

INSPECTION REPORT

WYMONDHAM HIGH SCHOOL

Wymondham

LEA area: Norfolk

Unique reference number: 121171

Headmaster: Mr D R Walker

Reporting inspector: Dr A R Beaver
20224

Dates of inspection: 7th – 9th January 2003

Inspection number: 249779

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: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address:
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Wymondham
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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr G Barrell

Date of previous inspection: 28th April 1997

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20224	Dr A R Beaver	Registered inspector		Information about the school The school's results and students' achievements How well are students taught? How well is the school is led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
19743	Mrs A Taylor	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
32115	Mr J S Foster	Team inspector	French	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
11969	Mr J Hardy	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
30699	Mr A H Kemp	Team inspector	Mathematics	
1994	Ms H A Olds	Team inspector	Geography History Provision for students with special educational needs Educational inclusion	
15971	Mr M Pye	Team inspector	Physical education	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Wymondham High School is located in the town of Wymondham, Norfolk, ten miles south west of Norwich. It provides education for girls and boys aged 11 to 18 years. Pupils come from many primary schools in the surrounding area. The school has chosen the status of that of a community school and is comprehensive. It is bigger than most other secondary schools and provides education for 1313 pupils and students, of whom 154 are in the sixth form. There are 73 more girls than boys in the school, and girls outnumber boys especially in Years 7 and 8. The school is very popular and many more parents apply for their children to join the school each year than there are places available. Numbers of pupils attending the school have increased by 405 since the last inspection in 1997. Very few pupils have minority ethnic backgrounds; a few do not have English as their first language, including some learning the language from an early stage. Fewer pupils join or leave the school, other than at the usual ages of 11, 16 or above, than is typical nationally. The percentage of pupils who claim free school meals is well below the national average. The percentage of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs, including those with statements of special need, is below average. These pupils mainly have learning difficulties. On entry to the school at age 11, pupils' attainments span the full range, and are above average overall. The school has Beacon School status and is a focus of good educational practice locally. The school has made application to become specialist in the performing arts, but has so far been unsuccessful.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Wymondham High School is a very good school and enables its pupils to achieve very well. The standards attained are well above the national average. Teaching is good. The leadership and management of the school are very good. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils attain standards well above the national average in Year 9 National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations.
- Teaching is good and helps pupils of all levels of competence to make very good progress.
- Pupils are highly motivated, want to learn and behave very responsibly.
- The headmaster gives strong direction to the school and has ensured good improvement since the last inspection.
- The house system enables pupils to develop very well, both personally and socially.
- The extra-curricular opportunities provided to extend pupils' worthwhile experience are very good.

What could be improved

- Specialist accommodation in several subjects is insufficient.
- Pupils' experience of differing cultures and traditions is not extensive enough.
- Consultation with pupils is currently not sufficient to enable them to participate fully and to share responsibility in accomplishing school priorities.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the last inspection in April 1997, the school has made good improvement. Well above average standards have been maintained for the many more pupils who are now in the school than in 1997. Pupils make very good progress from entry into Year 7 onwards. The teaching has continued to be good in the main school and very good in the sixth form, enabling pupils and sixth form students to learn successfully. The school has succeeded well

in meeting the key issues of the last inspection. Lower attainers and pupils with special educational learning needs now achieve highly in GCSE examinations. Standards in English in GCSE examinations are well above average. Pupils have good skills in mental mathematics. Standards in design and technology in Years 7 to 9 are satisfactory. Boys do not usually attain as well as girls in GCSE examinations, but they attain higher standards than most boys nationally. Pupils now receive personal and social education through the Pupils' Development Programme in all years, but the time provided is not generous. Careers education in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. However, the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 still provides few vocational courses. Monitoring is now effective and pupils make very good progress. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very well. Learning support assistants have been appointed and they work effectively with pupils. The sixth form now receives its entitlement to religious education. The school tries hard to comply with the requirement to provide an act of collective worship for all pupils every day. There are regular assemblies that involve acts of collective worship. Although many tutor meetings involve an act of worship, not all do so.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

* National comparison data for AS / A Level results in 2002 are not yet available.

The average point score is the average of the overall points gained by students at GCSE and A-level; it is often considered the best measure of a school's overall performance. Reference to similar schools is to those with students of similar backgrounds. Reference to all schools indicates all secondary schools across the country.

Pupils make very good progress from entry to the school onwards. In the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2002, 2001 and 2000, pupils of all levels of competence attained well above average standards in comparison with all schools and with similar schools. The trend in the average point score attained in the tests since the last inspection has been above the national upward trend.

