

INSPECTION REPORT

OLD SWINFORD HOSPITAL

Stourbridge

LEA area: Dudley

Unique reference number: 103870

Headteacher: M W Roffe

Reporting inspector: W K Baxendale
2928

Dates of inspection: 5th - 8th November 2002

Inspection number: 249761

Short 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: Secondary

Age range of pupils: 11 to 19

Gender of pupils: Male

School address: Heath Lane
Stourbridge
West Midlands

Postcode: DY 8 1QX

Telephone number: 01384 817300

Fax number: 01384 441686

Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: D H Higgs

Date of previous inspection: 10th - 14th November 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
2928	Mr W K Baxendale	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?
11229	Dr M Freeman	Lay inspector		
21971	Mr J V Glennon	Sixth form co-ordinator	English	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils? How well the school is led and managed?
04749	Mr M Ash	Team inspector	French	
27050	Mrs V Blackburn	Team Inspector	Biology	
01547	Mr G Clarke	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
02024	Mr R Hart	Team inspector	Psychology	
03943	Mr D Innes	Team inspector	Physical education	
13046	Mr M Marks	Team inspector	Mathematics	
15576	Mr D Nebesnuick	Team inspector	Business studies	
30978	Mrs E White	Team inspector	Geography	

The inspection contractor was:

Power House Inspections

Grasshoppers
1 Anglesey Close
Chasetown
Burntwood
Staffordshire
WS7 8XA

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London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Old Swinford Hospital is a voluntary aided comprehensive boarding school for boys in the 11-19 age range. A body of trustees set up by the school's founder in 1667 administers its endowments. With a total of 539 pupils and students, the school is much smaller than average. There are 365 full or weekly boarders and the rest are either out-boarders who participate in evening prep (homework) with the rest of the school or sixth form day students. The sixth form has 187 students in total. Because of improvements to boarding arrangements a slight fall has occurred in the school roll since the previous inspection, although the sixth form is the same size as it was then. The pupils are from a wide range of backgrounds. Many are from the West Midlands and others come from many other parts of the British Isles; substantial numbers are from abroad. Two pupils are eligible for a free school meal, far below the national average. The pupils are predominantly from a White British background, but there is also a complex mix of other nationalities, with pupils from Chinese, Indian and Black African backgrounds forming greater proportions of these. The pupils' attainment when they start the school is above average. Fifty pupils, a higher proportion than in most schools, have English as an additional language, although none is a beginner. No pupil has a statement of special educational need, but about 10 per cent are on the school's special educational needs register; this is below the national average. Reasons for inclusion on the register are mainly literacy-related problems with a few others having behavioural and emotional difficulties. The school has Beacon status and is seeking specialist status for business and enterprise.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good, unique school. The school provides an extraordinarily rich range of learning experiences that combine to help the pupils make excellent academic progress and to attain very high standards in national tests and examinations. Dynamically led by a recently-appointed headteacher, the school is building enterprisingly on its very strong immediate inheritance. A questioning governing body holds the school very closely to account in support of its traditions. The school enjoys excellent support from the pupils' parents. The school's relatively large sixth form is very cost effective and, considering the low allocation of public funds and the pupils' very high standards, the school provides excellent value for money.

What the school does well

- The pupils' achievement is excellent.
- The pupils' personal development is very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Very good leadership has a clear view of how to improve provision and to raise standards.

What could be improved

- The accountability of subject departments is underdeveloped.
- The ways teachers cater for individual learning needs are not specific enough.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvements since it was last inspected in November 1997. Examination results have continued to improve and the school has adopted most of the recommendations of the previous inspection report. For example, the personal, social and

health education course is much improved; the remodelled management structure is potentially very effective and teacher appraisal is now moving forward well, although the identification of training needs is still weak. The provision for collective worship and religious education now meets requirements.

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	A*	A*	A*	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	N/A	N/A	A	

<i>Key</i>	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

The pupils' and students' standards and examination successes place the school firmly among the top state comprehensive schools. Hard work is the main reason for the very high achievement. The pupils' learning day is much longer than most and they benefit from the professionally supervised prep they do in Houses, which has a substantial impact on standards. Scrutinies of work during the inspection confirm the very high standards in Years 7-11 and the well above average standards in the sixth form.

Results in the 2001 national tests for 14 year-olds and in GCSEs were very high compared with national averages and with schools in similar contexts. Although there are no national comparisons available, results in 2002 were an improvement on those of the previous year. Comparing these standards with the pupils' attainment on starting the school, the results represent excellent achievement, particularly as standards are not restricted to examination successes alone. The provision for personal development through wider educational experiences is excellent, so the school produces mature, refined students who, upon leaving, are very well prepared for their next steps, mainly in higher education.

In 2002, results in national tests for 14 year-olds were best in mathematics, with about one-third of the pupils reaching levels that equate with a good GCSE pass. A few failed to reach the nationally expected standard. In English, some pupils, often those with English as an additional language, had not quite reached expected levels of attainment, so about 10 per cent of the candidates did not attain the expected Level 5. Results in science were better than were those in English. Nearly half of the pupils attained Level 7, two above the expected level. Standards in other subjects reflected similar very high achievement.

The very high performance registered at the end of Year 9 continues in GCSE. Overall, the pupils make greater progress than their test results as 14 year-olds suggest they will: very high achievement is sustained. Improvements in GCSE results are above the national trend of improvement since the previous inspection. The 2001 results placed the school in the top 5 per cent nationally for the proportions of pupils obtaining 5 or more higher grade, A*-C, passes and for aggregated point scores. Point scores rose again in 2002. The pupils gained

more than double the national average of passes at the highest grades, A* or A, in both years. The pupils continue to do very well in mathematics, with none obtaining lower than a C grade pass. Standards in science are also very high and in 2002, the pupils' English results were comparatively better than they had been at the end of Year 9. Some of those with English as an additional language had caught up. Pupils with special educational needs achieve as well as do the others; nearly all obtain at least 5 higher grade, A*-C, GCSEs.

The key skills that open the way to further learning are well established by the age of 16; the pupils are articulate, numerate and make effective use of information and communication technology (ICT), except in lessons in some subjects.

Including numerous newcomers to the school, the sixth form students make very good progress. A-level results were well above the national average for all schools and colleges in 2001. Point scores fell a little in 2002, but results in English and mathematics rose well. Analysis of the results and of students' attitudes shows that progress for most is at least in line with what could reasonably be expected and is often above it. Whilst students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language mainly achieve very well, some find courses that require long essay writing to be too demanding. The standards in mathematics and science of numerous students with English as an additional language are, at the same time, often exceptionally high. The curriculum is not, however, fully suited to all students' needs.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are very well disposed towards school life and learning. They enjoy the very hard work, so making excellent progress.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The pupils' very good behaviour and strong mutual support contribute strongly to the very high standards. The three exclusions in the last year indicate the vigilance of the very good care exercised.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. The House and boarding arrangements nurture very good personal development. Relationships are very good and are a strong feature of the school.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance is well above the national average. Brisk, effectively monitored registrations meet legal requirements. Punctuality to lessons is also good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of both teaching and learning is very good. They improve from stage to stage and are best in the sixth form. In each of the sixth form subjects inspected teaching was often very good and none was unsatisfactory (no unsatisfactory teaching or learning was observed in the whole inspection). The provision for learning through lessons, out-of-school activities and the

House system is much greater than in most other schools; the completion of prep has an excellent impact on pupils' standards. The teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and their very high expectations contribute substantially to the pupils' attitudes and behaviour, which are very good. Because they learn so well, the pupils' acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding is also very good. The pupils' pace of working and concentration are excellent. Pupils' conscientious writing reinforces learning very well. Marking is very helpful on most occasions. Almost all lessons run very smoothly because they are very well planned, so that time and resources are put to the best use: there is no slacking. Since the previous inspection there has been some improvement in the frequency of pupils using investigative methods to learn. The pupils learn very well, but there is scope for a substantial spread of already good teaching methods, better to cater for individual needs.

The main weaknesses in teaching arise because work is not tailored closely enough to the different stages of attainment in some classes, so, in these lessons, higher attainers are not stretched and lower attainers left struggling. Prep sessions are used effectively to help the pupils with special educational needs, but specific assistance in lessons is infrequent. Sometimes teachers omit to share the lesson's purposes with the pupils, nor do they assess progress through a suitable summing up at the end. The correction of some work, most often that of lower attainers, is unsatisfactory in the first three years. Too little use of ICT to help learning in some subjects contrasts adversely with the often-good practice in Houses and clubs.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The school provides a wide range of subjects and an excellent variety of out-of-school activities, although not sufficiently balanced between subjects and more physical or recreational pursuits. The good sixth form curriculum satisfies demand, but it does not cater fully for the increasingly wide range of attainment represented.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is improving. A new special educational needs co-ordinator has made good progress in raising awareness and has made a start on providing individual learning programmes
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Some extra work is provided after lessons. Immersion in the school and its House system helps pupils to make good progress. Although most attain standards that equate with those of other pupils, some still have difficulties when faced with writing accurately at length.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The pupils' total learning experience produces some mature, confident highly articulate young men. Outstanding cultural and social activities and relevant emphases on moral and spiritual issues characterise the very good provision.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Provision is well structured and effective. Pupils and parents appreciate highly the close supervision through the House boarding system that is a mainstay of security, personal development and very high standards.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The school has a clear vision of how to broaden its appeal and to raise standards further. Excellent dynamic leadership by a recently appointed headteacher has, with the strong collaboration of a very good senior team and supportive staff, transformed the management structure, giving everyone a greater say in the running of the school and making the best of resources.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The governors hold the school very closely to account, are supportive through committees and stick tenaciously to the school's traditions, sometimes, however, finding it hard to accept change.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Progress has been made in the last year, but much remains to be done. The ways senior and middle managers evaluate performance lack rigour and system. The school development plan is not focused enough on uniting the outcomes of performance management and other evaluations with the training necessary to raise performance and standards further.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. The school uses meticulously the criteria for establishing best value in its purchases. Comparative under-funding from the public purse is topped up from the school's own business activities that are also very well managed.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. • The school is well led and managed. • The school expects their sons to work hard and achieve his best. • Behaviour is good in the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information on how their sons are getting on.

Inspectors agree fully with the parents that this is a very good school and that it provides a very good all-round education. Inspectors note the very strong agreement parents express with nearly all the questions in the governors' questionnaire to them and concur with parents' thoughts. The information provided for parents is greater than in most secondary schools and reports more than meet statutory requirements.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

OLD SWINFORD HOSPITAL SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 187 students in the sixth form. Nearly all pupils in the main school transfer to the sixth form at the end of Year 11 and there is also a significant number who transfer from other schools. Most sixth formers are boarders. To enter the sixth form students must have entry qualifications of at least seven GCSE grades A* to C. All courses within the sixth form aim at either A or AS level examinations.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very good. Standards are well above average. A-level results in 2001 were well above average when compared with all other schools. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and students have very good attitudes. Consequently they achieve very well considering their very good attainment on entry. The sixth form is very well led and managed. It provides excellent value for money.

