards. Because of recruitment difficulties, one teaching timetable is filled with a temporary and short-term, time-share arrangement. This has meant that eight classes have two different teachers for mathematics. The successful introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy with its three-part lessons in Years 7 to 9 has

helped to improve the overall quality of teaching and learning. Standards are rising in Years 10 and 11 as a result of the implementation of a newly written scheme of work. The introduction of a more rigorous procedure to check on the quality of teaching and improvements in the way teachers assess pupils' progress are contributing positively to pupils' learning. These changes are helping to raise standards because pupils enjoy the direction given to the work and are motivated well by the variety of learning activities and materials provided.

142. By Year 9 higher-attaining pupils simplify algebraic expressions containing brackets and powers confidently and competently. They use graphical methods to solve simultaneous equations accurately. Middle-attaining pupils grasp the concept of probability easily, though a few struggle with directed numbers. Lower-attaining pupils carry out decimal addition accurately but some find difficulty in understanding simple aspects of co-ordinate geometry.

143. By Year 11, higher-attaining pupils rearrange algebraic formulae with ease. Middle-attaining pupils successfully perform long multiplication involving decimals by hand. Lower-attaining pupils calculate areas of regular figures with reasonable accuracy and confidence, though a few still do not understand the meaning of the decimal point.

144. Standards of numeracy are well below average in lower-attaining classes. The department tackles this problem well through the use of lessons and materials that are planned carefully to emphasise basic skills in number. The school is developing a policy to teach numeracy across all subjects. At present, pupils have good opportunities to practise and apply their mathematical skills in subjects such as science, geography, ICT and design and technology. Teachers pay suitable attention to the teaching of literacy. As a result, pupils present their work well. Teachers emphasise key words in lessons, particularly as below average skills in reading and comprehension hinder the learning of a few pupils. The department has carried out a successful joint project with the English department to help to develop literacy skills within investigations. Pupils have insufficient opportunities to develop their ICT skills in mathematics. However, all pupils in Year 7 last year carried out an investigation using ICT to present their findings. A class seen in Year 9 used graphical calculators successfully to investigate number patterns in the Fibonacci Series.

145. Pupils' learning in lessons is generally good. However, in a very small number of classes of lower-attaining pupils, the behaviour of one or two pupils is challenging and potentially disruptive. The vast majority of pupils behave sensibly and are motivated. They enjoy learning and discussing their understanding with the class. Pupils appreciate participation in the mental games used as starting activities in many lessons. They enhance their learning through using new techniques. A class of high-attaining pupils in Year 9 learned to simplify simple algebraic expressions and then applied their learning successfully to more complex examples involving powers and negative coefficients. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because the additional support they receive in class is effective. Gifted pupils are challenged with extension materials and through entry to national competitions. All pupils are valued equally in lessons. Pupils use calculators accurately and generally appropriately.

146. When learning is less successful teachers have to waste time dealing with the occasional, disruptive pupil and the lesson loses pace. This was seen in a Year 8 class of lower-attaining pupils. When the teacher gathered experimental data from individuals a disruptive pupil tried to encourage others to misbehave. Fortunately the teacher had a good grip on the situation and soon had the group back on task.

147. Teaching is good overall and leads to good learning. Teachers have adopted the three-part lessons enthusiastically. They use the quick-fire questioning to generate interest

and motivation. Particularly successful teaching helps pupils to learn well through painstaking and sequenced questioning. This was seen in a Year 11 class of higher-attaining pupils who were learning to recognise the significance of slope and intercept of the general straight line. The teacher used questioning effectively to enable pupils to build up a good understanding by dealing with more and more complicated examples. In the few less successful lessons, planning does not provide enough challenge for all pupils and a few pupils lose concentration and their attention drifts. A key feature of most teaching is the good rapport between teachers and pupils that enables teachers to take time to explain problems in several ways.

148. The management of the subject has been satisfactory. It is now improving rapidly. Leadership is by good example. The most recent test results at the end of Year 9 and forecast results for current Year 11 pupils indicate that standards are rising. Since the previous inspection the department has made satisfactory progress. It has the capacity and commitment to make good improvements and to raise standards further. The department recognises the needs to continue to share the good practice in teaching, to make more use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning and to reduce the number of split-classes.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- New leadership and management are improving teaching and standards are beginning to rise.
- Staff are committed to raise standards and to help pupils to make good progress in many lessons.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes and want to do well

Areas for improvement

- GCSE results are not high enough, particularly those of higher-attaining pupils.
- The quality of teaching lacks consistency and leads to pupils making different rates of progress.
- Marking and assessment do not give enough guidance to pupils about how to improve their work.
- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning, particularly data logging, is insufficient.

149. Standards in science are average at the end of Year 9 and below average at the end of Year 11. They indicate satisfactory achievement by the end of Year 9 and unsatisfactory achievement by the end of Year 11.

150. In 2001, pupils' results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were above the national average. They were below average compared with similar schools. Compared with pupils' attainment when they joined the school in Year 7, the results represent satisfactory achievement. In the past few years, boys have achieved better results than girls. Over the period 1999 to 2001, results improved faster than the national rate of improvement. Results in science in 2001 were slightly better than those in English and mathematics. Unconfirmed results for 2002 indicate similar results to those of 2001.

151. GCSE results in 2001 were well below the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher A*-C grades was well below average. When compared with similar schools these results are very low. Boys attained better results than girls. Unconfirmed results for 2002 show an improvement over those of 2001, but are still below the previous

year's national average. Pupils do less well in GCSE examinations in science than they do in many of their other subjects.

152. In classes seen and in scrutiny of work, standards by the end of Year 9 are average and are lower than those indicated by test results in 2001. Pupils' practical and investigative skills are not as strong as their science knowledge and are below average. This is because in most lessons pupils have too few opportunities to make their own predictions or to define problems based on scientific knowledge and understanding. Pupils seldom plan their own practical investigations from which they can evaluate the results and draw conclusions. They are generally good at carrying out experiments planned by the teacher.

153. Many pupils in Years 7 to 9 lack confidence in using basic scientific terminology. Although most teachers help pupils to develop their literacy skills appropriately, they do not always do so rigorously enough. Pupils' numeracy skills are satisfactory. Their graphical skills are generally good, because most teachers give pupils plenty of practice in developing and using these skills. Pupils' ICT skills, although improving, are not developed well in science because of the lack of opportunity to use computers for data logging. By the end of Year 9, pupils' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their prior attainment in the subject, which, when they join the school as 11 year olds, is average. Pupils for whom English is an additional language and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

154. Standards in the work seen in Years 10 to 11 are below average. They are better than those suggested by the GCSE results in 2001. Pupils do not achieve as well as they should and most have a less than satisfactory knowledge of the topics they are studying. Many pupils in a Year 10 class are developing a good understanding of acceleration due to gravity and devise their own experiments to measure acceleration. Pupils in a Year 11 class, studying energy changes in chemical reactions understand the difference between exothermic and endothermic reactions. However, their understanding of making and breaking of bonds and of the carrying out of calculations involving bond energies to explain these reactions is much less secure.

155. Pupils of average and below average attainment, including those with special learning needs, reach the standards expected of them. However, as in Years 7 to 9, a large number of higher attainers achieve less well than they should because the tasks they receive are often insufficiently demanding. Pupils' practical and investigative skills improve, but are below their attainment in other areas of science. In a few lessons, pupils do not express themselves clearly when answering spoken or written questions.

156. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall. The teaching observed varied from very good to very poor. The variable quality of teaching has an adverse effect on attainment

157. Teaching was good or very good in just over half of the lessons seen. In the very good lessons, teachers plan effectively so that pupils see the importance and relevance of what they are doing. The focus in these lessons is upon what pupils must learn as well as the organisation of the activities. A very good atmosphere is created within which high expectations are shared with pupils. In the best lessons, teachers ask questions with speed, skill and enthusiasm, explanations are clear and activities are interesting. As a result, pupils respond well, are curious and develop a thirst for knowledge, so that they not only answer questions but also ask them. This was seen to best effect in a Year 10 lesson about the extraction of aluminium from bauxite. The teacher built on pupils' prior knowledge, that the more reactive a metal is the more difficult its compounds are to decompose. The lesson began with an interesting activity, plotting a graph of the world's production of aluminium from 1920 to the present day. The teacher got pupils to identify the blips in their graph. This led to a discussion of the history behind the use of aluminium. In this very interesting lesson, pupils'

spiritual, moral, social and cultural development was encouraged well, as it generally is in science lessons. Pupils considered the environments from which bauxite is obtained and those where it is processed. They discover the inter-relationships between science and society and how world economics influences scientific development. Good discussion took place on the reasons for the development of hydroelectric power and how Sweden had become the largest producer of aluminium.