During Years 10 and 11, pupils continue to progress very well. The percentage gaining five or more grades A* to C and A* to G in GCSE examinations in 2002 was well above average, and this result has been sustained in all recent years. The percentage who regularly attain grades A* or A far exceeds the national average. In 2002, the percentage of pupils who attained at least one GCSE grade was very high, and the school was among the top five per cent of schools achieving this standard in the country. The trend in performance, shown by pupils' average point score, has risen in line with the national rate of improvement.

The school sets itself challenging targets to attain in examinations and regularly reaches these.

In the work seen during the inspection, in English, all pupils express their ideas very clearly in discussion. They gain good understanding from reading and they write confidently, in a good range of styles. However, lower attainers have difficulty in analysing the texts that they read well enough. Pupils explain their reasoning when tackling a mathematical problem very well; they are competent in using trigonometry and understand the limits on the information gained from statistics. In science, they show good skills in research and they present their findings well in practical work; their skills of note-making are less well developed.

In the sixth form, the students progress very well to attain well above average A-level standards. In A-level examinations in 2001 (the last year for which validated data are available) students attained highly in gaining grades A and B and results, overall, were well above average. In 2002, standards were equally strong. In AS examinations in 2002 and 2001, almost all students passed, and a good proportion attained the highest grades. Very few students do not complete their courses. In the work seen during the inspection, students' oral skills were impressive. For example, they made well argued, sophisticated response to complex texts in English literature. In mathematics and science subjects, they argued a case well. In French and German, they responded fluently and confidently in both foreign languages, and in religion, philosophy and ethics, they engaged in animated discussion about the course topics.

Overall, pupils and students achieve very well throughout the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are interested in their work and have very positive attitudes towards the school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils behave very well in lessons and when they are not directly supervised around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils have mature and sensible attitudes towards school and work. They act responsibly and relationships are very good.
Attendance	Pupils are reliable and attend regularly. Very few do not meet their obligations to attend.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The teaching is effective. It meets the needs of pupils of all levels of competence well. All, including talented pupils and those with special educational needs, learn successfully from the good teaching that they receive. Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding are very good. They have high expectations of what pupils should achieve and they challenge them to reach their best standard. The marking of work is often very helpful to pupils in telling them how they can improve. In the very few lessons that were less than satisfactory, lessons lacked pace and pupils were not managed well enough for them to learn as well as they

could. English, mathematics and science are very well taught, and literacy and numeracy are well taught across the curriculum. Of the other subjects, religious education is especially well taught. Below the sixth form, the teaching of art and design is less effective in enabling all pupils to achieve their full potential.

At all ages, pupils are keen to learn and work hard to extend their knowledge and understanding. Their very positive attitudes to learning ensure that they make very good progress from the good teaching that they receive.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall. The curriculum provides equally well for all pupils. All receive the full breadth of the National Curriculum. Careers advice is satisfactory in enabling pupils to make choices at age 16. Personal, social and health education is provided, but the time allowed is not generous. Extra-curricular opportunities are very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils have access to the full curriculum and receive effective support in mainstream classes from support assistants and teachers to help them to achieve very well in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The school works hard to provide for the very few pupils for whom English is not their first language.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils' moral and social development is very well provided for. Provision for their spiritual development is satisfactory. Their experience of European culture is very well provided for, but their understanding of diverse cultures is not extensive enough.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The house system is especially effective in the care, guidance and support that it provides for pupils and supports them to achieve very well.
Partnership with parents	Good. The school works closely with parents on matters concerning their children and most parents recognise how well the school meets their children's needs.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headmaster and other key staff	Very good. The headmaster has high expectations of the staff and the pupils and drives the school to achieve very well. Management by senior staff, heads of department and heads of house is good and ensures that teaching and the quality of education overall enable pupils to achieve as well as they can.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors provide very good support to the headmaster and share his high expectations of the school. They inform themselves well about standards and provision. They do not provide a collective act of worship for all pupils each day.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school monitors its performance effectively and identifies areas for improvement and gives these support and encouragement. The information describing the school's performance in examinations is used effectively and targets set are realistic and achievable.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school uses the resources available to it very effectively to enable its pupils to achieve very well. Much accommodation is in huts, and leadership, staff and pupils do exceptionally well with this temporary accommodation. Subject-specialist accommodation is insufficient to meet all needs well. Overall, best-value principles are applied well: the school's performance compares very well with that of other schools; it provides pupils with a good range of learning experiences; it uses its below-average income very well. An audit is overdue.

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 expects their children to work hard and achieve their best and their children make good progress. They are happy to approach the school with problems concerning their children. The teaching is good. The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homework could be better. Some parents want to be better informed about how their children are getting on. Some think that the school could work more closely with them.