Strengths

- In subjects inspected or sampled, students attain standards that are well above average in English, mathematics, biology, physical education and psychology. Standards are above average in all other subjects inspected in detail.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Students have very good attitudes to the sixth form and develop their learning skills very well.
- Relationships in the sixth form are very good.
- Students benefit greatly from a very full programme of activities outside normal school hours.
- Students receive very effective guidance both about their present courses and their future education and careers.
- There is very good leadership and direction of the sixth form.

What could be improved

- The range of courses does not fully meet the needs of the less academically inclined students.
- The wide range of enrichment activities outside the timetable should be more carefully planned to meet the needs of students.

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	Very good. Standards are well above average and students' achievements are very good. Students learn very well because teachers' knowledge of the subject is very good and expectations are very high. Students are highly motivated and have a very good attitude towards their work.
Biology	Very good. Standards are well above average and students make good progress. Teaching is very good and, because teachers have such high

	expectations, this results in very good learning. There is not enough use of ICT to improve learning.
Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Business studies	Good. Standards are above average and students achieve well. Teaching is good. The department needs to develop a better assessment strategy.
ICT	Good. Standards are above average and students achieve well. Good teaching encourages students to be involved and make good progress in lessons.
Physical education	Very good. Standards are above average. Teaching is very good. The range of sporting activities outside lessons is excellent. Management of the department places too great a burden on one teacher.
Geography	Good. Standards are above average, having improved in the last year. Good teaching leads to good progress in lessons but learning is not thoroughly consolidated. Assessment is not used effectively.
Psychology	Very good. Standards and students' achievements are well above average. Teaching is very good. There is insufficient use of ICT as a means of improving learning.
English	Very good. Standards are well above average and students achieve very well because of their very good attitudes and the very good teaching they receive. A-level results improved markedly in 2002.
French	Good. Standards are above average and students achieve well. Teaching is very good. The subject is well co-ordinated and benefits from good resources.

Classes in art and design, chemistry, German and classical studies were also sampled. In each, generally above average standards are reached and the quality of teaching and learning is very good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. Students receive very good guidance and support. Guidance for careers and higher education is very good. The use of assessment to monitor students' progress is very good.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. The sixth form is very well led and managed. It fully reflects the school's aims and values in its work. The governing body plays an important role in developing sixth form provision.

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"> • The very good educational opportunities and the teachers' high expectations. • The wide range of activities outside lessons. • The effective prep system for study. • The very good relationships with teachers. • The very good quality of careers advice. • The general ethos of the sixth form. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social arrangements to help students who arrive new to the school in the sixth form have not yet taken full effect.

Students have very positive views about the sixth form and are confident that it prepares them very well for university entrance and for other careers in the case of those not aiming at university. Inspectors fully agree with their perception.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The pupils' achievement is excellent.

1. Excellent achievement is the result of hard work in a school that fosters and celebrates success. The school's long-standing foundation is built upon such ideals. Intended for sons of local families given to endeavour, the school has a very well established tradition of very high achievement, meeting well the ambitions of its initial benefactors and current parents.

2. When they start as 11 year-olds, the pupils' attainment is above average, although there is a range of attainment from very high to low. Some pupils with English as an additional language need extra help to catch up and some others have special educational needs, for example as a result of dyslexia. Provision in support of these pupils has improved substantially over the past year, yet there is still ample scope for it to continue to grow. A newly appointed special educational needs co-ordinator is making a significant impact; her work receives strong support from the parents, but only one individual education plan has been drawn up and related in-class support is still to be appointed. Pupils with special educational needs do make good progress and often achieve very highly, too. The pupils with English as an additional language have some extra tuition after school; their achievement during their time in the school is equal to that of others, mainly because their life as a boarder, fully exposed to English, helps them to make rapid progress. An analysis of GCSE results shows these pupils to be distributed, as would be expected, evenly amongst the rest of the year group in 2002. Some do not, however, do so well in A-level subjects that require them to use more sophisticated language in essay writing.

3. Standards have risen since the previous inspection; in 2001, they were, compared with all schools nationally and with schools in a similar context, very high in national tests for 14 year-olds in English, mathematics and science. Teacher assessments in other subjects indicate similarly very high standards. Considering their starting points as 11 year-olds, these results indicate excellent achievement. Results improved in 2002, but no national comparisons are yet available.

4. Average point scores in GCSE have risen faster than the national trend of improvement since the previous inspection in 1997. Results in 2001 were also very high compared with national averages for all schools and for schools in similar contexts; they were higher still in 2002, but there are no national comparisons available. The school is keen to sustain such excellent progress and to broaden further the pupils' education by, for example, obtaining, in pursuance of the founders' objectives, specialist school status in business and enterprise, and by gaining IIP (Investors in People) status.

5. The school's unique boarding provision is an ideal basis for pupils to make excellent progress. Pupils enjoy, for instance, virtually double the supervised study time available very nearly everywhere else. Standards rise because of the very successful ways in which the school interweaves study, physical, social and cultural activities throughout term time – no pupil leaves without a pass-out before the completion of extensive evening prep (homework). Very good teaching and learning are supported by substantial extra House-based activities, including prep, with House personnel and teacher tutors constantly available. The pupils

benefit greatly from these points of reference and also make heavy use of the library and ICT facilities in each House. Many start their daily routine with pre-lesson sessions attending study support clubs in, for example, ICT or design and technology.

6. Scrutinies of pupils' written and other work are good indicators of their excellent progress. Those in Year 7 with above average attainment write fluently and with humour, making, however, technical errors; lower attainers make many spelling errors and they find the mechanics of writing difficult. For all pupils, the range of writing in English is not extensive and similarly in history, geography and religious education, writing is restricted to short paragraphs showing pupils' understanding of the work. Presentation is satisfactory, with some very good diagrams in geography, but with unsatisfactory labelling.

7. By Year 9, the pupils have adopted an assured literary style; work in English is particularly advanced, with pupils supporting comment by close reference to texts and looking, in history for example, beyond factual knowledge to evaluate evidence very well. Presentation is very good in art and design where the pupils use an unusually rich subject-related vocabulary. Some very high quality computer graphics characterise often-excellent presentation in design and technology and good use of ICT is frequently found in other subjects. Writing in science betrays the pupils' keen interest in what they are learning. The work of a few pupils is much less well developed; it is weakly organised and often incomplete. Unsympathetic correction and no concessions to those who cannot keep up, for example in geography, indicate further room for improved provision for lower attainers.

8. Progress remains very high through Years 10 and 11. In English, pupils control sentences very well and show very good understanding of literature, for instance how poets achieve their desired effect through using figurative language. Presentation improves very substantially in sciences, at the same time as the pupils' achievement goes on rising. In mathematics, they cover very substantial amounts of work that is completed very well. The impact of increased time allocated to prep in these years is clear. Genuine creativity, especially in techniques to establish depth in their work, characterises continuing excellent progress in art and design. In design and technology, pupils produce very good, well-articulated statements of what they are trying to achieve and any anticipated pitfalls, though spelling weaknesses undermine the overall quality for some. The absence of applied, school-wide literacy and numeracy policies affects standards adversely.

9. In comparison with other schools nationally the A-level results are well above average. Such results represent very good achievement because the school takes numerous extra students, who have a broader range of attainment, into its sixth form. However, some students find the transition to sixth form study hard. The curriculum on offer does not fully meet the needs of all undertaking the courses, so, for some, achievement is lower than in the preceding years. However, work to demonstrate the rate of progress, using a highly regarded commercial assessment scheme does show continuing progress for most that is well up to and often beyond what could reasonably be expected. Similar reasons to those found in Years 7 to 11 pertain to the sixth form; the students work very hard and have access to some good learning resources and staff expertise at most times of the day. They receive very good guidance not only on how well they are doing and, in the best cases, on how to improve, but also are able through very good careers guidance, to apply their work to future ambitions.

The pupils' personal development is very good.

10. The pupils' very strong personal development is couched in the very good opportunities for each individual's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development provided by the school. A well-conceived House system, reflecting the boarding arrangements, rapidly

becomes each pupil's immediate school family and is an important part of his cherished Foleyan identity. Pupils are keenly encouraged to work for their House and to share in its successes. The arrangements work very well. Early in Year 7, the pupils feel

themselves to be well supported, yet at the same time, much more self-reliant than in their primary schools.

11. By Year 9, the pupils can easily recognise the advantages their unique school life affords; they refer to the quality and range of activities, the school's many and improving facilities and opportunities they have to develop interests. The pupils appreciate the very good attitudes and personal relationships that develop in a friendly, secure situation where they see the rules as reasonable and where boarders and out-boarders are equally privileged. Equality of access is very good. The pupils are more confident in speech, uninhibited and open about what they perceive as the school's weaknesses in some unfair punishments, some mainly-resolved bullying and unsatisfactory food quality.

12. Year 11 pupils express similar thoughts maturely, appreciating the ways outdoor activities, grants for theatre visits, weekend pursuits and the strength to be gained from much mutual support characterise a school that helps their personal development very substantially. Inspectors agree fully with the pupils' assessment of the provision.

13. The parents are almost unanimous in their appreciation of the way the school assists their child to become a mature young person.

14. A major feature of the school is the comprehensive, very well supported range of out-of-school enrichment activities that play a crucial part in the pupils' very good personal development. Activities take place in near and distant corners of this country and around the world. The pupils fully appreciate the way school travel helps them to mature. More than 30 clubs and societies operate, providing a wide spectrum of opportunities for the pupils to take responsibilities and to show initiative. A school council is of growing importance and is keenly supported by the pupils: an important personal development mechanism. Fund-raising for charity is also an important part of the pupils' personal development.

15. Sports predominate; the range and participation is, for a school of this size, outstanding. Pupils and students represent the school at regional and national levels in a number of disciplines, amongst which rugby features strongly. There is, however, some imbalance in the range of enrichment activity. There are numerous other clubs, for example, chess, drama and various aspects of music making, but there are fewer specifically aimed at reinforcing themes studied in class. The school's exploitation of its rich, more immediate geographic area is comparatively weak. Whilst the school produces an excellent magazine celebrating its very good enrichment programme, there is no easily accessed record to show precisely the range of lower as well as high profile activities in a given year.

16. Traditional assemblies are very good spiritual, moral, social and cultural events. They celebrate successes and commitment, for example in the ways pupils support House activities in adverse conditions. Enlivened by the school orchestra, full assemblies contain uplifting and provoking thoughts, comparing, for instance, biblical and current immigration. Such ideas are carried through to a full citizenship course where, however, the teaching missed reference to the enriching impact of immigration on the school itself. In providing boarding education for pupils and students from numerous parts of the world, leadership improves the awareness of different lifestyles and customs and, as a direct result, the pupils' personal development. Numerous instances are found of the ways pupils and teachers from abroad are brought into

lessons to provide fresh dimensions; for example, a Zimbabwean teacher made telling direct references to African custom and usage.