158. Features of very good or good lessons seen were the active involvement and participation of pupils in their own learning, the careful organisation of the lesson to make the work relevant and interesting, the provision of a wide variety of teaching and learning methods and the effective use of paired and group work. These features were not always prominent in the satisfactory lessons and were mostly absent in unsatisfactory lessons. This meant that in lessons in which teaching was less than good, many pupils were passive learners and made limited progress. In one very poor lesson, the teacher used too much time in trying to control the class, the pace was slow, and insufficient learning of any depth took place.

159. Most teachers mark work regularly and in encouraging ways. They do not always give pupils a clear enough indication of how well they are progressing, of what they have got wrong, and what they need to do in order to improve. The best practice gives pupils 'cause for thought' in encouraging further progress and checks that comments have been acted upon.

160. Overall, learning is satisfactory in all of Years 7 to 11. It is not quite as good as the teaching is. The reasons for this are that, in a few instances, pupils' expectations are not sufficiently high, they do not always see the relevance of science and are reluctant to think and work things out for themselves. The behaviour of a few pupils is not always as good as it should be. A few pupils put insufficient effort into their work.

161. Pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory, overall. Most concentrate well and want to succeed. Behaviour is generally satisfactory. Whilst many pupils enjoy their science, especially the practical work, a few do not. These are the pupils who lack motivation because of weak teaching and who become disruptive, hindering the progress of others in the class. The majority of pupils respond well to their science lessons, are co-operative with their teachers and help each other. They share equipment safely and are happy to record their observations together. Few pupils ask questions to enquire more deeply into a topic.

162. The satisfactory leadership and management of the department have the capacity and commitment to be effective in raising standards. Significant changes have taken place very recently indicating that necessary improvements can be made. The new head of department has been in post for only a few weeks. A good awareness of the department's strengths and weaknesses has already resulted in suitable and new plans to tackle underachievement and to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Planning and checking the work in science have been ineffective in recent times to raise standards. These are now changing for the better. Pupils are showing interest in the new courses that have been introduced. The department recognises the need to improve the ways in which pupils' work and progress are tracked and checked for improvement. Reports to parents, although containing detail about pupils' attitudes, do not give sufficient detail about their scientific skills, knowledge and understanding, or about how these can be improved.

163. Accommodation though satisfactory overall, suffers from poor maintenance and cleaning. Display of pupils' work in open areas near laboratories is a satisfactory aid to pupils' learning. In general there is adequate basic equipment to meet the needs of the curriculum. The lack of computing software to enable the department to carry out data logging and a lack of textbooks restrict the progress of pupils.

164. Improvement is unsatisfactory since the previous inspection. Standards of attainment are broadly similar in Years 7 to 9 but GCSE results in Year 11 have fallen, so that overall achievement is unsatisfactory. Marking remains unsatisfactory overall. The use of ICT has improved, but pupils still do not get hands-on experience of data logging.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Thorough assessment and good support meet pupils' needs and lead to satisfactory achievement in Years 7 to 9.
- Good use of sketchbooks for research and development enhances learning in Years 10 and 11.

Areas for improvement

- Insufficient use of ICT and ceramics limits pupils' range of media experiences in Years 7 to 9.

165. Standards are average by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11.

166. In 2001, teachers' assessment showed that attainment at the end of Year 9 was below average and that girls attained higher standards than boys. GCSE results grades A*-C in 2001 were average. Girls' results matched the national average and those of boys were just below. Half of the girls who entered the GCSE examination attained grades A and B. In photography, boys' and girls' attainment was similar. Pupils attained lower GCSE grades in art and design than they did in many of the other subjects they entered.

167. In the classes seen and in scrutiny of work, standards are average by Year 9. There is little difference between the attainment of boys and girls. Achievement is satisfactory because the teaching is always satisfactory and pupils' attitudes to learning are positive. Lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, make at least satisfactory progress as a result of good support in class. Pupils explore ideas and gain access to visual information, including images from different historical and cultural contexts. They make little creative use of ICT, although they occasionally use it in research for cultural and historical information. When pupils use first-hand observation as a basis for their work, they gain a greater perceptual depth in the work. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils arranged shapes for composition and had a good understanding of spatial layout. They experimented with colour mixing and made good connections to the work of Salvador Dali.

168. The work seen in Year 11 is average. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is satisfactory. A few pupils achieve well. Pupils develop and sustain a chosen theme in their work. Their work shows influence of important movements in art and design and of particular artists. Pupils demonstrate personal interests, ideas and responses to their own and other cultures through the work they produce. They annotate and use sketchbooks effectively so that they develop good technical language. Pupils are motivated well by the teachers' enthusiasm. They are interested in the work because it is planned well to provide activities of different levels of difficulty to cater for the range of attainment found in the class. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils spoke confidently about their work and demonstrated good knowledge and understanding. Working on the theme of 'Pockets', pupils interpreted direct observational studies well in three-dimensional sculptural forms using a variety of media. Pupils enjoy their art and design lessons and apply themselves purposefully. The positive climate for working in

class encourages pupils to behave and to do their best and pupils are eager to explain their work.

169. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is better in Years 10 and 11 because teachers use a greater range of learning activities with the older pupils and encourage them to make good use of research. Teachers use their good knowledge of the pupils to plan their lessons to meet individual requirements. They use their good expertise in the subject well so that lesson preparation is satisfactory in all years. The use of clear introductions to lessons and time spent reviewing and reinforcing the work of the previous lesson enables pupils to build upon prior learning and to recognise the continuity of topics. Teachers make good use of praise to encourage the participation of all pupils. They make good use of question and answer to ensure pupils are actively involved. The best teaching occurred when the work and organisation of the classroom were suited well to the tasks and the differing needs of the pupils. In lessons in which the tasks were less challenging, or lacking in pace, a few pupils became restless. The good emphasis on procedures and care of equipment helps pupils to organise their work efficiently. Teachers pay suitable attention to improving pupils' literacy. Sketchbooks reveal that pupils receive active support with the development of their reading and writing skills. In a Year 7 lesson, pupils were combining written work with illustrations of holiday experiences. Pupils understood fully the processes involved and the concept that recording information can be in a variety of media. They created distance using scale and tonal variations. Pupils improve their standards through knowing what they need to do to meet National Curriculum levels of attainment. Homework is good and appropriate in subject matter. It is used well to support project work in Years 10 and 11.

170. Leadership and management are satisfactory and the teachers work well as a team. The department makes a good contribution to the moral, social and cultural development of pupils. There is very limited access to computers within the department and insufficient use is made of working with clay for three-dimensional study. The stocks of reference materials held within the department are good and contribute positively to pupils' learning. The library provision for reference books of good quality is satisfactory. Extra curricular activities, visits to galleries and museums and the use of the 'artist in residence' scheme have a positive effect upon the quality and range of pupils' work. Pupils have insufficient opportunities for individual and personal approaches to study in a variety of media in Years 10 and 11. Multi-cultural connections are now an important aspect of pupils' work in art and design. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Procedures for assessment are now more effective in giving pupils opportunities to discuss their achievement and to set targets for future development. The use of sketchbooks has improved in all years and is having a positive effect on learning. Schemes of work now ensure suitable continuity and progression in the subject.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Achievement in the vocational GCSE engineering course is very good.
- Standards in Years 7 to 9 are improving and are average.
- Teachers are beginning to work well as a team and have improved the planning of lessons.
- Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to assist pupils' learning.

Areas for improvement

- The teaching of design is inconsistent across design and technology subjects.
- The monitoring of performance is not rigorous enough to raise standards in Years 10 and 11.
- Teachers make ineffective use of marking and assessment to help pupils to raise achievement.

171. Standards among Year 7 pupils joining the school are broadly average. Standards by the end of Year 9 are average across a range of activities. They are slightly lower than those indicated by teachers' assessments. Pupils make and design products in food, resistant materials, textiles, graphics and electronics. Pupils follow the guidance provided by the teachers and generally respond well to the worksheets and information provided in lessons. They develop a good range of drawing skills and are beginning to apply this well in all specialist subjects in design and technology. Achievement for all pupils, including those with special educational needs, is satisfactory when they reach the end of Year 9. Pupils learn the techniques of designing. However, they do not often analyse existing products to see how various materials, features and processes are used to manufacture commercial products.