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. Homework was set regularly during the inspection and was helpful in extending pupils' subject knowledge and understanding. Written reports are suitably informative and parents' meetings are seen as very helpful by most parents. The school works hard to act in the interest of pupils and parents. However, it could consult more freely to convince all parents and pupils that their interest is its highest priority.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The school's sixth form was established ten years ago. It consists of equal numbers of male and female students, comprising 154 in total. It has increased from 100 to 154 students since the last inspection in April 1997. Currently one in three students from Year 11 joins the sixth form at age 16. A few join at age 16 from other schools. The curriculum provides a good range of AS and A-level courses, extended by key skills, physical education and general studies. To gain entry to the sixth form, students require at least seven GCSE subjects at grades A* to C and a grade B in the subjects they intend to study. Many more students seek entry to the sixth form than can be admitted.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very effective. It achieves standards that are well above average and it has sustained these since it was last inspected. The teaching is very good and students learn very successfully from it. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good and ensure that the quality of education that students receive is both impressive and cost-effective.

Strengths

- Students attain well above average standards in A-level examinations.
- The teaching is very good and helps students to achieve very well.
- The leadership and management are effective.
- Students have very mature attitudes to learning and act most responsibly.
- Students receive a rich learning experience through the curriculum and extension activities.

What could be improved

- More students should have the opportunity to join the sixth form, but cannot be provided for in the accommodation that is available.
- Pupils' experience of differing cultures and traditions is not extensive enough.

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. A-level standards are above average and many students achieve very well. Teaching is very good. Students' very positive attitudes help them to learn successfully.
Physics	Very good. Students enjoy the subject. They make very good progress. They attained impressive A-level results in 2002. The teaching is very good and some is excellent. Students' effort, concentration and independence are well developed.

Subject area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Information and communication technology	Very good. A-level results are above average and continue to improve. Teaching is very good and enables students to achieve very well compared with their results in GCSE examinations.
Sports studies	Very good. Students achieve very well because the teaching and management of the subject are very good. A-level results are above average.
Art and design	Good. Students' performance has improved from the below average standards of some recent years and they are now achieving well. Good teaching enables students to produce good painting and life-drawing. Insufficient use is made of information and communication technology (ICT).
Geography	Very good. A-level results are above average. Very good teaching helps students to learn effectively, especially from class discussion. Fieldwork investigation is a strength.
History	Very good. Students achieve very well because teaching is very good and teachers' impressive subject knowledge, skilful questioning and marking extend students' understanding very well.
English literature	Excellent. Students achieve very well and gain excellent results in AS and A-level examinations. Very good teaching ensures that students respond to challenging texts with understanding and enjoyment.
French	Very good. Teaching is very good and enables students to achieve very well. A-level results are consistently very strong and students' personal development is very good.

In other subjects work was sampled. The teaching was usually very good, and consistently so in the lessons seen in AS and A-level biology, chemistry and sociology. The teaching of AS and A-level religion, philosophy and ethics was excellent and enabled students to achieve well above average standards.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students receive effective support and guidance to enable them to achieve successfully. They are advised and helped very well in making application for courses in higher education, but careers advice for the few who enter employment at age 18 is insufficient.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management are effective. Students achieve very well because teaching and learning are very good. Funding is used effectively. Staffing, accommodation and learning resources are used well to enable students to achieve success. However, accommodation is insufficient to provide entry for all students who want to join the sixth form. Best value principles are applied well.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• They are well taught and challenged to achieve their best.• Teachers are available and willing to help them with problems concerning their work.• They are helped and advised to work and research independently.• They enjoy being members of the sixth form and would advise others to join it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The range of activities and courses beyond their main subjects.• Careers advice.• The school's willingness to listen to and respond to their views.

Inspectors agree with students in what they like about the sixth form. They note that students have good opportunities through the late afternoon enrichment programme to extend their learning. Almost all students intend to follow courses in higher education when they leave the sixth form; they receive very good support in applying to universities, but there is little specific advice on the careers opportunities available. The school does consult with students and they have a series of committees through which they can express their views, but there is no formal system through which to express them to the headmaster and governors, and inspectors agree that this would be desirable. The school is working towards putting this into place.

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

Pupils attain standards well above the national average in Year 9 National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations.

1. The performance of pupils in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations is impressive. Since the last inspection, when pupils enter the school at the beginning of Year 7, their attainment, overall, has been above average, as shown by their results in the Year 6 National Curriculum tests; some have reached well above average standards. However, one in three pupils in all year groups attained below average standards when they first joined the school. By the time they take the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9, they attain standards that are well above the national average in the three subjects tested, English, mathematics and science. Pupils' results in 2002 well maintained this strong profile of performance. Pupils of all levels of competence and ethnic background do well. Both the girls and the boys well outperform their respective gender groups nationally. Pupils' attainment in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests is consistently well above the average of similar schools. From the evidence of the average point score attained in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests, the upward trend in pupils' performances in the national tests has been ahead of the national rate of improvement.