17. Generally, discussions in lessons are lively; the pupils and students put forward perceptive points of view. Very high standards of assured speaking and similar levels of understanding typified the best work in English. Engaging conversations with inspectors showed, for example, the pupils' very good understanding of the value of studying religious education, as they considered sympathetically others' points of view and their obligation to make decisions on moral grounds.

18. The results of the pupils' very good personal development are seen in their similar behaviour and attitudes to learning in Houses, on the field and in class; these raise standards. In a very good citizenship lesson, Year 10 pupils' enterprising co-operation, patience and their attentive listening skills allowed them to take substantial disruptions in their stride. Excellent enthusiasm for work and very high motivation contribute greatly to the high standards attained by many in mathematics; students are able to explain their work very well, to check it and unhesitatingly ask the teacher for confirmation or further explanation, if necessary. They complement this very hard work in class by great application outside.

19. Sixth form students' often-excellent relationships with their teachers lead to some very high challenges posed in most biology and science lessons. In all subjects inspected and sampled, students respond willingly, they are fully engaged and always willing to help each other.

20. The school makes genuine attempts to compensate the gender imbalance. The pupils' personal development is helped greatly by the increased role women play in teaching and management, as well as in Houses. Collaborative activities with a girls' school also provide important extra dimensions to the personal development of sixth formers. In discussion, the pupils sense the one-sidedness of much of their education, some maturely wishing to experience the different and sometimes greater challenge female presence often brings.

21. The school produces mature, cultured young citizens, many well equipped with strong leadership qualities. They are very well prepared for their next steps, nearly always in higher education.

The quality of teaching and learning is very good.

22. Inspection evidence confirms the parents' views, expressed in their returned questionnaires, that the quality of both teaching and learning is very good. They improve from stage to stage and are best in the sixth form, as the students' gains in knowledge and confidence produce increasingly mature and purposeful debate in lessons.

23. The opportunities for learning provided in lessons, out-of-school activities and through the House system are much greater than in most other schools. Learning benefits from the school's and the pupils' own good resources and from the availability of assistance from House personnel and duty tutors in the completion of prep that has an excellent impact on the raising of standards.

24. The teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and their very high expectations contribute substantially to the pupils' attitudes and behaviour that only falter from exemplary when, on very rare occasions, the teaching fails to come up to the pupils' own expectations.

25. Because they are so well disposed towards learning, the pupils' acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding is very good. Their pace of working matches the teachers' expectations and is excellent. Almost all lessons run very smoothly because they are very well planned, so that time and resources are put to the best use: there is no slacking. There has been some improvement in the frequency of pupils using investigative methods to learn since the previous inspection.

26. In the best English lessons, for example in Year 9, the pupils were fully aware of their attainment levels, where they fitted in the national picture and what they needed to do to rise to the next level. As a result, they were moved to try hard and they made excellent progress in understanding Shakespearean language through a study of a Macbeth soliloquy. The higher attainers were given the extra demanding challenge of coming up with suggestions on how to film the scene to make it have greatest impact.

27. In games, one of the school's particular strengths, very good demonstrations allow the pupils to evaluate the good and weak points of techniques such as body angles and the timing of ball release. Lessons proceed at a very rapid pace, with inter-related, but varied, activities so the pupils sustain their efforts and concentration: they are invariably keen to evaluate performance and so make very good progress.

28. Pupils' interest and concentration are very good. They want to answer questions, the best of which draw out answers that show the depth of their thinking. Even in lessons where the pupils are largely passive listeners, they are able to ask pertinent questions around the theme of the lessons, indicating that very good learning has taken place. Pupils' often very good and conscientious writing reinforces learning very well. Their work is marked very helpfully on most occasions, indicating in the best cases how to improve. Correction techniques used in history and English are examples of particularly good practice.

29. Challenging teaching, for example in religious education, questions any statements the pupils may make, so they know they will have to substantiate expressed points of view. In a particular lesson, a very good, purposeful working atmosphere was rendered the more effective by quiet background music that helped reflection. In other subjects, too, pupils are willing to ask. For instance, in a Year 7 mathematics lesson they wished to know why the formula to find the area of a triangle was so, discussing the rationale behind it: such curiosity raises standards and the quality of learning.

30. The school has recognised in the last year the need to provide better for the pupils with special educational needs and for those with English as an additional language. Progress is underway towards means of helping to improve their learning through increased and better-focused specialist teaching support. The pupils learn well, but there is scope for a substantial spread of already good teaching methods, better to cater for individual needs. Prep sessions are used effectively to help the pupils with special educational needs, but specific assistance in lessons is infrequent.

Very good leadership has a clear view of how to improve provision and to raise standards.

31. The previous inspection found that leadership had given the school a strong sense of shared values and that it was instrumental in raising and keeping high standards in a highly successful, renowned school. The previous inspection also found numerous weaknesses,

nonetheless, in planning, in the clarity of individual duties, in the evaluation of practice and in the support for pupils with special educational needs.

32. The governors clearly took these features into account when making the appointment of a successor who is proving to be equally dynamic in promoting the school, but with a very different philosophy on management. The school continues to operate as a thriving business in which planning for change is pronounced, yet it is under pressure to retain numbers to ensure viability.

33. In the year since his appointment, the new headteacher has begun to put into practice his exciting vision for the school. The intention is to broaden the school's sphere of activity, especially within the community, and to raise standards even further by improving the curriculum, better to meet the needs and interests of substantial numbers of pupils and students for whom current provision is not the most suitable. It is evident that, at the same time, the school will retain the strong traditions associated with its founder's philosophy of enterprise and philanthropy and the benefits to standards of high-quality boarding provision.

34. Realigned management structures are a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Although still evolving, they are clearer and more open. The new structure capitalises well on the talent in the school. Boarding and day activities interweave well. Staff have the opportunity to contribute directly to the school's development by participation in numerous active working groups looking, for example, at the curriculum, communication, ICT, reporting and enterprise. The staff have improved job descriptions, though the evaluation aspect of senior staff duties is weaker, as it lacks specificity.

35. Strategic appointments, intended to improve provision, are beginning to make an impact in the sixth form by improving the induction of newcomers and the integration of day and full boarding students. Similarly, the provision for pupils with special educational needs is starting to improve. A newly-appointed special educational needs co-ordinator has begun to identify ways of getting the whole staff to help individual pupils to learn. Projected appointments of learning support assistants complement the strategy. Further work to improve provision for the numerous students and pupils with English as an additional language are also timely. The school does analyse individuals' performance, but this is not shared widely in the staff and consensus reached on how to help these pupils to make better progress by the implementation, for example, of a common approach to literacy development, is missing.

36. Performance management has been streamlined in the past year, although much remains to be done to align the outcomes of the procedures with a coherent training policy. The accelerated preparation for IIP status is intended to produce such an outcome.

37. The headteacher's clear vision for the future of the school is best seen in a well-launched, imaginative project to win specialist 'business and enterprise' school status. The project meets with the support of the staff and most governors. Significant steps to win the support of industry and local commercial organisations have been taken and parental support appears to be strong. The school and its aspirations are also being promoted in the USA and other parts of the world. The project fits snugly into the founder's ambitions for the pupils. Its realisation is intended to strengthen very substantially the whole curriculum by complementing the strengths and supporting the comparative weaknesses in, for example, modern foreign languages, which lack some kudos amongst the pupils.

38. New leadership has put the school into much greater prominence in the local area. The school now wins plaudits from primary and special schools for its much closer associations with them, for example in the arrangements to provide for the gifted and talented through the school's renewed Beacon status. At the same time, part-time education provision for a seriously autistic pupil of a nearby special school shows the school's intention to help the personal development of all pupils.

39. The school is particularly well perceived by the local business community, for example in its exemplary conduct of work experience programmes. The school's image has also improved in the local education authority where it now plays a full and growing part, not least in defending its position as a small school that receives a comparatively small budget from public funds.

40. The governing body holds the school very closely to account, letting nothing through without minute dissection. It contributes, through committees, very effectively to most aspects of school development and appears in minutes and in conversation to support the school's clear direction. However, a very well conceived agenda that covered the principal important elements for the school's future met resistance from a few governors, understandably wishing to adhere to tradition.

41. Spending is also very closely controlled by the governors, headteacher and by the business manager who is able to play a full part in financial debate in the school and local education authority. All criteria for wise expenditure are applied. Considering the very high standards and the excellent progress the pupils make against the low allocation of public finances, which are supplemented by boarding and other profits from its own enterprises to maintain provision, the school provides excellent value for money.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The accountability of subject departments is underdeveloped.

42. The new management structure and performance management render a heritage of subject departments acting independently obsolete. There is some way to go, however, before suitable accountability is established. The elements are in place, but the rigour with which they are monitored in application is unsatisfactory, as it varies greatly between departments. Good practice is found in English and psychology.

43. Principal areas for improvement are in development planning and the improvement of teaching and learning for all. The current development plan, drawn up by the headteacher lists what needed to be done to start to change the school's direction. It has met with approval from staff and governors. Steps to devise a second plan for the coming period have begun. Preparation is much more democratic. The matters of concern are entirely appropriate for the school, covering its leading academic status, boarding, the improvement of the range of out-of-school activities, teaching and learning, improving the working environment and attaining specialist school status. As yet, however, details of how success will be measured and who will be responsible for what are absent.

44. Although the school analyses the results of examinations, subject departments do not act upon the outcomes by tailoring work to where it is most needed. Work is not prepared specifically to help those in greatest need, for example lower attainers or those who can cope very easily with the work that is too often common to all pupils in a class. The job descriptions of senior and middle managers are not clear enough on how such developments are to be monitored.

The ways teachers cater for individual pupils' learning needs are not specific enough.

45. Some weaknesses in teaching and learning provide suitable points of focus outlined for further improvement identified in the next school development plan. Not all lessons take the stages of learning of the different pupils in the class closely enough into account. In many lessons, whilst the teachers use a variety of teaching methods, these are not altered

or duplicated with extra work to extend the highest attainers or to give some lower attainers a feeling of greater success in being able to make even better progress.

46. Teaching sometimes misses opportunities to base learning on what the pupils know and understand. Sharing with the pupils what it is intended they learn and referring regularly to it, to note how well they are doing, is not as widely spread as accepted good practice requires. Sometimes teachers fail to involve the pupils in summing up at the end of lessons, so they have less of an idea of how successful their teaching has been. In other lessons, teachers talk excessively, so the opportunities to reinforce learning through, for example, personal or group research, are missed. The pupils use ICT widely in prep and in the computer rooms and library, but its use as an aid to helping individuals learn in lessons remains comparatively underdeveloped.