172. The GCSE results in 2001 were below the national average. Provisional GCSE results in 2002 indicate that performance was lower. The best results in 2001 were achieved in the GCSE courses in vocational engineering, graphic products and textiles. The worst results were in resistant materials. Pupils achieved well in courses in textiles technology and child development. In 2001, pupils attained lower GCSE grades in design and technology than in many of the other subjects they sat. Overall, the girls attained higher grades than the boys.

173. In the classes seen and in scrutiny of work, standards by the end of Year 11 are below average. Pupils following the GCSE courses show a range of skills in research and investigation. They make products of satisfactory quality as part of their coursework. However, they lose valuable marks by missing out a few important stages of designing. For example, they do not always research and analyse other products carefully before writing a specification for their own design. Achievement by pupils, including those with special educational needs, is unsatisfactory by the end of Year 11.

174. The quality of teaching and learning was satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. It is unsatisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In a few lessons seen in Years 7 to 11, teaching was good. However, in Years 10 and 11, marking and feedback to pupils are unsatisfactory. The sharing of good practice is not widespread in the department.

175. In the best lessons seen, teachers planned the lessons well and provided clear objectives to guide and support pupils in their work. Pupils responded very positively to the good guidance provided by teachers, were motivated and enjoyed the subject. Teachers helped pupils to improve skills in designing through the effective use of a good range of

learning resources that allowed pupils to learn at a good pace and in suitable sequence. In other lessons, however, pupils did not develop their skills in research well enough. Pupils' own analyses of their research were not prominent in much of the design work seen. An example of this was evident in a Year 10 lesson in which pupils were designing boxes for storing valuables. Although pupils tried out various methods of constructing boxes, they placed little emphasis on finding out about existing products. As a result, many pupils produced a restricted range of initial ideas and a few struggled with the task. In lessons in which teachers encouraged pupils to check on existing products, pupils used the ideas effectively to extend their understanding and creativity. A good example occurred in a graphics lesson in which pupils were designing a package for a mug. Pupils brought in different sorts of packaging. As a result, they produced a wide range of ideas. They added a few original features to produce interesting and creative work. In the lessons observed, teachers helped pupils to develop their basic skills in the subject through good personal support to individuals and small groups.

176. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in literacy. They help pupils to increase their competence in using the technical vocabulary of the subject. Good resources, such as prompts for writing, encourage pupils to organise and present their work effectively.

177. Marking is of inconsistent quality across the department. Several books were not marked. A few good examples of marking were seen in which teachers provided constructive comments to help pupils to improve. However, the use of marking and assessment to set short-term and specific targets for improvement is limited. As a result, pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable.

178. Good relationships between teachers and pupils create good conditions for learning in most classes. Most pupils have positive attitudes to their work. However, behaviour is unsatisfactory overall because a few pupils in several classes lack concentration, behave badly and have an adverse effect upon the learning of the rest of the class.

179. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 make effective use of ICT to enhance the quality and presentation of their work and to process and present data. They use ICT when conducting surveys about the products they design. In Years 7 to 9, pupils perform needlework on electronic machines. They use specialist software to design and test electronic circuits.

180. Pupils develop good skills in numeracy as they measure and mark out materials and process information when calculating values in food and resistant materials. Teachers try to include all pupils in the learning activities. The vast majority of pupils respond well to the work they do in class. However, a large minority of pupils distract others when they behave unsatisfactorily in a few lessons.

181. In recent years the department has experienced considerable and continuous staffing difficulties. As a result, despite much hard work, the management of the department has not succeeded in achieving the required improvements in standards and the overall quality of teaching. The school's senior management team do not check rigorously enough the quality of teaching and learning in the department to provide suitable support for the department and to secure higher standards.

182. Improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory. Standards in Years 10 and 11 have fallen to below average. GCSE results have declined to well below average. Staffing difficulties have been a major contributory factor in this decline. The department has the capacity to make the necessary improvements. Systems are now in place to improve marking and the use of assessment particularly with pupils in Years 10 and 11.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Effective and efficient management of the department sets a clear sense of direction.
- The planned use of ICT and enquiry work, including fieldwork supports learning.
- Teachers are well qualified and committed to raising standards.

Areas for improvement

- Boys do not achieve as well as girls in Year 11.
- Provision of in-class support for pupils with emotional and behavioural needs is insufficient.

183. In 2001, GCSE results were above the national average. A*-C grades have been above the national averages since 1998, with the exception of 2000 when they were marginally below. In the past two years, girls have outperformed girls nationally. The gap between the performance of boys and girls at the school is very wide with boys under performing boys nationally. Girls' results were well above the national average in 2001. In 2000 and 2001, boys, as well as girls, have done better in geography than in their other subjects at GCSE. Boys' achievement has been satisfactory compared with their prior attainment. Provisional results for 2002 show a marked drop in standards with results well below the national average. This was partly because only a few girls entered for the examination and partly because a number of boys attained one grade lower than predicted. Higher achievers of both genders gained A* and A grades that were one or two grades higher than predicted.

184. Standards of work at the end of Year 9 match the national average. Most pupils acquire basic geographical skills. For example they locate places on maps, draw sketch maps and diagrams using the correct symbols. Teaching of fieldwork and investigational skills is good. All pupils learn to collect and process data using simple graphs. Pupils are competent users of ICT as seen in a Year 9 lesson using computers to process data on weather. The majority of pupils undertake research tasks, finding information from a variety of sources, including the Internet. Most find what they need and a few, mainly the higher achievers, know how to process their information rather than simply download it from their computers, or copy from the books. This was evident in a very good case study on El Nino that explained local, global, short and long-term impacts. Pupils of all levels of attainment have a basic knowledge and some understanding of the patterns and processes they have studied. Most write in sentences to explain or describe geographical processes or places, though many have problems with spelling and punctuation. Higher-attaining pupils write more extensively using appropriate diagrams with explanations, for instance, to explain volcanic eruptions. Pupils use a good knowledge of local geography to illustrate geographical topics.

185. Pupils make satisfactory progress in geography in the first three years at the school and are achieving as expected from their previous attainment at the end of Year 6. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make similar rates of progress as their peers because of appropriate challenge. They receive support that is focussed well on their individual needs and through materials developed by teachers to meet the needs of pupils of all capabilities. The reason that progress is satisfactory rather than good is that the unsatisfactory behaviour of a few pupils hinders learning in several classes.

186. Currently, attainment in Year 11 is below average. The Year 11 fieldwork study of Abingdon's leisure facilities demonstrated pupils' ability to carry out research and enquiry tasks. Higher-attaining pupils demonstrate a linkage between their findings and relevant geographical ideas and concepts. They have a basic knowledge and some understanding of the topics covered on their GCSE course. For example, all pupils understand that human activity has an impact upon the natural environment. There is a wide range of attainment in the current Year 11 geography option groups. Whilst many pupils are achieving satisfactorily or better, a substantial number of boys are not. The uptake of girls into GCSE geography has declined. This has had a knock-on effect to boys' progress. A significant minority of boys have negative attitudes to the subject, behave badly and are disobedient and discourteous to teachers. They have a disruptive effect on the learning of others and there is insufficient in-class support to deal with the problem.

187. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in the department is good. Detailed planning and preparation ensure that pupils learn effectively. Tasks are planned and sequenced to meet the needs of all pupils. Teachers use appropriate stimulating resources to aid learning. They generally handle pupils whose behaviour is challenging very well. However, a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching and learning was seen in Year 11. The major cause of this was the inability to control pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties who made up a substantial proportion of the class.

188. Geography is a strong department. Good leadership and management ensure frequent and regular monitoring and evaluation of the geography curriculum with effective action taken to improve standards. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The issues raised then have been successfully tackled.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Occasionally, teaching is very good.
- In many classes, teachers use their good knowledge of history to enthuse pupils.
- Good relationships between staff and pupils assist learning in most classes.

Areas for improvement

- GCSE results are well below average and unsatisfactory.
- Ineffective management leads to an inconsistent quality of teaching in history.

189. In 2001, teachers' assessment at the end of Year 9 indicated average standards in history. Standards in classes seen and in scrutiny of work confirm these judgements. Given the pupils' average level of attainment on entry to the school, achievement by the end of Year 9 is satisfactory.