2. At the end of Year 11, pupils of all levels of competence sustain the well above average standards that they reached in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests. The percentages of pupils attaining five or more grades A* to C and five or more grades A* to G in GCSE examinations have been consistently well above the national average, including the latest result, in 2002. All pupils do very well. Talented pupils gain double the proportion of the top A* grades in GCSE examinations than is attained nationally. Some pupils attain ten high grades. Lower attainers, some of whom have special educational learning needs, also do very well. In 2002, for example, the percentage of pupils attaining one or more graded subject results in the GCSE examinations was very high, and the school was judged to be among the top five per cent of schools in the country reaching this standard. Results in GCSE examinations compare very well with those of similar schools. Although the performance of boys is less consistent, when compared with that of girls in the attainment of the A* to C grades, boys attain well ahead of boys nationally. Although standards attained have been sustained at a well above average level since the last inspection, the trend in performance in GCSE examinations has continued to rise in line with the national upward trend, based on the evidence of the average point score attained by the different year groups during the last five years.

3. The school has high expectations of what the pupils should achieve. Everyone takes GCSE courses with the expectation that their results will be the best that they can achieve. Consequently, standards throughout the school have remained very strong. This is apparent in work seen, for example, in English and mathematics. In English, pupils are articulate and express their ideas very clearly in class discussions. They read fluently and gain a very good understanding of the texts that they use. Many read widely, beyond the prescribed texts. They write effectively and confidently in a good range of styles. In mathematics, pupils also participate very well in discussions and explain their mathematical reasoning very well. Most have a good understanding of the different aspects of mathematics and are very competent in using trigonometry. They show clear understanding when interpreting statistics. Pupils present their written work in mathematics very clearly and accurately.

Teaching is good and helps pupils of all levels of competence to make very good progress.

4. The teaching of pupils of all ages and levels of competence is good, overall. Of the 55 lessons seen during the inspection, more than one lesson in every four was very good and one was excellent. Very few were not at least satisfactory. The teaching enables all pupils to learn successfully and confidently and meets their needs well. Consequently, pupils make very good progress throughout the school. In Years 7, 8 and 9, they progress very well and achieve a very good rate of added value to their performance on entry, as shown by the difference in their performance between Year 6 and Year 9 National Curriculum tests. Pupils maintain their very good rate of progress through Years 10 and 11 and, therefore, do very well in GCSE examinations. The good quality of teaching contributes well to ensuring that pupils achieve their best.

5. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects that they teach. This enables them to interest pupils in the work and to support their progress. For example, in a Year 11 mathematics lesson in which the pupils were introduced to histograms, the teacher's very thorough knowledge of the topic helped the pupils to extend well their own understanding of ideas that were new to them and attain well above average standards. In a very well taught Year 8 lesson in ICT, the teacher's very good subject knowledge enabled all the pupils, including several with learning difficulties, to use the software available to improve their skills of presentation with the use of images and effective manipulation of information.

6. The planning of lessons is effective. The work to be done is usually clearly indicated to pupils at the start so that the teacher and the pupils share understanding of what is to be achieved in the time available. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson, the teacher made the lesson's objectives clear to the pupils and outlined these on the whiteboard from which the pupils noted these for themselves. The lesson included many activities – for example: individual reading, the development of pupils' vocabulary and techniques of writing and planning. All activities were accomplished very well and the pupils achieved highly, helped by their shared understanding of what was to be achieved. A good range of well-planned activities is followed in most lessons and pupils' make very good progress with the work that is set.

7. The teachers manage the pupils very well in lessons. Good discipline is almost always apparent. In a Year 11 science lesson for lower-attaining pupils doing practical work on electrolysis, the teacher managed the pupils very well so that they enhanced their theoretical understanding of the topic with well managed practical work. Pupils' work in a very good Year 11 English lesson on the play, *Lear*, by Edward Bond, was very well managed by the teacher, supported by very good relationships with the pupils. In most lessons, teachers and pupils have very good relationships. Pupils' attitudes to the work are very positive because they share a keen sense of purpose to learn with teachers.

8. This strong sense of purpose enables pupils to appreciate that learning is worthwhile. Teachers have high expectations that pupils will achieve very well from the learning activities that they provide. A key purpose of teaching is to present pupils with challenging work and, in most cases, stretch their ideas and understanding. In a very good Year 11 physical education lesson which was part of the compulsory curriculum, pupils were challenged very well to develop their skills in using the trampoline. The teacher ensured that all made very good progress and pupils helped and encouraged each other in what was an enjoyable and very successful learning experience. The teachers make work suitably challenging to classes of both higher and lower attainment, but a greater sense of enjoyment and success tends to be more often apparent in the former than in the latter classes. However, examples of successful and challenging lessons for lower attainers were seen. In a very good Year 9

French lesson for low attainers, for example, each pupil with special educational learning needs was assigned a suitably challenging target to reach; the teacher assisted and monitored each pupil's progress as they moved towards these targets. A Year 9 religious education lesson for lower attainers on the issue of responsibility for the environment was very well pitched to the pupils' level of understanding. The teacher very skilfully helped them to understand the meaning of key words, such as 'responsibility' and 'duty', and the work challenged their thinking and enlarged their understanding of the subject very well. Most lessons are well adapted to pupils' levels of attainment and potential. They are usually suitably challenging, move at a brisk pace and extend pupils' thinking and learning well.