47. The correction of some written work, especially in the first three years, is unsatisfactory. It is inconsequential, apparently unheeded by the pupil who, for example, goes on leaving blank pages or failing to complete work he is evidently incapable of doing. Some written comments are sufficiently negative to reinforce failure.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

48. To raise standards even further, the governors and staff should:

- (1) Devise a development plan that emphasises the ways departments account for the quality of work they do. Such a plan would require them to analyse results more closely and propose means of improving them further; it would show more clearly how the work of each department is to be evaluated, especially the marking of written work and the quality of teaching.
(Paragraphs: 43, 45)
- (2) Establish from the findings of this report and from the outcomes of in-house lesson evaluations a programme of training aimed at improved sharing of good teaching practice. The programme should cover: better use of ICT to help learning in lessons, improved ways of helping pupils and students with special educational needs and higher attainers to learn better and improved ways of assisting the language development of those with English as an additional language.
(Paragraphs: 21, 30, 31, 35, 46, 53, 59, 77-80, 88, 105, 135)

Sixth form

N.B. the issues raised in sections (1) and (2) of paragraph 48 relate equally to the sixth form.

Also:

- (1) Devise extensions to the sixth form curriculum, better to meet the study needs of the widening range of students now in school.
(Paragraphs: 9, 33, 37, 76, 79, 91)

- (2) Relating equally to the whole school, reconsider the balance and the range of enrichment activities outside lessons to make them complement more closely the work students do in lessons.
(Paragraph: 15)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	21
	Sixth form	39
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		46

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	1	5	10	5	0	0	0
Percentage	5	22.5	50	22.5	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	4	19	11	5	0	0	0
Percentage	10	48	29	13	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 – 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than 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	352	187
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	2	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	45	9

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	50

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	1
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	2.9
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
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 pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	77	0	77

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	71	76	72
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	71	76	72
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	93 (96)	99 (96)	97 (95)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	75 (57)	95 (83)	82 (76)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	74	77	76
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	74	77	76
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	97 (91)	100 (100)	99 (93)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	61 (50)	81 (78)	65 (67)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33(29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	72	0	72

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	68	71	71
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	68	71	71
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	95.8 (91)	100 (99)	100 (100)
	National	49.2 (47.9)	88.9 (88.5)	94.4 (94.4)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	61.8 (61.2)
	National	39.0

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	77	0	77
	Average point score per candidate	23.3	0	23.3
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4

		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	77	0	77	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	23.3	0	23.3	0	0	0
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	0	0	0

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	466	3	3
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	1	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	18	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	4	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	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	22	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	31	0	0
Any other ethnic group	9	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)	41.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	12.9

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	7
Total aggregate hours worked per week	204.5

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	67.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	20.6
Key Stage 4	21.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income *	1 857 068
Total expenditure	1 857 068
Expenditure per pupil #	3 511
Balance brought forward from previous year	0
Balance carried forward to next year	0

* including donations and private funds

£2,690 from public funds

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	6.03
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	7.03

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	539
Number of questionnaires returned	234

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	60	36	2	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	51	42	3	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	55	41	1	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	41	5	0	22
The teaching is good.	43	51	1	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	38	42	11	3	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	63	33	3	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	79	19	1	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	38	49	9	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	63	33	0	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	70	26	3	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	81	18	0	0	0

Other issues raised by parents

On balance, the parents' views of the school are outstandingly positive. Several parents provided extended response, mainly praising the staff dedication, the pupils' very good standards and behaviour and saying how pleased they were with their son's personal development. A few others criticised a lack of innovation and new technology in music, the erratic marking of books and some intolerance.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

Strengths

- The students build on their very high GCSE standards and achieve well.
- The students' attainment in the key skills in the use of language, number and ICT is good.

Areas for improvement

- Some students with English as an additional language are unable to cope with the demands of the A-level courses that require them to write at length; they do not do as well as their GCSEs suggest they should.

49. The students build well upon their very high GCSE standards through to A-level; this represents very good achievement. An intake of extra students from other schools for sixth form education settles well, and makes good progress.

50. Average point scores obtained in the 2001 A-levels were well above the national averages for all schools and colleges. Average point scores dropped a little in 2002, but there was a big improvement in geography that, in 2001, was the only subject in which results were below the national average. There was also a substantial improvement in higher grade, A or B, passes in English and mathematics in 2002 compared with the year before, but there were falls in business studies and sports studies. No national comparisons are yet available for 2002.

51. Close analysis of results and of students' attitudes shows that progress for most is at least in line with what could reasonably be expected and often above it. A large entry for general studies produces a wide spread of results, with about average proportions of high, grade A or B, passes, but a tail of unclassified candidates. A few students find A-levels very taxing and do not make the progress their GCSE results suggest they should.

52. An analysis of 2002 A-level results shows the students make the best progress in art and design, biology, chemistry, ICT, history, French and mathematics compared with their GCSE results.

53. The students with special educational needs achieve well, as do many with English as an additional language. However, in subjects that make the greatest demand on their use of English, some of the latter do not reach the standards their GCSE results suggest they might. On the other hand, the results they obtain in mathematics and biology often show considerable improvements on what GCSE results suggest. The school's greater attention both to special educational needs and to the needs of those who have English as an additional language is timely. In some subjects, for example, business studies and psychology, a number of students whose GCSE average point scores were among the lowest did even less well at A-level, some because of imperfect fluency in English and some others having over-stretched themselves in GCSE.

54. In collaboration with the local education authority, the school has set realistic targets for improvement; scrutinies of work produced by current sixth formers indicate a continuation of well above average standards. The work shows very good continuing achievement.

55. Standards are never less than average in the subjects inspected and in those sampled. The standard of work in English, for example, is well above average. Students make good gains in understanding in both language and literature. By Year 13, they are very perceptive in analysing language; they are aware of how writers use language for persuading, narrating, arguing and creating comic effect. In literature, knowledge of texts grows through careful reading. The students' understanding of the evolution of language is good; they are aware of how styles have changed and can locate texts within an historical period from the language content and its complexity.

56. Achievement in mathematics is very good. Students make very good progress, for example in their understanding of forces and motion. Algebraic skills are put to very good use in the solution of numerous equations. The students produce vast quantities of work, mainly outside class time, and this contributes greatly to the high standards.

57. In biology, individuals demonstrate a very marked, positive development, building on GCSE, for example in an essay on the chemical structure of haemoglobin and collagen and the inter-relationship of molecules.

58. A very good development of knowledge and understanding shows in the well-organised, clear written work of sports studies students who plan essays well and make effective use of ICT, although there are some weaknesses in English expression, picked up by the teacher. Research and presentation are excellent in psychology; evidence is used well to support judgements and very good use is made of graphs and diagrams. Similarly, in geography, very good diagrams form part of high quality presentations, although there is less clear evidence of higher attainers being stretched fully in this subject and in business studies than in others; some of the writing is less fluent and punctuation variable.

59. The students' attainment in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and the uses of ICT is good. They make particularly good use of ICT to help with prep and project work, but its use, as a help to learning, is underdeveloped in, for example, biology, business studies and psychology lessons.

60. Very few students drop out of the sixth form before they finish their courses. The pattern of access to higher education is consistently high, because of the students' well above average standards and mature personal development. The school's planning is aimed at retaining its position as a very high attaining state comprehensive school. Standards of work seen suggest this will be achieved.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

Strengths

- Students' attitudes and values are very good and contribute to their very effective learning.
- Students play an important role in the life of the school.
- Students enjoy mature relationships with each other and with staff.

61. The sixth form is a harmonious, happy and well-adjusted community; this contributes greatly to very good learning. Sixth formers take on a full and important role in the life of the

school, performing responsible tasks very well, such as head of school and school council secretary. They also support a good range of local and national charities.

62. The very good attitude that students have towards learning is a notable strength of the sixth form. Students are well motivated, work diligently and are eager and proficient learners who take a pride in their work. Their behaviour is very good with no exclusions in the past year.

63. Their personal development and their relationships with each other and with adults are also very good. They are relaxed and comfortable, respect others' values and beliefs, and display considerable assurance, self-confidence and maturity.

64. Students in Year 12 who joined the school only a few months before the inspection say they feel well accepted and had no particular problems in "settling in". "New" day students, however, say that it is not easy to integrate fully with students who have already been in the school for five years and most of whom are boarders. Nonetheless, they consider it a fairly natural state of affairs. Recently, the school has taken important steps to overcome any sentiment of disadvantage by appointing a day student co-ordinator to the management of the sixth form. Early indications are that this is working.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

Strengths

- The teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects gives students confidence and raises standards.
- The teachers have outstandingly high expectations of the students who respond accordingly.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient use of ICT to help learning in some lessons.
- Work is not always tailored to the learning needs of individual students.

65. Both teaching and learning are very good overall; they underlie the students' very good achievement. Well over half the teaching and learning was at least very good in the sixth form; none was unsatisfactory. Teaching and learning have improved since the previous inspection.

66. Prep (homework) has an excellent impact on learning, as the students dedicate much time to its completion, drawing greatly on the school's ICT, library resources and study clubs. The supervisory parts played by House staff and tutors complement learning very well. Similarly, the sixth formers' House duty gives them chance to assist younger pupils doing their own prep; as a result, learning supports personal development strongly.

67. The teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects are very good and their clear enthusiasm gives the students great confidence in them. At the same time, the teachers' excellent expectations push the students to work very hard. In response, the students' pace of working and their output are also excellent, so they sustain their often-very high standards. Lessons flow outstandingly well: there are no problems with class management.

68. Very good teaching in English is characterised by apt emphases, at the start of lessons, upon what the students are going to learn. A very good variety of learning activity, with strict time limits for the completion of each one, helped work to proceed at a rapid pace in the best

lessons. Note-making, lively discussions, for example on identifying features of classroom discourse or on women's civilising effects on men in Shakespearean plays helped students both to retain knowledge and to develop their thinking skills very well. In

one lesson, although the students spoke confidently, they lacked the spark to challenge others' viewpoints.

69. The very good mathematics teaching has similar characteristics, with clear agreement on what is to be learned and rapid pace; presentations intermix with enthusiastic discussions. Relationships in class are very good; formality is combined with humour and the students request help confidently when they do not understand. Teachers encourage the students to explain their own work to help their understanding of complex topics; they use artefacts effectively, for example a pendulum, to show the effects of forces, linking classwork to real-life situations, a characteristic also of the very good teaching in physical education and psychology. Occasionally, in mathematics, the teachers do too much for the students and fail to grasp opportunities to pose questions that make them think and produce more expansive answers.

70. Very good science teaching makes clear allowances for the students' different learning backgrounds in mathematics, by, for example, producing two options for the solution of a calculation. Constant challenge to ascertain understanding, excellent classroom interplay and a very good variety of teaching methods help to create very good learning and well above average standards.

71. Very good teaching and learning occur in very nearly all other subjects, including ones on key mathematical skills. The organisation of teaching ICT skills leads to mixed reactions amongst students, some of whom have already mastered the skills and others who are complete novices. In these cases, learning is only made satisfactory by the students helping each other.