190. GCSE results in 2001 were well below average and indicate unsatisfactory achievement. Pupils attained lower grades in history than in nearly all of their other subjects. This was the first time that the Modern World syllabus had been examined in the school and coincided with a reduction in the taught time in Year 11. Provisional GCSE results in 2002 show a small improvement in the A*-C grades. Girls have outperformed boys in the last two years but they represent a smaller part of the pupils studying history. The trend in GCSE results has been erratic in recent years.

191. However, there is an improvement in standards in Years 10 and 11 as seen in classes and in scrutiny of work. Standards are slowly improving in these years as a result of teachers' greater familiarity with the requirements of the new syllabus and more practice in examination techniques for the pupils. A further aid to raising standards is the introduction of a clearer sequence of learning activities that include prompts for better writing and graded worksheets and textbooks. The small improvement seen in results in 2002 seems set to continue. There is no significant difference in the rates of progress for those who are gifted and talented, those with learning difficulties or the few pupils with English as an additional language.

192. By the end of Year 9, pupils develop a range of historical skills, including the understanding of chronology, the handling of primary and secondary evidence and an appreciation of the impact of social and economic factors. Pupils are able to discuss the impact of colonialism on society and contrast eighteenth century values with present day ones. Pupils with learning difficulties are able to make satisfactory progress with the support of learning support assistants and with guided worksheets. Literacy skills are emphasised and as a result all pupils make satisfactory progress. In the best lessons, pupils work well together and listen carefully to each other's answers and learn from these contributions.

193. In the work seen in Years 10 and 11, pupils are still not making enough progress overall. Most respond satisfactorily in work involving personal enquiry. The project work seen is satisfactory for this stage of a pupil's development. Knowledge of life in the 1930s in the Soviet Union is adequate. Pupils with learning difficulties receive additional support from the teacher that helps them to make satisfactory progress in project work. In a Year 10 class of pupils of a wide range of attainment, the Wall Street Crash and its implications were understood by most of the class. However, for a small number of pupils, the rate of note making was too slow and meant that their progress was inadequate. In a few classes in Years 7 to 11 the expectations of teachers and pupils are not high enough and lead to underachievement. Occasionally, a few pupils behave poorly and make insufficient progress in class.

194. Teaching is satisfactory overall. However, the teaching observed ranged from very good to unsatisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to share their enthusiasm with the pupils. They make effective use of probing and challenging questions and present good opportunities for pupils to develop their enquiry skills. These lessons promote good achievement through effective work in pairs and groups and through research using ICT.

195. When teaching was less than good, pupils were not aware of the lesson's objectives and teachers expected too little of the pupils. Such factors occasionally led to incidences of unsatisfactory behaviour and a slow rate of learning. In one lesson, the teacher was too dominant so that pupils contributed little, either orally or in written work, and accordingly made inadequate progress. Teachers do not always plan effectively to ensure that the main learning points are reinforced by full class reviews. Currently, little is done to monitor weaker teaching to bring about improvement. Homework is set regularly but the marking is not linked either to levels of the National Curriculum or to the GCSE requirements. Pupils do not have a clear understanding of how they can improve their work step by step.

196. Management has been ineffective in raising standards in GCSE examinations in recent years. Plans for improvement in the department have yet to be worked out fully. A number of new teaching methods have been tried to provide support for pupils' extended writing and to meet examination requirements. These changes are beginning to have a positive impact. However, there is still much to be achieved. The Year 9 curriculum does not include enough elements about local history. Although a few teachers have included ICT in

the work given to pupils, practice is not uniform across the department. The schemes of work contain few references to departmental resources or assessment tasks. Some of the best teaching seen during the inspection was in history, but the good practice is not spread across the department.

197. Improvement since the previous inspection is unsatisfactory. GCSE results have declined over time. The recent changes to the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 have yet to produce the desired improvement in standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving in Years 7 to 9.
- New leadership and management are having a positive effect on teaching and learning
- Improvements to resources provide pupils with more opportunities to develop their ICT skills.

Areas for improvement

- Standards by the end of Year 11 are well below average.
- Pupils' unsatisfactory attitudes to learning sometimes restrict progress in lessons.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to use ICT to enhance their work in several subjects.

198. Standards are average by the end of Year 9 and indicate satisfactory achievement. Standards in the examination courses in Year 11 are below average and represent unsatisfactory achievement. Although standards have been low at the end of Year 11 in recent years, improvements to teaching and learning are already apparent under new leadership.

199. GCSE results at grades A*-C in 2001 were well below average as they have been over the past three years. A higher proportion of pupils enter for the examination than is typical. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-G was close to the national average. Provisional results for 2002 show a small improvement. Standards reached by boys and girls are lower than the national average. Girls outperform boys by a wider margin than is found nationally. In 2001, pupils GCSE grades were lower than their grades in other subjects.

200. There has been a rising trend in standards at the end of Year 9. Teachers' assessments of pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were above average.

201. In work seen, standards are average by Year 9. Pupils use computers confidently and competently to research information from the Internet. They present their work well, combining text and pictures to communicate information clearly. Pupils have an adequate working knowledge of spreadsheets when they use them to model costs of outings. They reach lower standards in data logging and control because resources for these aspects are insufficient.

202. In work seen, standards by Year 11 for pupils who choose to continue to study a course in ICT are below average. The unsatisfactory attitudes to learning of a few pupils restrict their progress in lessons. Recent changes to teaching styles, however, and more effective monitoring of progress are beginning to have a positive impact in lessons seen. Pupils use computers well, particularly when they use the Internet to research information, but work is often at a superficial level. They have unsatisfactory skills of independent learning

and problem solving and so are heavily dependent on teachers to guide them through tasks. Pupils are insufficiently creative and do not show enough initiative in presenting their work imaginatively when the task requires it.

203. Good behaviour in Years 7 to 9 has a positive effect on learning and achievement. The care that pupils take with homework and classwork indicates pride in their work and a keenness to learn. Boys and girls of all backgrounds and levels of attainment sustain concentration and clearly enjoy their lessons. Occasionally the unsatisfactory behaviour of a small minority of pupils restricts learning because the teacher has to spend too much time on managing their behaviour. Although behaviour in Year 10 is generally satisfactory, in Year 11 the unsatisfactory attitude of a significant minority restricts learning in lessons.

204. Achievement by Year 9 is good. Pupils enter with variable experience but generally below average skills and knowledge of ICT. By Year 9 they have a competent understanding of computer applications. They make good progress in learning so that they present information appropriately and search and retrieve information from the Internet. Standards are rising because of improved curricular provision and more effective learning over time.

205. Achievement by Year 11 is unsatisfactory. A significant number of pupils do not make enough progress with coursework and, unless prompted frequently, are not inclined to work hard in lessons. Although teachers plan their lessons to build skills and knowledge the casual attitudes to learning of a significant minority of pupils hinder their progress. Teachers plan the active involvement of pupils in lessons but pupils' response is often disappointing. The work of Year 11 pupils done when in Year 10, confirms this. In the current Year 10, attitudes are better and pupils are making good progress. The increased use of tracking their progress is making pupils more aware of the standards they are reaching.

206. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9. Teachers use their very good expertise and knowledge of the subject to communicate clearly and confidently to pupils. They provide interesting work that includes choice and challenge as seen when Year 7 pupils made PowerPoint presentations on a topic of their own choice. Projects in Year 9 are planned well to include a wide range of applications to consolidate previous learning. Teachers prepare lessons well, organising them to build skills and knowledge. They explain the objectives of learning and set targets for the lesson that are reviewed at the end to check progress. Teachers do not relate pupils' work closely to the levels of the National Curriculum levels to encourage them to aspire to higher grades. Teachers know pupils' special educational needs and behavioural targets well. They support these pupils effectively in Years 7 to 9 to enable them to make suitable progress towards meeting their targets.

207. The overall quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. In Year 11, teaching is satisfactory but learning is unsatisfactory because of the unsatisfactory attitudes to learning of many pupils. Teachers have a good knowledge of examination courses and use their own very good subject knowledge to support pupils individually. Pupils do not always respond well enough. Many lack the motivation to do as well as they are capable. Teachers emphasise the need for accurate writing. They support pupils well in developing their written work. Copying word for word from original sources is discouraged and pupils are made aware of the moral issues involved.

208. Pupils practise and develop their ICT skills in work in a few subjects such as design and technology and geography. However, pupils have too few opportunities to enhance their work through the use of ICT in many subjects, including English, mathematics, science, art and design and modern foreign languages.