9. A good range of methods is used to support pupils' learning. Teachers use questions well and these often lead to discussion which is a feature of many lessons. Teachers have good control of their classes, and pupils are able to express their views in a situation where, almost always, they want to learn and listen carefully to each other, as well as to the teacher. Learning becomes a shared enterprise in these lessons. Teachers also demonstrate essential subject skills very well. For example, in physical education, the teachers are themselves successful practitioners and demonstrate the necessary skills to their classes. As a result, pupils learn from the role model that the teacher provides. The teacher's own good humoured, confident use of French in a Year 9 lesson enabled the pupils to overcome their self-consciousness by clapping and chanting to a rhythm to learn the essential rule and endings of the imperfect tense. They all made good progress and attained very well. The teacher of a Year 7 music lesson helped the pupils to understand the importance of a regular beat, by using a metronome and challenging pupils to clap to a set notation. This method was very effective and pupils made positive progress in the short time available; they also found the experience challenging and fun.

10. Support staff and learning resources are used effectively. Since the last inspection, the school has employed learning support assistants who help pupils with special educational needs in class, where appropriate. These staff work well with teachers who ensure that the assistants know what work is to be done and how they can best meet the needs of individual pupils.

11. Teachers mark pupils' written work well. Some marking is of very high quality – for example, in English. The teachers indicate very clearly what the pupils should do to improve their work, and this contributes very well to the very good progress that is made. The work set for pupils to do at home is also well marked and assessed. During the inspection, teachers set homework regularly and it was well chosen to extend pupils' learning.

Pupils are highly motivated, want to learn and behave very responsibly.

12. Pupils in all year groups have very positive attitudes to learning. In the vast majority of lessons seen during the inspection, their attitudes were at least good. In one lesson in three, they were very good or excellent. Pupils are keen to learn. They participate in lessons well. They listen to teachers and to each other in discussion in a sensible and often mature manner. Year 9 pupils, in a lesson on responsibility for the quality of the environment, for example, expressed considered views on this important topic in a very mature and sensible manner. Learning is usually good or better in lessons because pupils respond well to the opportunities provided by teachers. Pupils gain knowledge and understanding of the subject because their attitudes are so positive and almost all are keen to learn. They concentrate on their work very well in class and they take homework seriously. Relationships among pupils are very good in almost all lessons. Pupils respect each other's views and they respond to teachers' questions and contribute in class in the confidence that their views will be heard and treated seriously by their classmates. Relationships between teachers and pupils are also very good. Both enjoyed the experience of learning in the vast majority of lessons seen.

Pupils respond well to humour and teaching and learning are made more effective because the serious business of learning in lessons is sometimes also fun. They take up the opportunities provided through the extra-curricular programme freely.

13. Pupils behave very well in lessons. Pupils also behave very well when they are not directly supervised out of lessons. Although the inspection was held when snow was on the ground, the pupils behaved very sensibly – in almost all situations!

The headmaster gives strong direction to the school and has ensured good improvement since the last inspection.

14. The headmaster, with the support of the staff and the governors, has the confidence of the vast majority of parents that the school will enable their children to achieve their best. He expects that staff and pupils will all achieve their highest personal standard of work and conduct, and they duly respond. The headmaster, with the governors' close support, ensures that the school maintains the traditional values of hard work, good order, and successful learning and achievement. Consequently, he ensures that the school provides all pupils with worthwhile opportunities. His leadership is purposeful and determined and he has ensured that impressive standards have been maintained since the last inspection. For example, results in Year 9 National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations have been consistently strong. Pupils achieve very well because the school's leadership ensures that teaching is effective. Where it is less effective, subject departments are expected and supported to find ways to improve. Performance management is in place and helpful in ensuring that teaching is of good quality. Newly qualified teachers appreciate the support that the school provides to help them to improve their teaching skills.