72. Lessons are very well planned in all subjects and the effectiveness of teaching methods is good overall. As a result, the students acquire skills, knowledge and understanding very well. In a classical civilisation class, for example, a vibrant discussion on the effects of the Persian wars on the development of Greek democracy exemplified the students' keen interest, often very good independence of thought and ability to concentrate, communicate and hypothesise.

73. Some teaching, for instance in certain business studies lessons, lacked crisp pace. Introductions were occasionally too long and activities allowed to drag a little. Although the students concentrated very well, their discussions, in these circumstances, lacked sparkle.

74. A combination of good marking with other formal assessments and House discussions provides the students with a very good knowledge of how they are doing. In the best instances, marking indicates clearly how to improve, but there is scope for it to spread, as there are some significant exceptions, for example in geography and business studies where correction does not show students clearly enough how to improve. Sometimes the students are not pushed to go even further.

75. Students with English as an additional language learn very well. Students from Germany, Bulgaria and China, for example, are not afraid to ask for clarification of both the explanation of ideas and the language surrounding them. They make good progress, as a result, although the A-level results of such students are clearly lower in subjects that demand real fluency than they are in others, such as mathematics and biology.

76. Students with special educational needs also learn very well, but the A-level curriculum is not always the best solution for their learning needs and, on occasion, teachers in geography, for example, accept too readily a student's weaknesses rather than seeking solutions that help individuals to make better progress.

77. Very good use is made in class of the school's good learning resources and time, in most lessons, is filled very well. The main exception to this is in the under-use of ICT to help learning in subjects such as business studies and biology. In ICT and mathematics, for example, the teachers made effective use of computer-assisted whiteboards in presenting the lessons. In French, the use of the Internet to study and comment on caricatures of the president raised enjoyment and cultural appreciation very well. Further very good learning through imaginative presentations via the overhead projector sustained both interest and momentum.

78. The school's objective of retaining its position as one of the country's highest attaining state comprehensive schools is well supported by the quality of teaching and learning. Emphasis on improving all students' standards by tailoring work to individual needs is an important part of this aspiration.

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

Strengths

- The curricular provision is good.
- There is very strong provision of activities outside the school day.
- There is a very good programme of guidance for future career or higher education opportunities.
- There is very good provision for students' personal development.

Areas for improvement

- The available courses, all of which lead to AS and A2 levels, are not suitable for some students.
- The key skills course needs some adjustment in its organisation.
- Provision for personal development could be improved even further by more systematic planning.

79. The quality and range of learning opportunities in the sixth form are good. There is a wide range of A-level and AS subjects available from which students can choose. Most of these are subjects that students have already studied at GCSE level but there are others such as geology and psychology that are new to nearly all students. The option system is effective and students report that they all find places on the courses they select. The school is prepared to provide a course even if the take-up is very small as it feels it has a commitment to meet the needs of students if at all possible. This year a small number of subjects was offered for which there were no takers. Although the entry requirement for the sixth form is seven GCSE subjects at grades A* to C there are some students for whom a diet of AS and A2 levels is not suitable. At present there are no alternatives, such as vocational courses, available, although expansion of the curriculum is being actively considered. Provision is being strengthened for students who have special educational needs and for those for whom English is an additional language; there is scope to improve it further by more formalised methods.

80. All students in Year 12 follow key skills courses leading to ASDAN certification. These are organised so that they are complementary to a student's main course of study. However, the organisation of the ICT course needs to be examined as it involves teachers

whose skills and knowledge are insufficient. All students also follow a course in general studies, which contains a sufficient element of religious education to satisfy statutory requirements. Although students have little time during the school day when they are not in lessons, the unique nature of the school means that they have ample opportunity for private

study in the boarding Houses, the school library or the sixth form centre. Thus they benefit from very good access to research facilities, especially the Internet.

81. There is a very strong programme of voluntary activities, which enrich the curriculum beyond the timetable. In addition to the variety of sporting, social and cultural activities, which are available to all the pupils in the school there are some specifically for sixth formers. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Club is notably successful with about 35 students having obtained gold awards in the last two years. Students participate in Young Enterprise and in the Challenge for Industry Conference. In the latter, over a period of three days, Year 12 students combine with students from a nearby girls' high school on an industrial problem-solving exercise. As a way of induction, all Year 12 students participate in a camp in Wales, under the auspices of Leadership Challenge.

82. Careers education and guidance are very good, as is the provision of university entrance information and guidance. There is a good, well organised and well used careers information collection in the sixth form centre and the staff have developed productive relationships with several major universities such as Birmingham and Oxford. Year 12 students may opt to do a week's work experience. A very successful careers and higher education convention is held annually. In addition, visiting speakers throughout the year make a strong contribution to the very good programme.

83. The school makes very good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural activities. Students attend whole school assemblies. The example of those seen during the inspection was a clearly spiritual event in which a reading from the Old Testament, prayer and a homily from the headteacher combined to help students reflect on attitudes to refugees. In the House assembly seen there was a strong moral theme based on the parable of the widow's mite. Students are encouraged to behave as leaders and role models for the rest of the school and given positions of responsibility both whole-school and in the Houses. They take their role very seriously. They are socially responsible as is seen by their behaviour in the sixth form centre and the sixth form club. The latter plays an important part in preparing students for the social side of university and other walks of life after school.

84. There is wide variety of cultural activities and visits in the evenings and particularly at weekends. Most of these are very well supported and students say that this is one of the main things they like about the school. Sport is a very important part of sixth form life and students gain county, divisional and international honours. The school has been awarded the sportsmark gold award for its excellence. It has particularly strong fixture lists in cricket and rugby; the rugby squad in recent years having toured Canada, South Africa, South America and Australia. In order to further awareness of other cultures the school takes part in World Challenge every two years and students have worked in Venezuela, Kenya, Honduras and Rajasthan.

85. Most of the provision for this aspect of students' education takes place in subjects. However, subjects do not consciously plan for it in their schemes of work and the school does not carry out an overall audit. Thus, although provision is very good, it would benefit even further from a more planned approach starting from the viewpoint of students' needs.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

Strengths

- Procedures for monitoring students' academic progress are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Individual education plans for pupils with special educational needs have not yet been produced.

86. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are very good. The director of the sixth form has an effective system for receiving information about students' progress termly. The information received about the progress of each student is compared with his predicted grade based on his GCSE performance as measured by a widely used commercial A-level information system. Students also know what their targets at A-level are, based on their prior performance at GCSE. Consequently teachers and students know exactly what progress is being made and whether targets are being met. This information is used, particularly when students are completing their UCAS forms. It also provides an opportunity for advice and support if students are under performing.

87. In most subjects, teachers assess accurately what progress students are making. In English, virtually all written work is marked against A-level criteria. However, there are some exceptions. In business studies, for example, there is little evidence of evaluative marking although pupils attain standards that are well above average. In geography, although teacher and students are aware of what standards are being reached, assessments are not used to set challenging targets.

88. Although teachers are aware of the individual learning needs of students and take them into account in the support they give, there is little evidence of planned provision for students who might require more help. For example, teachers know which students have English as an additional language or special educational needs but do not have a system for supporting them. However, the school has identified this shortcoming and individual education plans are in the process of being produced in accordance with the Code of Practice.

Advice, support and guidance

Strengths

- The guidance and support for students is very good.
- Careers and higher education guidance is very good.
- Social support for students is developing well.

89. Pastoral care and welfare are very good. Personal support and guidance given to students are very good, well organised and plentiful. Additionally, the pastoral care and welfare provided by the House and boarding system buttresses the very good support provided by the sixth form staff. Inspectors agree with the view of students that the guidance they receive about future careers and higher education are of very good quality.

90. The sixth form staff give the care of students a very high priority. The sixth form centre is newly adapted to meet the needs of day students in particular. Although it is rather cramped, its social area is attractively furnished and laid out. It is a popular place for students at lunchtimes. The school recognised the need to help day students and boarders to mix freely and to this effect has appointed a sixth form day student co-ordinator. In the short time she has been in post she has launched innovations in this direction. Students who have transferred to the school at the beginning of Year 12 feel they are readily accepted. The sixth form club is an important feature of the care given to students. It allows them to mix freely under very low-profile supervision and to invite guests of either sex.

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

Strengths

- The schools' partnership with parents is excellent.

91. The school's partnership with parents of sixth form students is excellent. The school takes great pains to establish and maintain strong and effective partnerships with parents. Parents are highly supportive of the sixth form and are well engaged in it, for example, a parent who is a barrister gave a useful talk to sixth formers on the law as a career. Communications with parents are very efficient and particular care is taken to ensure that sixth form staff are readily available to help and advise. Special care is taken to form good links with parents who live overseas and UK based guardians. The growing use of e-mail by parents and the school is advantageous in this respect. The well-organised boarding house system, with its constant availability of staff to answer questions and help parents, assists collaboration and raises standards. Parents receive good, clear and helpful information about the school. The annual reports on progress are informative and the regular parent-teacher consultation meetings are well attended and useful.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

Strengths

- The sixth form is very well led and managed.
- The school's aims and values are very well reflected in the sixth form
- Teachers and support staff are very well matched to the needs of the curriculum.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching and learning are not monitored closely enough.

92. The director and assistant director of the sixth form provide a very good quality of leadership and management. The recent introduction of a day student co-ordinator has added strength to this team. There is a very clear vision of what the sixth form should provide both in academic and pastoral terms. The leadership sets the very highest standards in both respects and questions existing practice in order to improve. For example, having increased the number of students entering the school in Year 12, it recognised that existing arrangements for their integration with students who had already spent five years in the school were not satisfactory. As a consequence the sixth form centre was established, a new

appointment was made and there are plans to develop the facility further. It is, however, too early to judge the success of the venture. Further, the leadership of the sixth form recognises that a minority of students does not have its needs best met by the present curriculum and fully supports the school leadership in seeking methods to alleviate this problem.

93. There is a great attention to detail so that the needs of individual students receive priority at the same time as the leadership is looking at longer-term strategies. For example, the very good system of monitoring the progress of each student is kept regularly up to date. Examination results are effectively analysed and the performance of individual subjects is kept under review but the school does not have a clear system for improving performance where required. On occasion external advice is sought but it is not clear at what point such action is triggered.

94. The governing body carries out its role responsibly with regard to the sixth form. It is active in seeking the best way to develop it, but avoiding if possible, breaking with tradition.

95. Departments are led well overall. In the case of the subjects inspected, leadership is very good in English and psychology. Elsewhere it is generally good and never less than satisfactory. A weakness is that the school lacks a policy for checking carefully by classroom observations the quality of teaching and learning. Hence the sharing of good practice and the strengthening of weaknesses is left on too much of an ad hoc basis. Nor does the school examine the practices of the most successful departments to find what they are doing that the others are not. However, heads of department feel that they are beginning to play a part in the strategic planning of the school. The school carries out appraisal and performance management satisfactorily.