209. The department benefits from the contribution of the new leadership. Priorities to raise standards have been identified and are already having a positive effect on learning in lessons. The department is developing more effective means of using assessment of prior attainment to plan lessons as a baseline by which to measure progress. A high priority is suitably being given to establishing standards for more consistent and accurate judgements of attainment at the end of Year 9.

210. Improvement since the previous inspection has been unsatisfactory especially in standards at the end of Year 11. Good improvements have been made to standards in Years 7 to 9, to the range and quality of resources and, more recently, to the leadership and management of the department. Leadership and management now have a clear capacity and commitment to raise standards further.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Good teaching helps pupils to achieve well in GCSE examinations.
- Good relationships in many classes contribute positively to pupils' learning.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils have limited opportunities to use ICT to enhance their learning.
- Lack of support for pupils with behavioural difficulties inhibits learning in a few lessons.

French and German

211. Standards are average at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11.

212. By the end of Year 9 in 2001 teachers' assessments show that standards were below average. More recent assessments have indicated a rise in standards.

213. GCSE results in French at the end of Year 11 in 2001 matched the national average. Results in German were below average. GCSE results in modern foreign languages showed a slight increase over the figures for 2000. Pupils attained better GCSE grades in modern foreign languages in 2001 than in many of their other subjects. Girls perform better than boys. There are more boys than girls in many classes, which tends to depress overall levels of attainment.

214. Standards of work seen in Years 7 to 9 are average overall. By the end of Year 9 higher-attaining pupils in both languages are beginning to produce extended writing and make reference to past and future events. Pupils of lower attainment produce little extended writing and struggle to make reference to past and future events. Because pupils do not start to study the subject until Year 7, this represents satisfactory achievement overall. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as other pupils because teachers match work to their needs. However, there is lack of support in a few classes in which teachers have to manage poor behaviour. This inhibits learning and restricts achievement.

215. Given their prior attainment at the end of Year 9 achievement by Year 11 is satisfactory overall. Standards of work produced by higher-attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 are satisfactory. They produce more extended writing. Lower-attaining pupils are working at below average standards. They take part in simple conversations and read short extracts. They do not produce extended writing without support, and their listening skills are developed insufficiently. Pupils following the entry-level certificate course operate successfully in a limited number of carefully defined situations, for example, ordering drinks and snacks in a café.

216. The department contributes effectively to the improvement of pupils' literacy through its focus on accurate spelling and the grammar of the foreign language. Pupils enhance their literacy skills in work on sentence and paragraph construction and through the use of prompts for writing. Teaching makes a small contribution to developing pupils' numeracy through the counting systems of France and Germany, changing money, and use of the 24-hour clock. Pupils have insufficient opportunities to use computers to extend their work in French or German.

217. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 9 one lesson in every two seen was good and the rest satisfactory. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. In Years 10 and 11 one lesson in five was good, one in five unsatisfactory, and the rest were satisfactory. In the good lessons, teachers share learning objectives with pupils and give them a clear idea of what they are expected to learn. Teachers use French and German effectively for routine purposes as well as practice. They sustain a brisk pace and use a variety of activities and working arrangements so that pupils are productive throughout. Pupils respond well to the high expectations set by teachers. This leads to satisfactory learning overall and good learning among higher-attaining pupils.

218. Pupils have satisfactory attitudes to the subject. Behaviour in lessons is satisfactory overall. In the small number of lessons in which teaching observed was unsatisfactory, pupils' attitudes to the subject were also unsatisfactory. The result was restricted learning and a measure of underachievement. The large majority of pupils, however, show interest and take pride in their work. They participate willingly in lessons and complete homework tasks. They establish good relationships with their teachers that contribute positively to their learning.

219. In a climate in which staff turnover has been high, leadership and management in modern foreign languages are satisfactory. Schemes of work are detailed and appropriately pitched and sequenced. The work provided for pupils with special educational needs is not always suitably matched to pupils' individual needs. The department has developed its procedures for assessing pupils satisfactorily. Teachers use a portfolio of examples of work at different levels of the National Curriculum to help pupils to know what work is needed to attain certain standards.

220. Procedures for monitoring the quality of teaching are linked to the school's performance management arrangements. Difficulties in staffing in the recent past have hampered development. The current team is just beginning to have a positive effect on raising standards, particularly in Years 7 to 9.

221. Accommodation is satisfactory. Rooms are well provided with resources. The main textbook for French meets the requirements of the curriculum. The department has too little access to computers. There are too few books and other resources in the library to promote pupils' learning in modern foreign languages.

222. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Although attainment in Years 7 to 9 has been below average, results in French at the end of Year 11 have indicated satisfactory achievement. There has been some improvement in German at GCSE, and indications are that there is a trend of improvement in Years 7 to 9.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- New and effective leadership sets higher expectations for pupils and raises the profile of music.
- Pupils have access to a good range of courses in music in Years 10 and 11.

Areas for improvement

- The unsatisfactory behaviour of a minority of pupils hinders learning in a few classes.
- Pupils do not develop their computing skills in music.

223. Standards are average at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11.

224. Attainment of pupils on entry to Year 7 is average. Most pupils have some previous performing and listening experience. Their development in performance in groups and in improvisation skills is supported well by an increasing knowledge and understanding of notation, signs and symbols as they proceed through Year 7. This satisfactory achievement continues in Year 8. Most pupils are fluent on tuned percussion. They are gaining expertise in playing electronic keyboards and in vocal techniques. They understand simple aspects of musical style and structure. Many can read a single line of music notation.

225. Attainment in Year 9 is currently slightly below average. Most pupils are now working at a standard comparable to Year 8. Their keyboard and percussion skills vary considerably. Their knowledge of music, notation and structure is generally weak. These deficiencies are the result of unsatisfactory provision for the subject in their earlier years in the school.

226. Pupils in Year 10 and 11 are offered the option to study music and expressive arts. Numbers following a music course are small. Standards of work and GCSE results match the national average. The course in expressive arts is popular and has increasing recruitment. Standards are average and GCSE results are improving. Overall achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. However, pupils have no provision to learn and use music technology programmes to develop their skills of independent learning.

227. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. They have some good features. The best teaching seen challenges and supports pupils, who now understand that they must work hard to achieve clearly defined outcomes. All pupils are developing appropriate skills of teamwork. They are beginning to value each other's efforts. The pace of lessons is brisk and class management is efficient. The good support for pupils with special educational needs helps these pupils to achieve satisfactorily.

228. In a few classes, learning is less successful because the teacher plays too prominent a part with the result that pupils are not fully engaged in their task. At times, the teacher's expectations are not high enough and pupils do not have clear indications of what standards are required. The management of different activities sometimes allows pupils too much time for one task and not sufficient for another, and lesson time is wasted. These inconsistencies confuse pupils and restrict their progress. They permit the minority who behave badly to

disrupt the concentration of other pupils. Although most pupils now have a positive attitude to the subject they are still sometimes distracted and their progress is restricted.

229. In all lessons, and particularly in Years 10 and 11, pupils have few opportunities to take responsibility for their own development and rely too much on their teachers. Even after live performances in the classroom, teachers do not always provide time for all pupils to discuss and evaluate their own and others' efforts.

230. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. After a period of considerable instability in provision and decline in standards since the previous inspection, the recently appointed leadership of the department has made many positive changes. The curriculum has expanded and extra-curricular opportunities are being developed. The new scheme of work embraces a wide range of cultural resources and promotes the teaching of literacy and numeracy. The majority of pupils now take the subject seriously, understand its value and realise that they can achieve much higher standards through greater concentration and effort.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Good teaching leads to good learning.
- Good behaviour and relationships help pupils to make appropriate progress in lessons.
- Good indoor and outdoor teaching spaces enable a good range of learning activities to occur.

Areas for improvement

- Attainment on the GCSE course should be higher, particularly in standards of written work.
- Teachers do not always make the most efficient use of time in lessons.

231. Standards are average at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11.

232. Attainment of pupils by the end of Year 9 is average in a range of games and gymnastics. This represents good achievement for many who enter the school with limited skills and experience. By Year 9, most pupils listen carefully to teachers' explanations and are developing a competent understanding of how they might improve their performance. They know the importance of warming up before activities and can demonstrate appropriate stretching exercises. They show improving knowledge and understanding when explaining why some actions are more successful than others. The tendency in earlier years for a few pupils to lose concentration when working in groups, when not under the direct supervision of teachers, is now less evident.