15. Since the last inspection, good improvement has been made under the headmaster's leadership to manage the changes and challenges of the last six years. The number of pupils attending the school has increased considerably and much temporary accommodation has been brought into use. However, these changes have been very well managed and standards have been well maintained. The headmaster has led the school forward in dealing with the key issues of the last inspection. Lower attainers and pupils with special educational learning needs now achieve very well – for example, in GCSE examinations. The requirement to raise standards in English has been very well met and standards in this subject are very good. The issue to raise standards in mental mathematics has been well met, and pupils are confident users of the subject. Standards in design and technology in Years 7 to 9 are now satisfactory, and the school has overcome staffing difficulties in this subject as far as it can. Boys' standards in GCSE examinations have risen; they attain much higher standards than boys do nationally, although their performance in gaining the higher grades in recent years remains more erratic than that of girls. The curriculum has been improved and now involves personal and social education, through the Pupils' Development Programme. Careers education in the main school and religious education for sixth formers are now provided. The school has monitored its performance well and pupils achieve very well. Considerable improvement has taken place in providing for pupils with special educational needs and learning support assistants are helpful to identified pupils. The headmaster makes sure that the school does all it can to provide an act of collective worship for all pupils each day, and assemblies are acts of worship.

16. Although the funding available to the school is below average and the accommodation has weaknesses, the school achieves very good standards. The headmaster ensures that the key purposes of teaching and learning have remained the highest priority and he, with the support of staff and governors, has ensured that standards have been very well sustained. He has also enabled the school to achieve the status of a Beacon School, and has

contributed well to supporting and improving educational provision and standards in other schools.

The house system enables pupils to develop very well, both personally and socially.

17. Pupils' personal and social development is very well supported by the house system. All pupils are members of one of the five houses, and the sense of family identity is established from the time when each pupil joins the school until the end of compulsory education at age 16. To foster relationships further across the school, pupils are members of tutor groups that consist of members of all age groups - Years 7 to 11. The system is very effective in helping pupils to establish and maintain the very good relationships that exist across the school. Heads of house are centrally important in the care that the school provides for pupils; they have primary responsibility for pupils' personal and social development. The heads of house are the main link to parents. They oversee pupils' academic progress and wellbeing. Parents are encouraged to contact the respective head of house if they have any concern about their child's wellbeing and parents indicate that they are very confident to do so.

18. The houses give pupils the opportunity to exercise responsibility for others. Some pupils are appointed as house prefects and take a share of responsibility for the good running of the school. Others are games captains and help to manage the many competitions that give all pupils the opportunity to compete and work for their house. All pupils have the opportunity - and the vast majority take it up - to represent their house during the year in the very good range of activities that are available. The house is also the centre through which pupils exercise social responsibility – for example, to support selected charities and to undertake community service. The houses also organise social events to support pupils' social development and to foster positive relationships. For example, evenings of music, dance and drama are provided and well supported. The houses are also centres for pupils to participate as active "citizens" who are socially responsible members of their house and their school. Some are representatives of the house councils that began in the autumn term 2002 and express views to the head of house and other staff on matters concerning the whole school.

The extra-curricular opportunities provided to extend pupils' worthwhile experience are very good.

19. The school provides the pupils with a very good range of extra-curricular opportunities. These extend participants' worthwhile experience and their learning very well. An especially impressive feature of provision is the range of opportunities that are made available each day when school closes. The timetable ends at 3.00 pm, but between 3.15 pm and 4.15 pm, extra-curricular activities are available. Many pupils travel to school by bus and to ensure that no one is denied access to the opportunities available, the school provides an additional bus at 4.30 pm each day so that everyone can stay on in the knowledge that they will have transport home provided by the school at its own expense, not that of parents. During this after-school hour, helplines are available which enable pupils to speak directly with subject teachers to overcome any difficulties with work. All subjects are provided for, and the support received assists pupils to achieve higher standards. Pupils may use the library for homework after school, and receive staff support there, if they so choose. However, many other worthwhile recreational activities also take place. The range of sports provided is impressive and many pupils compete for their house and the school and some achieve representative honours at county level. There are many subject clubs available – for example, for drama, foreign languages and computing. Many residential opportunities are taken up by pupils, including foreign exchanges with both France and Germany. Many educational visits are provided that enhance pupils' experience of the subjects that they study well.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Specialist accommodation in several subjects is insufficient.

20. The school is the only secondary school situated in the town of Wymondham to provide education for local people. Its best accommodation is that of the adjacent leisure centre, use of which is shared between town and school. The school is very popular with pupils and parents because it is very successful and pupils achieve very well. However, the number of pupils in the school has increased by over 400 since the last inspection in 1997. This has put pressure on the school's accommodation and the local authority has responded by putting many individual, mobile classrooms on to the site. These provide no more than adequate spaces for teaching and learning and are disliked by pupils and parents because they are hot in summer and movement between them, for example during the bad weather at the time of the inspection, led to pupils arriving cold and wet to lessons in some cases. However, although the mobile classrooms are adequate for general lessons, they do not provide subject-specialist accommodation and the school has to use its original accommodation to supply these needs. Deficiencies are apparent in the accommodation for science, design and technology, drama, music, vocational courses and changing accommodation for physical education. Parts of the accommodation are not accessible to people who have physical impairments; the school is concerned to make access possible, but funding for the changes necessary is not currently available. Overall, the use of the existing specialist accommodation is excessive and many of these classrooms are old, worn and barely adequate. Staff and pupils deserve better.