96. The strength of the sixth form lies in the ethos that permeates it. There is a strong emphasis on striving for excellence. Students are regarded, and regard themselves, as leaders of the school and future leaders in adult life. The evidence of the success of the leadership of the sixth form is the way that students, who enter with very high standards, continue to achieve well academically in a very purposeful atmosphere in which students' personal welfare is also given priority. Taking into account the well above average standards that students attain and the relatively low public funding, the sixth form provides excellent value for money.

Resources

97. The very good match of teachers and support staff to the curriculum contributes greatly to the academic success of the sixth form. Teachers are well qualified and enthusiastic about their subject and very well supported by other staff. Technicians, for example, play an important role in the science department. Learning resources are good with readily accessible computers linked by a well-maintained network. The library is efficiently organised and has a good stock of books. Accommodation is satisfactory.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	3	100	62	0	15	1.0	1.51
Biology	1	100	52	0	2	1.0	0.79

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	28	79	87	46	43	5.7	5.8
Biology	24	96	88	50	34	6.67	5.25
Business studies	11	100	92	36	32	6.36	5.5
ICT	13	100	86	46	23	7.23	4.62
Physical education	21	100	92	24	25	5.52	5.09
Geography	18	89	92	11	38	4.67	5.74
Psychology	2	100	87	50	34	8.0	5.3
English	12	92	92	33	30	5.67	5.28
French	1	100	89	100	38	8.0	5.59

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The main focus of the inspection was on mathematics and biology. One Year 13 further mathematics lesson and chemistry were also sampled. Standards in further mathematics, taught to a small group, are very high; teaching and learning are undertaken at a very fast pace and the students rise well to the teacher's high expectations. A-level results over the past two years have been average. In chemistry, examination results in 2001 were above those expected nationally. One Year 13 lesson was observed. Excellent teaching presented the students with a high level of intellectual challenge and resulted in excellent progress in their understanding of the different methods of calculating strengths of weak acids.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average in all areas of mathematics.
- Teaching is very good; therefore, students make very good progress.
- Students have very good attitudes towards learning mathematics.

Areas for improvement

- The very brightest students do not move quickly enough on to harder questions.

98. Overall, the standard of work seen is well above average. In 2001 at A-level and AS level in mathematics and further mathematics, examination results were average, lower than in previous years. Students attained slightly lower grades in mathematics than in the other subjects they took. There are no significant variations between the achievements of different ethnic groups. In A-level examinations a small number of boys did not gain a pass grade. In 2002, results improved to levels more in keeping with past performances, with all students gaining a pass grade and 60 per cent attaining grades A or B.

99. Students enter the sixth form with standards that are above average for students starting courses in mathematics nationally. Taking this level of attainment into account, students make very good progress throughout the sixth form. The standards of work seen in lessons and over time are well above average for students on these courses, reflecting those indicated by the 2002 examination results. For example in pure mathematics, students differentiated complex equations using the "chain rule" and in a further mathematics mechanics lesson students explained how the different forces acting on an object related to each other.

100. Students' achievements are very good overall because their attitude towards work and the quality of teaching are very good and their behaviour is excellent. Students rate their mathematics lessons very highly. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are able to explain concepts very well. In one further mathematics mechanics lesson, involving Newton's laws of motion, the teacher's clear explanation of the topic significantly aided the students' understanding and good progress was made. In all lessons, students are highly motivated and very keen to learn. Teachers know their students well. The

best marking is of good quality, ensuring students know what they need to do in order to improve. Teachers provide appropriate support when it is necessary. In the very best lesson, where students solved linear trigonometrical equations, the teacher's planning was excellent, purposes were clear, so the students knew what was expected. The work was clearly matched to the abilities of each student and excellent progress was made. For example, in this lesson, questions of varying difficulty were posed to different students based on the teacher's knowledge of them and on each occasion students were encouraged to explain their responses, which they did very well. These positive aspects ensure the students' understanding of the topic improve dramatically. In some lessons, the very brightest students would benefit from moving more quickly on to harder questions.

101. The arrangements for students to complete homework in the evening are very good and this contributes significantly to the very high standards. Students work very hard and produce vast quantities of work. Notebooks are in very good order and a good feature is the many pictures and diagrams that they are encouraged to draw in order to understand the work they have completed. The files enable students to revise very effectively. All of these very positive features ensure that students learn mathematics very well. They acquire and use new skills very effectively and are interested in their work. Concentration levels are high from the beginning of lessons to the end.

102. The curriculum is appropriately matched to meet the needs of students. A-levels offered in both mathematics and further mathematics provide students with a firm foundation when they begin university. Leadership and management of sixth form mathematics are good. There is a clear sense of purpose and teachers are very keen for students to do well. Teaching is monitored through the performance management processes but more is needed if the excellent and very good practice seen is to be consistent in all classes.

103. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. Since then the number of boys studying mathematics has increased. The good features that were identified are still good and A-level standards have improved, particularly the proportion of students attaining A or B grades.

Biology

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

Strengths

- There are very high standards of attainment, which have improved every year up to 2001
- There is very good teaching by experienced subject specialists.
- Students have excellent attitudes to the subject, which allow them to get the very best out of lessons.

Areas for improvement

- ICT is not used enough to help learning.
- The monitoring of teaching and marking is not sufficiently structured.

104. Results in A-level biology have improved every year since the previous inspection and in 2001 were very high compared to all schools nationally. This represents very good

achievement in relation to the students' high attainment at GCSE. In the years up to 2001 the proportion of students attaining the higher grades increased with a slight drop in 2002 following the introduction of the new A-level course. The first results in the new AS examination in 2002 showed that nearly all students attained a pass grade with almost one third attaining the higher grades A and B.

105. The number of students choosing to take biology in the sixth form has remained fairly constant and has resulted in three groups of up to 12 students. Nearly all of these carry on and complete the A-level course in Year 13.

106. The standard of work seen in lessons is generally well above average. Students are making very good progress given their high attainment at GCSE and most improve on their expected grade. Year 13 students were able to use their knowledge of genetics to predict the genetic makeup of offspring of parents with different Rhesus positive and negative blood groups. In another lesson, students progressed to be able to identify the microscopic cellular structure of a kidney, building on their knowledge of the gross structure. Year 12 students in the first term of the course were able to identify different types of cells in a section of a privet leaf when seen under the microscope.

107. The few boys identified as having special educational needs are making as good progress as their peers. Similarly, those who have joined the school with English as an additional language make good progress. The latter group have developed a very good biological vocabulary and cope very well with the demands of the language of the subject. They are often helped and supported by their classmates. There are several students identified as gifted scientists. Teachers often provide additional or complementary work for these students, so allowing them to progress well.

108. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The team of experienced subject specialists has very good subject knowledge that allows them to present a topic in different ways to stimulate and interest students. Practical methods such as identifying the different observable characteristics of fruit flies allowed students to predict and then produce further generations of flies to back up their ideas. Dissecting a kidney helped students reinforce their knowledge of its gross structure and led to further understanding of the microscopic structure and how the kidney works. The very efficient support of the technicians is important in maintaining the smooth running of the practical sessions. However, the use of ICT to help learning in lessons is limited, owing to a lack of hardware.

109. Progress is tracked through the marking of tests and examination questions, which give attained grades and comments, but marking fails to give students clear pointers as to how to improve. While all teachers mark regularly, there is no structured approach to monitoring the standard of marking or of teaching.

110. In all lessons, students' attitudes to the subject are excellent. Their excellent behaviour and full application to work means that they make the best use of lesson time. In addition, the daily, extended prep session is well used. This allows students to consolidate their understanding of the lesson's content by producing their own notes and completing work started in class. In addition, teachers frequently give extra questions to develop students' understanding. Relationships in lessons are excellent and although students usually work on their own, they help one another when needed.

111. Overall, there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on business studies. Standards are well above average and the students achieve well. Teaching and learning are good.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Examination results are well above average.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- Students have a very positive attitude to the subject.
- The quality of relationships is good.
- Preparation for examinations is thorough.

Areas for improvement

- Monitoring of teaching is not developed.
- The scheme of work does not include teaching and learning strategies, resources and homework activities.
- Marking does not sufficiently show students what they need to do to improve.
- There is not enough access to ICT.

112. The A-level results in 2001 were well above the national average and students did better than expectations based on their GCSE performance. This indicates good achievement. The 2002 results fell a little. The AS examination has been successfully introduced. Over the last four years standards have risen from below the national average to well above. The introduction of the AS examination has enabled a larger number to study the subject for one year only. This is particularly attractive to the overseas students. Last year 40 students took the subject at this level. Most students continue to A-level, but a number who have English as an additional language finds the required levels of general expression hard.

113. Standards observed in lessons and in written work are average in both Year 12 and Year 13 and achievement based on the lesson observations and the work over time is satisfactory. The well above average standards in the examinations are mainly due to the students' thorough preparation by the staff and because they are very well motivated to learn and wish to do well. The understanding of complex business concepts by Year 13 students is good, in particular, critical path analysis where they show through the completion of several case studies that the theory is fully understood. In a Year 12 lesson, students worked with very great concentration on developing their understanding of the price elasticity of demand. During this lesson the teacher gave good support to individuals and as a result the concept was satisfactorily understood. The students were able to work very well on their own and to remain on task for some time in order to make good progress. In discussion with the students it is clear that attitudes to the subject are very good and that relationships within the groups are of a similar high standard.

114. Teaching and learning are good overall. In the lessons observed students depended too much upon the teacher for progress. Many of the students make too little active contribution,

other than listening for considerable periods to the teacher. The main concepts are thoroughly and clearly presented, using a computer-assisted whiteboard, and some opportunities are provided for students to work through their ideas at the board. This particular activity needs to be extended to enable a higher proportion of each group to participate actively in their own learning. The teacher's knowledge is good; it is used effectively to ask searching questions that underpin the learning. The overall planning of lessons needs to be strengthened as the two whole group sessions observed were rushed and did not successfully reinforce the learning that had taken place. In one lesson, the purposes were shared with the group and this enabled the students to judge whether they had made satisfactory progress. However, this good practice is not followed in all lessons. Work is marked regularly, but there are no comments that indicate what needs to be done to improve progress. There is considerable preparation for the examinations by the effective use of case study material and the students are confident that they are well supported. This encourages them to work hard and the desire to do well is very evident.

115. The department was not inspected in the previous inspection so it is not possible to comment on the improvement since then. The current head of department has been in post for four years and has made some improvements, most notably the improvement in standards. The scheme of work is in an early stage of development. This needs to be brought up to date, to include details of resources, teaching and learning methodology and homework activities. Currently there is no planned monitoring of teaching across the department or the planned sharing of resources and good practice. Although there is a computer-assisted whiteboard with access to the Internet there is limited access to other ICT facilities to provide further opportunities for students to become more effective independent learners and for more variety of teaching and learning methods within the classroom. Excluding the issue of ICT, the department has good resources, including a wide range of books and business videos that are used effectively. In addition, students attend business conferences each year, in particular the Challenge of Industry experience. Visits from business people are encouraged and the students are urged to read the broadsheets and business magazines. Some improvement has taken place but there is still more to be achieved in developing monitoring and assessment processes and ensuring that students become more confident independent learners.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on ICT. Standards are above average and the students achieve well. Good teaching helps the students to make good progress in lessons.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- Teachers are very knowledgeable about their subject.
- High expectations of participation and endeavour encourage students to be highly motivated and involved.
- There are very good facilities and resources for computer studies and making use of ICT.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching methods are not sufficiently adapted to make them more appropriate for a widening range of students' abilities.
- Teaching methods are not monitored and evaluated; successful practices are not shared.