233. The improvement in skills, understanding and performance continues for pupils in Years 10 and 11. Standards are generally good and particularly so in badminton, netball and rugby. Most of those taking the GCSE course attain standards of performance that are above average and none is below average. Weaknesses in the organisation and expression of written answers at GCSE examinations reduce the standards achieved by a significant minority. Pupils work harder, and make better progress than is evident in earlier years towards the appropriate standards.

234. GCSE results in 2001 were well below average. All entrants gained grades A*-G. Pupils gained lower grades in physical education than in the other subjects for which they were entered. Too few girls took the subject for meaningful comparisons to be made between their attainment and that of boys. Provisional results for 2002 are considerably better, closer to those attained in 2000, reflecting generally higher levels of previous attainment. High standards of performance of several pupils are reflected by the successes of teams and individuals at local and county levels. Teachers' assessments of standards attained by pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well below average but in 2002 matched national figures. The difference reflects both higher standards and greater accuracy in assessing attainment against the level descriptions of the National Curriculum.

235. Pupils at all levels of attainment enjoy their work. They are pleased with their successes and are appreciative of the successes of others. Although many are highly competitive, they consistently observe the principles of fair play. They always show consideration for the safety of others.

236. The quality of teaching and learning is good. It is sometimes very good and is never less than satisfactory. Teachers use their good expertise and knowledge in the subject to plan lessons well. Mostly, lessons are linked to previous and future work so that pupils understand their relevance. Teachers explain tasks clearly and make good use of questions both to confirm understanding and to encourage pupils to contribute to their learning. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour, effort and progress. They are quick to praise the achievements of pupils of all levels of attainment. Very good teaching and learning were observed in a Year 10 table-tennis lesson. The teacher conducted the lesson at a brisk pace and matched the tasks well to the different levels of attainment within the class. Pupils demonstrated very good attitudes and, accordingly, very good progress occurred, especially among those who began with very weak co-ordination. Minor lapses of attention and chattering are firmly and effectively corrected in the earlier years so they rarely occur in or after Year 9. Behaviour is good. This contributes to good progress. Pupils' motivation improves and they increasingly sustain good levels of concentration and effort. Time allocated to the subject is below the recommended minimum and slightly hinders achievement. Lessons are often slow to begin and this reduces learning.

237. Management is effective and is based upon a conviction of the potential value of the subject to pupils at all levels of attainment. Teachers have good knowledge of the abilities and difficulties of all pupils including the talented and those with special educational needs. They are skilful in varying tasks, sometimes using modified equipment so that all pupils are challenged appropriately.

238. Two of the three full-time specialist teachers are heads of year. Their other responsibilities inevitably restrict their contributions to the development of physical education. Their experience, skills of teaching and managing pupils have positive effects on learning. Only one member of the department is female which, together with a lack of non-specialist contributions by female teachers to extra curricular provision, reduces opportunities for girls compared with the good range available to boys. This contributes to the low take-up of the GCSE course by girls.

239. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Skills in racquet sports have improved. Pupils are encouraged more consistently to identify strengths and weaknesses in their own work and that of others. High expectations of teachers are now evident in all lessons. The tennis court is safe having been re-surfaced.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Standards match the expectations of the Oxfordshire Agreed Syllabus.
- Pupils achieve well because of good teaching and good attitudes to their work.
- Interesting and challenging homework extends learning in the classroom.

Areas for improvement

- The pace of some lessons is too slow to stretch pupils fully.
- Marking does not always do enough to help pupils to understand how to improve their work.

240. There were no candidates for the 2001 GCSE examination in religious studies. In the GCSE examination in 2000 the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C was above the national average. In 2002, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C matched the provisional national average. This slight downward trend from 2000 is not statistically significant. Pupils achieved equally well in 2002 in relation to their prior attainment.

241. There are no national standards for religious education for pupils at the end of Year 9. However, in work seen, the attainment of pupils in Year 9 was in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus for their age. Pupils have a competent knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion, of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country, and of their origins and distinctive features. They have a satisfactory grasp of religious language, concepts and ideas. They understand why and how the beliefs of practising members of faith communities shape their lives. Within that context, pupils' evaluative skills are developed particularly well. The attainment of pupils in Year 11 matches the expectations both of the Agreed Syllabus and the GCSE examination syllabus. For example, GCSE candidates evaluate differing religious and secular responses in a wide range of personal, social and world issues, such as those surrounding the concept of the sanctity of life, or the environment. They have an appropriate knowledge and understanding of the central beliefs of Hinduism.

242. Boys and girls of all levels of prior attainment achieve well by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11. They make good progress in lessons and over time. This is because they are taught well, and with the exception of a minority of boys in a few classes, come to lessons keen to learn and work hard. Pupils with special educational needs and pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve well because teachers create a classroom ethos in which all feel secure and valued. They take risks in their learning, knowing that their contributions will be received with respect. Pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills develop well because they are challenged with work of increasing depth and complexity. By Year 9, for example, they make a reasoned personal response to the complex ethical issues surrounding prejudice and discrimination in contemporary society. By Year 11, they have a grasp of the highly abstract concepts of Trimurti and Avatar in Hinduism.

243. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. It was very good in nearly half of the lessons observed. In the very good lessons, teachers have a very good command of their subject, know clearly what they wish their pupils to learn and share their aims with them. They plan their lessons well to achieve their aims. They catch and hold pupils' interest through a good variety of interesting and challenging activities and tasks that are matched well to their individual needs. For example, Year 7 pupils made very good gains in understanding the relationship between belief and behaviour through peer group questionnaires and a survey to research the views of family and friends. They interpreted and

evaluated the responses well both in discussion and writing. Year 9 work on prejudice and discrimination in contemporary society was brought alive through the use of challenging case studies.

244. Teachers constantly use very good skills in questioning to extend pupils' understanding. They set regular, frequent and worthwhile homework that extends the learning in class. For example, Year 11 pupils researched the aspects of the concept of the mother goddess in Hinduism in order to create worksheets for use in class by their peers. This good teaching is underpinned by the very good relationships that teachers engender with pupils, based on high expectations, mutual respect and care.

245. In lessons in which teaching was satisfactory rather than good, there was an over-reliance on oral work for the whole class. This meant that the pace of the lessons was not always fast enough to ensure that pupils made a sustained intellectual effort. Marking, though conscientious and supportive, does not always do enough to help pupils to understand how to raise the level of their attainment.

246. Good leadership and management set a clear vision for raising standards further. The commitment, enthusiasm and teamwork that characterise the department have a positive influence on standards. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The quality of teaching and learning has improved considerably. Proper provision is now made for teaching the Agreed Syllabus to all pupils. Statutory requirements for teaching the subject to pupils in Years 7 to 11 are now met. Improved attitudes of pupils to the subject are apparent in the greater number of pupils opting to study the subject at GCSE level.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	4	50	71	0	30	1.0	2.2
Mathematics*	2	100	62	100	15	4.5	1.5
Chemistry	2	100	87	0	40	2.0	2.8
Biology	4	75	84	0	34	1.5	2.6
Biology*	1	100	77	0	N/A	2.0	0.8
ICT	6	83	74	17	13	2.4	1.8
Art and design	1	0	88	0	43	0	2.9
Media studies	3	100	N/A	33	N/A	2.7	N/A
Geography	2	100	91	50	38	3.5	2.9
History	2	50	91	50	41	2.0	3.0
Law	2	100	N/A	0	N/A	2.0	N/A
Psychology	4	100	N/A	25	N/A	2.5	N/A
English literature	2	100	95	50	39	2.5	3.0
German	2	100	90	50	39	4.0	2.9
Photography	1	100	N/A	0	N/A	1.0	N/A
General studies*	2	100	77	0	19	3.0	1.9

Figures are for students aged 16 at beginning of school year 2000/01. Those marked * are for students aged 17 at beginning of school year 2000/01.