Pupils' experience of differing cultures and traditions is not extensive enough.

21. Pupils' cultural development is very well provided for with respect to European culture. For example, regular visits to theatres, galleries, historical sites and places of worship are provided. However, provision for pupils to appreciate diverse cultures is insufficient. Some very good provision is available in religious education and the Pupils' Development Programme includes considerations of anti-racism. Nevertheless, the school has not recently surveyed the curriculum to determine whether the range of provision is sufficient to extend pupils' understanding of the diversity of world cultures; the subject curriculum, overall, does not provide enough opportunity for pupils to gain the wider cultural experience that they need to equip them fully for life in a multi-cultural society.

Arrangements for consultation with pupils should be extended to enable them to participate more and to share responsibility in accomplishing school priorities.

22. Prompted by the guidance and expectations of the local authority, the school introduced house councils one term ago, in September 2002. Two meetings had taken place by the time of the inspection in January 2003. The school's intention is to provide opportunity for pupils to participate in discussion on matters of significance to the life and work of the school. Citizenship became a required subject of the National Curriculum in September 2002, and representative councils involving pupils is one means of providing them with practical experience and active involvement in democratic representation. The school intends, eventually, to expand pupils' representation and to create a structure resulting in a school council. These initiatives should help the pupils to learn more of the responsibilities, constraints and benefits of representation and gain encouragement to participate as active citizens in a democratic society. The school's activities are still at an early stage and the initiative awaits implementation in full.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

23. In order for the school to improve further the standards and the educational provision achieved, the headmaster, staff and governors should:

- (1) Provide a better situation for learning by improving subject specialist accommodation for science, design and technology, drama, music, vocational courses and the changing accommodation for physical education. (Paragraph: 20)
- (2) Extend pupils' experience by developing their knowledge and understanding further of differing cultures and traditions. (Paragraph: 21)
- (3) Extend opportunities for consultation with pupils to enable them to participate more and share responsibility for the life and work of the school. (Paragraph: 22)

Sixth form

- (1) Enable all students to enter the sixth form who want to do so by using all appropriate means to provide sufficient accommodation to meet the needs of all applicants. (Paragraphs: 45, 65, 66)
- (2) Extend students' experience by developing their knowledge and understanding further of differing cultures and traditions. (Paragraph: 50)

In addition to the key issues listed above, the headmaster, staff and governors should also consider including the following issues for the sixth form in their action plan:

- Improve careers education for those who leave formal education at age 18. (Paragraph: 57)
- Provide further opportunities for students to express their views to the headmaster and governors. (Paragraph: 34)
- Provide the opportunity for a daily act of collective worship for all students every day. (This issue applies equally to the main school.) (Paragraph: 67)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	55
	Sixth form	48
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		32

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7– 11							
Number	1	14	19	19	0	2	0
Percentage	2	26	35	35	0	4	0
Sixth form							
Number	4	20	22	2	0	0	0
Percentage	8	42	46	4	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 [enter Years 7 – 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than two percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1159	154
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	58	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	148	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	25
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	28

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.3
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	105	124	229

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	91	93	90
	Girls	115	111	106
	Total	206	204	196
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	90 (90)	89 (83)	86 (83)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	60 (66)	73 (62)	49 (41)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	95	95
	Girls	N/A	117	111
	Total	N/A	212	206
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	N/A (90)	93 (93)	89 (80)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	N/A (55)	66 (62)	54 (40)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2002	95	119

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	52	93	96
	Girls	90	117	120
	Total	142	210	216
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	66 (65)	98 (98)	100 (99)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	52.2
	National	39.8

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

Year 2001

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	30	28	58
	Average point score per candidate	19.4	22.2	20.8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	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	30	28	58	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Average point score per candidate	19.4	22.2	20.8	N/A	N/A	N/A
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	N/A	N/A	N/A

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	1093	46	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	37	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	1	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	6	0	0
Any other ethnic group	0	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	173	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 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	76.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	316

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.3
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.6
Key Stage 4	22.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	3 335 832
Total expenditure	3 282 643
Expenditure per pupil	2 654
Balance brought forward from previous year	32 324
Balance carried forward to next year	85 513

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	30.3
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	31.4

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3
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	1313
Number of questionnaires returned	267

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	42	51	5	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	54	39	5	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	51	5	0	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	54	15	3	3
The teaching is good.	40	53	2	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	47	13	5	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	51	38	6	3	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	32	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	28	47	14	3	8
The school is well led and managed.	49	40	2	0	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	47	3	1	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	41	43	8	1	7