116. The computing course at A-level is long established in the school. Following an analysis of recent examination results and students' opinions, the school now also offers A-level ICT.

117. When students embarked on the computing course in 1999 their experience and attainments in GCSE were above average. By the end of Year 13 in 2001, their A level results were well above the national average and this represents good achievement. In the 2001 A-level computing examination students obtained results that were very high compared with national averages. All candidates obtained grades A to C. Results in the 2002 A-level examination were not as good with almost half the candidates obtaining grades D and E. This is because a significant proportion of students joined the course from other schools, with a wider range of prior attainments than hitherto. Around half the students who take AS level courses in computing and ICT continue to A2 level. The 2002 AS level computing results show a similar wide range of grades. Almost all students on the new ICT course gained A to C grades at AS level. However, national data to make comparisons for 2002 are unavailable at present.

118. Standards in work seen in lessons are above average: they exceed expectations in relation to the prior attainments of the students. As a result of good teaching, students are achieving well. For example, Year 12 students following the computing course understand key concepts about filing, such as stack and queue, and quickly learn to demonstrate competently their ability to order and re-order information in a computer filing process. However, Year 13 project management skills are less well developed, for example their application of the "investigating problems" phase in their work is not fully thought through.

119. Year 12 students of ICT have quickly gained familiarity with commands for handling databases and demonstrate how this reinforces their knowledge of the way tables of information can be related. However, their grasp of key concepts used in constructing database tables is not yet secure. Year 13 students have acquired a good understanding of organisations in their systems analysis work. Most can show how they can relate ICT concepts in investigating solutions to a problem posed, but lower attaining students have difficulty understanding the distinction between organisational functions and the roles that individuals undertake. This, together with an examination of students' assignments submitted for examination, shows that a noticeable majority has yet to show sufficient innovation in their work or development and application of evaluative skills to achieve higher grades.

120. The quality of teaching is good. There are considerable strengths that result in good learning. For example, teachers' very good knowledge and understanding in their subject is reflected in effective planning that incorporates carefully sequenced tasks backed by very good use of resources. Good use of exposition and discussion, and a good variety of activities within a lesson, help sustain students' interest. Learning is reinforced by teachers giving individual students differential support whilst they work, but otherwise classes work at the same tasks. Teachers use time very well at the end of lessons, summing up to consolidate learning. Students are made clearly aware of the teachers' very high expectations of learning and deadlines, often linked to examination requirements, that are to be met within lessons and in "prep" assignments. For example, Year 13 computing students formally reported progress on their system analysis projects to each other and were challenged by the teacher to set out the time scales for the next phase of work to be undertaken in their own time. As a result, expectations were strongly reinforced. Despite the broadening range of attainment among

students, teachers do not structure tasks and focus their questions to take individual differences into account.

121. In all lessons, students respond very well to the teachers' clear expectations of involvement and endeavour. The teachers' knowledge of individuals and fostering of good inter-personal relationships encourages all students to be involved and to remain engaged during lessons. Students are confident about their work. They speak clearly and cogently about it, both in one-to-one situations and publicly before the class. Students feel well supported and appreciate the day-to-day interest teachers show in them and the more formal discussions with them about their coursework and progress.

122. The leadership and management of the department are good. The strengths indicated at the previous inspection have clearly been maintained. Students make very good use of readily accessible computers linked by powerful servers and a well-maintained network, up-to-date software and textbook resources. Shared teaching of computing and ICT classes ensures familiarity with the courses and a full assurance that examination board requirements are being met. There is a good team spirit and working rapport between the teaching, technical and support staff who are very well deployed to meet the demands of the examination courses. Teachers maintain a very good knowledge of the examination and assessment criteria, and effectively use it to evaluate students' progress and aptitudes. The introduction of the new ICT syllabus to complement the existing computing course reflects this analysis. However, the need now is to build upon the department's strengths to develop and align the range of teaching methods to the attainment profile of students now taking the subject, to evaluate success and to share effective practice.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was on physical education alone in this domain. Standards are above average and the teaching and learning are very good. The range of out-of-school activities is excellent.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning and achieve good standards.
- The school offers an excellent range of sporting and adventurous activities in addition to those experienced in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- The management and development of the subject rely too heavily upon the only full time specialist.

123. Results at A-level were above the national average in 2001 with most students gaining higher grades than they did in other subjects in which they were examined. The proportion gaining the highest grades, A and B, matched the national figure but was below the average for all subjects taken in the school. Provisional results for 2002 match the national average for the previous year and show good achievement by comparison with the grades students gained

at AS level one year earlier. In 2002, the provisional AS results were better than in the previous year, especially in the very high proportion, one half, gaining grades A and B.

124. Evidence from the inspection shows that the work of students now in Years 12 and 13 continues to be above average. All lessons observed were held in classrooms, but other evidence indicates that students have levels of performance skill that are at least good so they achieve highly in one or more games and activities, with some earning recognition at county or national levels. Students in Year 13 are building well upon a generally secure base of knowledge and understanding established during the previous year. They demonstrate good understanding of previous and current learning when they make accurate use of detailed technical terminology to identify psychological and physiological effects upon physical activity and their consequences. They are confident in expressing opinions on qualities and styles of effective leadership. Writing is clearly, relevantly and logically organised and expressed. Accuracy of spelling, sentence construction, fluency of idiom and expression are generally, but not consistently, good. Judgement of the relative importance of different elements of an answer is usually appropriate. Presentation of work benefits from confident use of ICT.

125. All students in Year 12 have made good progress since beginning the course. Standards of attainment are good. Earlier than is usual, most make confident and accurate use of appropriate technical language, for example when identifying the detailed characteristics of physical actions commonly used in particular activities. Although almost half the students have only recently joined the school, positive relationships are developing. Students work well together in groups or as a full class, showing respect for the contributions of others and being valued for their own.

126. The quality of teaching is very good. It is never less than good and is sometimes excellent. Teachers have very good knowledge of the aspects they teach. They have good understanding of the capabilities of students and set tasks that challenge them rigorously. They require students to contribute significantly to their learning by undertaking research and making presentations to the class, and by analysing practical demonstrations often using class members as demonstrators. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and very good use is made of prep to consolidate or continue work done in class or to prepare for future work. Teachers vary activities within lessons, which helps students sustain high levels of concentration. Serious points are sometimes effectively made in a light-hearted way, for example when a naturally left-handed tennis player was asked to deliver a right-handed serve in a lesson on skills acquisition.

127. Students demonstrate a strong interest in the subject and clearly intend to succeed in examinations and to use their knowledge to develop their own performance skills. They recognise that they benefit from effective teaching but are not over dependent upon it for their progress. They learn very well, making good use of material from the Internet and many demonstrate a high level of intellectual curiosity. Hence, learning is very good.

128. Colleagues who teach other subjects or have other roles within the school support the work of the department very well. The head of the department is the only full-time teacher of the subject. This means that at a time of continuing change there are few opportunities to share the revision of schemes of work and to find sufficient time for the monitoring of teaching and learning necessary to guide further development. This over-reliance upon one

member of staff was noted in the report of the previous inspection and remains valid even though post-holders have changed. Within this constraint, management of the department is effective. In recent months, schemes of work have been revised and assessment of standards of attainment now more closely matches national criteria. There has been good improvement since the time of the previous report. The style of teaching has developed so that students are now more consistently expected to contribute to their learning, to think for themselves and to express personal opinions rather than accept commonly held views.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

One art and design lesson was sampled in this domain. Examination results and standards are well above average and the students do better in this subject relative to most of the others they take. The students have very good creative ideas; they are knowledgeable about art and design and confident in talking about their work.

HUMANITIES

The main focus of the inspection was on geography and psychology. One classical civilisation lesson was also sampled. Standards in classical civilisation are above average. The students enjoy reading around the subject and discuss very enthusiastically the implications of given historical events on the development of societies in the ancient world. Good teaching challenges the students' thinking and also makes sure their technical vocabulary is sound. Students achieve well.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- Examination results are improving.
- Excellent working relationships ensure an excellent learning atmosphere in lessons.
- Very good schemes of work and department handbook provide very good guidance for the work of the department.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment is not used to set challenging targets for the students.
- The work of the department is not reviewed and monitored.
- The range and content of fieldwork is not as good as it should be.

129. In the 2001 A-level examination results were below the national average but they improved in 2002.

130. The standard of students' work seen during the inspection is above average. In written work, standards of presentation are high and students build up comprehensive portfolios of work indicating a good knowledge of human and physical geography. They describe and account for the weather patterns associated with depressions and interpret storm hydrographs well. However, written answers to practice examination questions do not adequately reflect the abilities of the most able students because they are not well planned and important facts are omitted or used ineffectively. Similarly, students' evaluation of fieldwork techniques lacks depth.

131. Students' attainment in classwork is well above average. They have developed good skills in interpreting graphs, statistics, maps and tables. They apply their previous knowledge well to new topics as in their first lesson on plate tectonics. Perceptive comments in response to teachers' questioning often show a good breadth of knowledge and understanding, for

example when identifying a reduction in available tax revenue as one of the disadvantages of counter-urbanisation, or when evaluating models of demographic transition. These perceptive comments contrast sharply with some examples of students being imprecise in their written statements or failing to take sufficient care when interpreting questions. For example, in response to a question about the effects of population change on

urban and rural communities, students wrote about push and pull factors in rural-urban migration.

132. Teaching is good. Teachers demonstrate very good knowledge of, and real enthusiasm for, their subject. Classrooms are excellently managed and the atmosphere is conducive to learning. Relationships are also excellent. Students and teachers are relaxed with each other and there are very good moments of shared humour. Lessons are planned well, new knowledge is introduced logically and the pace of lessons is good. All pupils, including those for whom English is an additional language, learn well in lessons because of these aspects. However, there are not enough opportunities for classroom learning to be consolidated using set tasks to review the information learned and to plan written answers carefully. Although all lessons seen were teacher led, open questioning by the teachers, students' confidence in responding, and where necessary seeking clarification, ensure that students are actively involved in their learning. Some fieldwork is undertaken but its range is limited and students have too few opportunities to use and evaluate a wide variety of fieldwork techniques.

133. Files are regularly marked and omissions corrected. However, the criteria for good answers are not made clear and comments at the end of assignments are not detailed enough to show students how to improve. Good use is made of past examination papers to assess students' attainment levels and both teachers and students know what standards are reached. However, these ongoing assessments are not used to set challenging targets, to judge if students are reaching their full potential, or to identify students needing more support.