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	20	100	87	65	43	7.3	5.8
Chemistry	7	100	90	71	43	8.0	5.9
Biology	7	71	88	57	34	5.1	5.3
Physics	4	100	88	100	40	9.5	5.7
Full design and technology	1	100	91	0	30	6.0	5.4
Business studies	4	75	92	50	32	5.0	5.5
Computer studies (ICT)	2	100	86	50	23	7.0	4.6
Sports/PE studies	2	100	92	0	25	3.0	5.1
Art and design	6	100	96	33	46	6.3	6.6
Music	1	100	93	100	35	8.0	5.7
Geography	11	100	92	9	38	5.3	5.7
History	5	100	88	40	35	5.6	5.5
Sociology	5	80	86	20	35	4.8	5.3
English language	8	100	92	50	30	6.8	5.3
English literature	8	100	95	50	37	6.5	5.9
Communication studies	8	100	93	25	31	7.0	5.5
French	2	100	89	100	38	9.0	5.6
German	1	100	91	100	40	10.0	5.8
Other social studies	9	67	87	22	34	4.0	5.3
General studies	30	93	85	33	30	5.8	4.9

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics and chemistry. Work was also sampled in biology and physics.

In biology, A-level results were above average in 2000 and average in 2001. Students' achievement was satisfactory when account is taken of their GCSE results. Unconfirmed results for 2002 indicate a slight improvement from 2001. The take-up rate for the subject fluctuates, but overall, it is low. Retention rates are good. One lesson was observed, in which students made satisfactory progress showed an adequate understanding of the structure of human DNA and replication of chromosomes. They know how DNA mutations occur that give rise to genetic disorders.

In physics, A-level results in 2000 were well above average. In 2001, results for the small number of students entered were well above average. Unconfirmed results for 2002 show a drop in attainment, though again small numbers were entered. Students do better than expected in relation to their GCSE results. Two lessons were observed in which students made satisfactory progress. In one, students were able to explain, using correct terminology refraction of light rays and total internal reflection. However, their understanding of advances made in fibre optic technology was less certain.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and leadership help students to attain good A-level results.
- Students achieve well as a result of their strong motivation to succeed.

Areas for improvement

- Few girls take advanced courses in mathematics.

247. The inspection covered the AS/A2-level courses offered by the school within the local 16-19 partnership. This course covers three modules in pure mathematics one in statistics and two in applied mathematics. Rates of retention on the courses are satisfactory. A few students opt to complete the course with AS qualification at the end of Year 12. More male students take the subject than females. The recruitment of female students on the A2-level course is low. The courses meet the needs and aspirations of the small number of students who have chosen to study mathematics at this level. Entry requirements to the courses are appropriate.

248. The department looks after its sixth-form students well. Students have consistently attained A-level results above the national average. All students who have sat the A-level examination in recent years have obtained a grade at A-level, including a Year 12 student who attained an A grade. Provisional results at A2-level for 2002 indicate that this trend has been sustained. Students usually attain a higher proportion of A and B passes than the national average. The provisional results for AS-level taken at the end of Year 12 also show that all students succeeded in gaining a grade. The attainment of male and female students is similar. Given the average levels attained by these students in GCSE the A-level results show good achievement.

249. Standards of work seen in lessons, scrutiny of students' work and discussions with students confirm the good and occasionally very good achievement. Since the previous inspection, standards have remained above average. Students in Year 13 have a good grasp of GCSE and Year 12 work. Thus, in a Year 13 lesson on arithmetical progressions, students used their good knowledge of simultaneous equations to solve problems with confidence. In a Year 12 statistics class, students recalled GCSE work on means and standard deviations to help them to understand the calculation of these measures for complex grouped data. In discussion, students remembered much of their knowledge of differential calculus and topics within applied mechanics.

250. Teaching is good. Consequently, students learn well. Lessons are planned very well to challenge each individual. Relationships are very positive and students are eager to learn. Teachers endeavour to maximise students' attainment. Students are highly motivated and work as a team in lessons. Marking of work is good. Students appreciate the routine recorded assessments of each module of work. Good leadership and management of the team of teachers set a good example, a clear direction for raising standards and enthuse the students. The department recognises the need to review the content of courses to make the study of advanced mathematics more attractive to female students.

251. Since the previous inspection the mathematics in the sixth form has made satisfactory improvement.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Students' positive attitudes and behaviour assist their learning in chemistry.
- A-level results were well above average in 2001.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough use of ICT, particularly data logging, to support teaching and learning.
- Teachers pay insufficient attention to marking written work and to students' note taking.

252. The inspection covered the AS/A2-level modular courses in chemistry taught jointly by the school and the local college of further education within the local 16-19 partnership. Numbers joining these courses vary from year to year and are usually small. In 2002, no students from the school were entered for the A-level examination. Rates of retention for students who start the AS-level and A-level courses are good.

253. A-level results were above average in 2000 and well above average in 2001. The proportion of students gaining the higher grades A and B was also up on the previous year. In 2001, all seven students who entered for the examination attained grades in the range A to C. Achievement was good because they did better than was expected from their GCSE results. Retention rates are high.

254. No direct observations of Year 13 students in class were made because no timetabled lessons took place at the school during the inspection. From discussion with students and observation of their files, it is clear that current standards are average and much lower than those indicated by A-level results in 2001. Achievement in relation to students' previous GCSE results is satisfactory. Students have an adequate understanding of Lowry and Brønsted's definition for acids and bases. They know that the reaction that occurs when an acid dissolves in water to yield hydroxonium ions is essentially transference

of a proton from a molecule of the acid to a water molecule, giving, for example, hydrochloric acid in water. The independent work, including course work, which students undertake, is generally prepared well. The tasks set complement the content of the lessons well. Students extract information from books and use ICT to support their learning. Most compile their own notes, though these are often disorganised and presented untidily. Skills in ICT are developing, but progress in data logging techniques is hindered by a lack of sufficient resources.

255. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course. Their progress is satisfactory. They are developing their practical skills and gain good results in their experiments, for example, when they measured the enthalpy change in the combustion of a series of alcohols. In the following theory lesson most students, with the support of the teacher, were able to calculate the enthalpy changes in the combustion of methane, ethane and propane. They used simple diagrams of energy levels to explain how the making and breaking of molecular bonds in chemical reactions involves energy transfer. Their understanding of Hess's law was less competent.

256. The quality of teaching in chemistry provided by the school is satisfactory overall. The current Year 13 students have experienced considerable staffing changes. They have had three qualified and one trainee teacher in one year. Staffing has stabilised now. From discussion with students, scrutiny of their files and observation in lessons it is evident that individual teachers plan their programmes well to provide a suitable introduction to the subject and to cover the syllabus. Practical lessons provide effective development of practical skills. However, the teaching of theory is narrow in its approach, lacking stimulus, excitement and relevance. There is little variety of teaching methods, so that in many cases the learning approach is not suited well to the needs of the students. Much of the teaching is instructional, directed at the whole class, without adaptation to the different levels of attainment within the class. Work in files goes mostly unmarked. In the little that is marked, students are not shown well enough how to improve because work is not annotated with corrections and identification of omissions.

257. The new and satisfactory leadership of the department has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses within the subject area. There is a clear commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. The planning of the chemistry course and the work of individual teachers are good. Schemes of work, however, need to be reviewed, particularly with reference to the use of assessment, key skills, ICT and data logging, and provision for higher and lower attainers. The guidance given to students on note taking and the monitoring and marking of their files is not as thorough as it should be.

258. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. A-level results are usually above average.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on ICT.

Information and communication technology

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is good.

Strengths

- Very good teaching and learning result in students achieving very well.
- Students benefit from very good guidance about their work.
- Very good relationships between students and teachers assist learning.

Areas for improvement

- Students have insufficient access to ICT to practise their skills outside of lessons.

259. The inspection covered the AS/A2-level modular courses offered by the school within the local partnership.

260. Although the numbers involved in taking the subject in recent years have usually been too small for national comparison, students have consistently achieved a high proportion of grades A and B.

261. Standards in work seen are above average by Year 13. Students have a very good knowledge of advanced computer applications and a mature approach to evaluating their work. They develop ambitious ideas and make very good progress with learning new and specific skills needed to complete projects. For example, they learn to use relational databases for projects in Year 13. Progress in projects is documented efficiently in well-organised folders. Students show appropriate testing of ideas and skills of on-going evaluation. They keep the end user of their projects in mind when, for example, developing ICT solutions to solve business problems. Students have an appreciation of project management that leads them to observe deadlines. They make good use of the Internet to explore ideas for research in depth and carefully interpret the evidence obtained.

262. Achievement is very good. Students enter the sixth form with a wide range of experience, a few having reached only modest standards at GCSE. From this base they make very good progress in consolidating and extending basic applications, such as the use of spreadsheets and databases. They move confidently on to more advanced work involving complex systems. Students make particularly good progress in writing skills and expressing their ideas with increasing sophistication. Students who have just entered Year 12 are adapting well to the demands of advanced-level work. They are making good progress in learning about the use of ICT and relevant legal considerations.