134. Students enjoy the subject and maintain their interest throughout the two years. They feel supported by their teachers and value their approachability. They consider they make good progress because of their teachers' knowledge and obvious enthusiasm for the subject. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The department handbook, reviewed since the previous inspection, gives clear guidance for the work of the department. New schemes of work provide a very good framework for individual lesson planning. However, there is no formal monitoring or self-evaluation in order to establish the most effective teaching methods and to set targets for its work through a detailed analysis of prior attainment data and examination results.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Standards at A-level in 2001 were well above average.
- Well-qualified staff have very good specialist knowledge.
- The psychology club provides effective extra support.
- Lesson planning is excellent.

Areas for improvement

- ICT is not sufficiently used to support teaching and learning.

135. The 2001 results at A-level were well above the national average. This represents very good achievement, as students attained much higher grades than predicted from their GCSE

results. At AS level, almost three-quarters of the students were successful at higher grades A and B; 14 of the 33 candidates achieved grade A. As the subject was not mentioned in the previous inspection report, it is not possible accurately to evaluate progress since then. The subject is now, however, amongst the strongest and most popular in the sixth form, with, in 2002, half the students obtaining the highest, A or B, grades in A-level and no failures.

136. The work of students on the AS and A level courses is well above average standards and represents very good achievement. In a Year 13 class, the students were introduced to the psychopathology of schizophrenia through a short video extract. In discussion, they were able to describe the key features of schizophrenia. They were able to use their psychological knowledge to identify schizophrenia as a disorder of personality and link this to theoretical concepts in, for example, analytical psychology. The students accepted the challenge of preparing a detailed presentation of biological explanations for the condition.

137. In Year 12, AS students make very good progress. They work hard, independently or in groups. In a lesson concerned with the topic of memory, students investigated the capacity of short-term memory for numbers. Students demonstrate a high level of concentration and attention during lessons. They are able to show what they have learnt by applying previous learning to new knowledge. In a Year 12 lesson, for example, students were able to define concepts such as hypothesis, independent and dependent variable and apply this knowledge in discussing experimental design. Overall, attainment in Year 12 and 13 is very good.

138. Teaching and learning are very good. Highly qualified teachers have an enthusiasm for their subject, which is transmitted to the students. Planning is excellent, with clear and specific objectives to be achieved by the end of the lesson. Continuity in planning is maintained through a good scheme of work. In the best lessons, the planning is supported by very good worksheets, which contain the key concepts being taught but, in addition, have questions that challenge the pupils to apply these concepts.

139. Teachers' expectations are very high with a pace to the lessons that challenges the students and maintains motivation. Questioning is used very effectively to reinforce previous learning and to encourage students to apply their knowledge in a new context. In a lesson concerned with experimental method, careful questioning led the students to identifying the limitations associated with a range of experimental designs. The teaching methods chosen are good. They are appropriate to the topic being studied and help to maintain the students' interest and motivation. Students are encouraged to discuss topics, take part in group work and take notes during formal teaching. Very good use is made of short extracts from video recordings to emphasise a teaching point. There is limited access to ICT as an aid to supporting teaching and learning. The relationships between students and teachers are very good. The popularity of the subject has resulted in teaching groups in which students can discuss topics and learn from listening to the views of others. Teachers know their students well and this knowledge allows them to extend the more able whilst offering extra support to students who may be experiencing difficulty in understanding a concept.

140. Students speak positively about the subject. They find psychology challenging and value the support provided by the teachers. The weekly Psychology Club, where they can obtain extra help or extend their knowledge of a topic, is much appreciated by the students. Students' project work is very well marked, using relevant exam criteria. The result of the constructive criticism with informative written comments is evident in the final project draft.

Prep and independent study times are used very effectively to support and extend the work in lessons.

141. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Work is carefully monitored and new members in the department are offered very good support. Well-chosen resources include a good range of videos, worksheets, journals and textbooks to support teaching.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English and French, but work in German lessons was also sampled. German has been as popular as French, and sometimes has larger teaching groups. In recent years, German results at A-Level have been in line with or above the national average for all schools and students have achieved satisfactorily. The quality of teaching in the one Year 13 lesson observed was good.

English

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

Strengths

- A-level results improved substantially in 2002.
- Standards of work are well above average.
- Teaching is very good and students learn very well.
- Students are very positive about English and work very hard.
- The department is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- There is no systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning.

142. Results in A-level examinations in recent years have been above national averages but students have done less well in both English language and literature than in the other subjects in which they have been examined. However, the department has changed to a combined language and literature course and in 2002 results improved markedly, although there are not yet any national statistics with which to compare them.

143. Work seen during the inspection similarly suggests that standards are higher at A-level than at AS. This is explained by the fact that the less successful students do not continue from the AS course to the A-level course. Nevertheless, overall standards in the sixth form are well above average. Year 12 students already have enough knowledge of the way that the English language has developed to place a piece of writing in its historical context. They know what features to look for and in one lesson were able to place an excerpt from an Edgar Allen Poe story in the nineteenth century because of its archaisms, figurative language, the shape of sentences and the attitudes of the protagonist.

144. By Year 13 students are very aware of the way writers use language to achieve many different purposes such as persuasion, comedy, narration and argument. They understand how lexis and figures of speech are modified according to the target audience. In their study of literature Year 13 students show a detailed knowledge of poetical texts and apply close reading skills confidently for analytical purposes. In the study of a poem by Hardy on the sinking of the Titanic they analysed particularly concentrated language skilfully. In their written work they make good use of the drafting process. Many students have excellent command of language both in their writing and when they speak about their work.

145. The quality of teaching is very good and students learn very well as a result. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. This underpins the confidence with which they skilfully

prompt students so that class discussion improves learning. For example, the teacher helped Year 13 students identify features of a typical lunchtime conversation such as informality, frequent interruptions and unfinished sentences. These features were then contrasted with a scripted scene from Willy Russell's "Our Day Out" and the teacher led students into an understanding of the difference between the two. It is common for teachers to use such a method so that students learn independently rather than simply being given a list to learn, in this case of the features of discourse. Students respond very well. They largely enjoy learning and most are very keen to join in discussion. They are very positive about the value of studying English to this level.

146. Teachers plan their lessons very well and keep pupils focused on the learning objectives. For example, Year 13 students made very good progress in learning about the language of "Othello" because the teacher shared the objectives with them. She then used the contrast between the language of Othello and that of Iago to lead to a lively debate finishing with a consideration of the purpose of figurative language. The prep was effective because it expected students to extend their understanding of Shakespeare's language.

147. Students work very hard, doing much more than the average amount of prep. They report that they have ready access to the Internet and to the school library, where there is a good stock of suitable books, to help them with their research. Above all, their work is marked in detail with many helpful pointers on how to improve. All work is graded to examination criteria so that students know how well they are doing and how to achieve the next grade.

148. The very good teaching and learning result from the subject being very well led and managed. The head of department provides very clear direction. Students' progress is regularly assessed and teachers are aware of differences of attainment between individuals. The department identifies its own strengths and weaknesses and takes necessary action. For example, a review led to a change of examination syllabus and more emphasis on students' essay writing skills. The department system of sharing sixth form teaching works well, but there is no system for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. There were few comments in the previous report about sixth form English so it is not possible to measure any improvement since that time.

French

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

Strengths

- Students achieve well and their attainment is above average.
- All the teaching is very good: the teachers have high expectations.
- Resources are good, especially those from the Internet and satellite television.
- The co-ordinator for sixth form French provides good leadership.

Areas for improvement

- The small size of teaching groups inhibits the interchange of ideas.
- Students' visits to France and Germany are not frequent enough to improve their confidence, speaking and listening skills.

149. Over the last three years, numbers of candidates for AS and A-level French have varied. Results have been above the national average. Students have done comparatively better in French in recent years, than in the other subjects they took. One lesson was seen in Year 12 and one lesson in Year 13.

150. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files during the inspection showed that standards of work matched the predicted grades A to C at AS level and A to D at A2. This represents good achievement. French accents and intonation range from excellent to satisfactory. Students understand the general meaning of spoken and written French, and pick out important details from what they hear and read. They express their views and opinions clearly but some make errors while speaking and writing in French. They write on different topics, using a variety of structures and tenses; accuracy varies according to the ability of students. Students have developed a wide range of vocabulary related to nuclear power, wind power, and other topics. They have good research skills, and download current information from the Internet. This develops well their reading skills and their overall knowledge of France and world issues.

151. The teaching of French is very good in the sixth form. Teachers' expectations are very high, and the students learn very well. Lessons have clear aims, which are ultimately achieved. They are very well planned to both challenge and interest the students and exploit the department's resources. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson where the students were given texts about the views of children and parents on divorce. The teacher presented a summarised version of the texts in French on the overhead projector and covered up some words, forcing the students to guess them from the context. If they could not guess them quickly, she gave clues in French until they succeeded. Finally, she played a tape, which gave details about the people in the texts: they were able to identify them from the information given. They had seen a French film called *Amelie*, and had written an essay about *Amelie's* ability to influence other people. In the Year 13 lesson one student gave a presentation about President Chirac's political career, and the other students answered questions on a prepared sheet. Another student gave extra information about Chirac and the students asked him questions. Next they gathered round the computer to read a comic strip on the Internet relating to Chirac's alleged misdemeanours. Finally, the teacher revised their knowledge of a novel by Mauriac, checking the names of the main characters and asking questions. All these activities were good practice for examination questions. The teacher assisted learning by giving encouragement and help if the student could not understand parts of texts or tapes. The lessons went at a good pace, but the teacher ensured that the students had sufficient time to complete the tasks. These varied tasks helped them to practise and develop their language skills.

152. The students have a mature approach to their work and organise their time well. They have been given good advice on how to develop their skills. They make good notes on grammar points, literary works and the topics, and use the information to discuss ideas with their teachers. They are keen to speak in class, and seek help if they lack vocabulary to make their point. They have good research skills, use dictionaries and other reference material well, and exploit ICT well. They are responsible and use private study sessions and free time in school to do their work. They show enthusiasm in class and are pleased with their course in French. They have very good relationships with the teachers.

153. The department is well led and managed. The teaching of French in the sixth form is shared between two teachers and is well organised. Good advice on methodology is given in the sixth form scheme of work, and includes bridging the gap between GCSE and AS level. The teachers keep a record of grammar covered each week and meet regularly to discuss progress. The teachers have good knowledge of the course requirements and mark work according to the examination criteria. They share these with the students, so that they know how to improve. The teachers are keen to find interesting and stimulating resources; they use the Internet and have the news and other material recorded by satellite from French television. It is regrettable that more students are not currently choosing to study French: the limited time in Year 11 narrows the curriculum and prevents teachers from giving students a broad experience of French. The school's objective of winning specialist school status, business and enterprise with languages and ICT appears timely.