263. Students' personal development is very good. They have mature attitudes to learning that contribute to their high achievement. They work independently to solve problems that give them a better understanding of the work.

264. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers use their very good knowledge of the subject effectively to guide students' work. They explain difficult concepts clearly and in context so that meaningful discussions follow that help students to understand the work. The quality of learning is very good because teachers have high expectations and students have high aspirations for themselves. In theory-based lessons, active involvement of students through short tasks and questioning results in improved understanding. Students are well informed about what is expected of them in examinations because teachers have a

very good working knowledge of the requirements. Students feel supported and respect their teachers' expertise. The department does not provide visual displays of good quality to stimulate ideas.

265. Facilities for study are limited. The lack of computers in the sixth-form area disadvantages a few students who need more time to practise their skills and to extend coursework. Leadership and management are effective in maintaining high standards. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Although subjects in this curriculum area were not a focus for the inspection, a lesson in physical education with Year 12 students was sampled. Teaching was good. The teacher's high expectations and running commentary helped students constantly to re-evaluate and improve their tactics and their use of the badminton court. They enjoyed an eventful lesson and respected the teacher's knowledge and skill. Their performance and evaluation skills were above average.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Although subjects in this curriculum area were not a focus for the inspection, a Year 13 lesson in performing arts, a Year 12 lesson in music and a combined Year 12/13 lesson in photography were sampled. Teaching in all of these lessons was at least good. The teacher's probing questioning in the performing arts lesson enabled students to adjust and refine their music in preparation for a multi-media presentation. Music students in Year 12 gained confidence and improved their analytical skills because of the teacher's encouraging and demanding approach. Teaching of particularly good quality in the photography lesson ensured that students made very good progress in understanding and practising the techniques of photographic processing.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography. A history lesson was also sampled, in which students encountered a variety of teaching approaches and plenty of challenge. They had good relationships with their teacher and were achieving well.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards on the A2-level course are above average and represent good achievement.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject to plan lessons carefully to challenge students.
- The subject is managed well.

Areas for improvement

- Students use their debating and discussion skills insufficiently to enhance learning.
- Students have inadequate facilities for individual study, including the library.

266. The inspection covered the AS/A2-level courses taught by the school within the local 16-19 partnership

267. A-level results in geography in 2001 matched the national average though the proportion of students gaining the higher A and B grades was well below average. These results show a drop in standards compared with the previous year. Provisional results for 2002 indicate an improvement with over one-third of students attaining the higher grades. In all of the past three years all students entered have attained A-level passes. Seven students from the school followed the AS-level course last year. Provisional results indicate that standards were above average. Rates of retention on the AS-level and A2-level courses are good.

268. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of samples of students' work confirm that standards are above average and achievement is good. In Year 12, students have made a good beginning and show a good knowledge of introductory topics. They write fluently using appropriate geographical terms as was demonstrated in a very good analysis of regional change in Australia produced by one of the students. All have developed good research skills. In Year 13, students have a comprehensive in-depth knowledge of aspects of physical geography as was evident from coursework on the Lyme Bay area. They showed a broad knowledge of wilderness environments having researched the topic this term, largely from the Internet. They collect evidence from primary or secondary data and use an appropriate range of skills and techniques to analyse these. Fieldwork assignments are of a high standard. There is clear progression in both learning and thinking.

269. Teaching is good overall, with a few very good features. Students learn well as a result. Teachers use their very good knowledge and expertise in the subject to motivate and inform students. They plan lessons well, using resources of good quality and share clear learning objectives with students. They use every opportunity to reinforce geographical skills and to build on earlier learning. The use of time is productive. Lessons proceed at a challenging pace ensuring that students are involved fully in their own learning and extended in their thinking. In a Year 13 lesson, the teacher used probing questioning to assess learning but the questioning failed to promote a good quality of discussion or debate, largely because students lacked self-confidence. Year 12 students made an oral presentation of their research on the Peak District National Park though this did not lead to a general discussion. Homework assignments are marked regularly and frequently. Students receive clear judgements on the quality of their work with helpful comments to improve it.

270. The good and experienced management of the department, assisted by a hardworking team of suitably qualified teachers ensures that teaching is good. Students receive good support. The department provides resources of good quality and a good residential experience of fieldwork to assist students' learning. However, the facilities available for students' private study do not sufficiently enhance learning. In particular, provision in the library is inadequate. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English literature. French was also sampled. In the Year 13 lesson observed, teaching and learning were satisfactory. There was an appropriate level of challenge and students' good response contributed to their learning.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good. Teachers use their very good expertise to support students' learning.
- Students' achievement is good given their prior attainment.
- Good relationships with teachers provide a good foundation for students' independent learning.

Areas for improvement

- Occasionally teachers spend too long on one activity so that the pace of learning is slowed.
- At times, a teacher's well-meaning encouragement does not help students to discriminate between responses that are worthwhile and those that are not.

271. The inspection covered the AS/A2-level courses offered by the school within the local partnership.

272. A-level results over the last three years have improved from below average in 1999 to above average in 2001. Provisional results for 2002 are similar to those of the previous year. Comparisons with national figures have to be made with caution because the number of the school's students on this course has been small. There are currently five Year 12 students, and four of the original five from last year's intake have continued into Year 13. Rates of retention on the courses, for the small numbers involved, are good.

273. Current standards indicate above average attainment by the end of Year 13. They reflect students' good achievement given their GCSE performance and performance in AS-level examinations. Students' written work reveals a range of attainment from potential grades A to D. Higher attainers produce fluent and detailed work, showing thorough knowledge of texts, above average analytical skills and evidence of wide reading. Lower attainers, though hard working and conscientious, have more difficulty with essay style and structure. Their writing lacks close focus on the topic or argument and analytical skills are less strong. All students, however, demonstrate above average research skills particularly in relation to gathering information about the historical background and authors of their literature texts. Students' folders contain helpful background material and notes provided by their teachers. Their writing indicates that these have been used effectively to help to prepare essays.

274. Students make good gains in knowledge and understanding both over time and in lessons. After only four weeks in one Year 12 class, for example, a student understood and could explain that an extract from Jane Austen revealed much about class distinctions and the 'code of conduct' which women were expected to observe. In a Year 13 class, more experienced students were particularly perceptive about issues about class in Hartley's novel 'The Go-Between' and understood how the novelist showed the immaturity of the young boy Leo. The confidence of their judgements here arose clearly from successful learning and the range of reading that these students had already undertaken.

275. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers' own knowledge and understanding of texts and how to analyse them, and their encouragement of independent thinking, enhance students' learning. This was particularly the case in a Year 12 lesson on Webster's play 'The White Devil', in which students learned much about character and aspects of Webster's style both from their initial preparation and from their teacher's knowledgeable, supportive and challenging contributions to their discussions. The teacher was particularly good at giving

students pointers to identifying key moments in the play and at highlighting Webster's direct and aggressive style. Subsequent work in groups provided a good opportunity for students to form their own opinions and to share ideas. In a Year 13 lesson, the teacher kept a clear and explicit focus on two extracts from 'The Go-Between'. Astute questioning helped students to see important links between the extracts and the novel as a whole. It helped them to identify the chapters' symbolic qualities. The teacher was particularly good at amplifying, expanding and summing up students' answers, so that by the end of the lesson all could make a contribution that demonstrated their confident understanding. Occasionally, the pace of learning in a few lessons was a little slow because teachers over explained or did not involve more reticent students sufficiently, or spent too long on one or two rather similar activities. On one occasion the teacher's natural eagerness to praise contributions from students made it difficult for them to distinguish between what was a worthwhile answer and what was not. Nevertheless, they successfully learned about the structure of a Shakespearean sonnet and respected the teacher's intelligent and thoughtful style.

276. Students in Years 12 and 13 have positive attitudes to the course and the quality of teaching they receive. Year 12 students appreciated their teacher's enthusiasm for Ian McEwan's novel 'Enduring Love'. As a result they studied it with interest and enjoyment. Year 13 students value the opportunities they have for independent learning and the help and advice they receive. In discussion, they show a strong response to their reading and talk about texts with feeling, reflecting their involvement in the course.

277. Leadership and management of the subject are effective in maintaining students' standards of attainment and achievement through the careful deployment of teachers who provide a consistent quality of teaching, helpful guidance and supportive relationships. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.