Other issues raised by parents

Parents were, overall, very supportive of the school and endorsed its success in enabling their children to achieve successfully. Some considered that learning for lower attainers and pupils with special educational learning needs was less enjoyable and effective than for higher attainers.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

24. The standard for entry to the sixth form is the achievement of seven grades A* to C in GCSE examinations and at least grade B in the subjects to be studied at advanced level. These standards are higher than are usually found in maintained schools. Students' results in A-level examinations were well above average in 2001, the last year for which nationally validated results are available. Results were also very good in 2002. Both boys and girls attained well above average standards. The girls' results are usually a little ahead of those of the boys. The attainment of grades A and B in A-level examinations is regularly much higher than the national standard, and well over half the grades attained are at this level. Overall, students make very good progress from the GCSE examination results that they attain, compared with their A-level results gained two years later. Although they begin advanced courses in Year 12 with strong academic profiles arising from their performance in GCSE examinations, the value added to their GCSE performance is very good. No comparative, nationally validated results are yet available for AS level examinations in 2001 and 2002. However, almost all candidates passed these examinations, and very many attained grades A or B. Overall, students' results in AS and A-level examinations are impressive and students almost always achieve their academic potential, with most achieving ahead of the standards that might reasonably be predicted from their GCSE examination results.

25. There is some variation in performance between subjects. In 2001, the latest year for which nationally validated comparisons of performance can be made, students attained well above average standards in A-level biology, English literature and sociology. Their result in sports studies was above average, and average in ICT, geography, history and mathematics. Students' results were below average in chemistry, general studies and physics, and well below average in art and design. There were too few entrants in French and German for valid comparisons with the national performance to be made, but the few students involved achieved very well. In 2002, results in A-level examinations in English literature were again very strong. Results in physics, chemistry and history greatly improved, and the few students taking French and German again attained very well. Students' performance in art and design also improved considerably on the weak performance in 2001, and all candidates passed the examination. In AS level examinations, students' performance in English literature was outstanding; a large majority of candidates gained grade A and all gained at least grade B.

26. In Year 12 AS and Year 13 A-level courses, the work seen during the inspection in the nine subjects that are reported in full in Part E of this report, students were attaining well above average standards in English literature, French, geography, history, ICT and physics. They were seen to attain well above average standards in mathematics and their work in further mathematics was of an exceptionally high standard. Work seen was above average in sports studies and art and design. Compared with the standards that might reasonably be expected of students at this point in their courses, they were achieving very well in eight of the nine subjects inspected and reported in full in Part E of this report, with the exception of art and design, in which their progress was good. Overall, this is a very impressive academic performance and performance in English literature is exceptional.

27. The other subjects that students are studying in the sixth form were sampled. After one term of AS and A-level courses, the quality of the work seen was above average, and often of a very good, standard. The one key skills lesson to enhance students' skills in ICT that could be seen enabled the students to achieve well. Some students attained level 3 in some of the key skill modules taken in the 2002 examination.

28. In all subjects, students have impressive skills of speaking and express themselves, fluently, cogently and effectively. In English, for example, they argue a case very well and analyse and interpret their reading effectively to make a thoughtful, mature response to very demanding texts. Their skills in speaking are equally apparent in mathematics and the three science subjects, where they are adept at assimilating and presenting evidence effectively to support an argument. In French and German, they speak with confidence and fluency in both languages. Work in religion, philosophy and ethics, is frequently characterised by animated discussion in lessons. Students' written work complements their skills of speaking very well. The meticulous marking of it in English, for example, guides them very well to achieve highly.

29. Since the last inspection, standards have been maintained at an impressive, well above average standard. The evidence of the inspection indicates continued high performance. Very few students do not complete their courses.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

30. Students at Wymondham are fully committed to making the most of their time in the sixth form. They all succeed in completing the probationary period that the school requires to ensure that their attitudes and application to work are very positive. They enter the sixth form knowing that the school expects their full commitment to work hard, and they rise magnificently to these high expectations. During the inspection, students' attitudes in lessons were usually very good and in a quarter of all lessons seen, their attitudes were excellent. Consequently, they make very good progress and achieve very well. Their attendance is very good; during the inspection, most lessons had their full complement of students present.

31. Behaviour is very good and students set themselves up as excellent role models for younger students to aspire to. The school has never had occasion to exclude a student for unacceptable behaviour since the sixth form was established in 1992. In a sixth form assembly, students listened attentively as the assistant headteacher explained the principles of the Amish people, making a strong point about how their values contrast with ours of today. Students showed much respect for the occasion.

32. Students' personal development is very good and students act in a mature and responsible way. They work very well without direct supervision by teachers. Relationships with staff are very good - warm, friendly, yet respectful. In conversation with inspectors, students generously praised the way staff help and support them. There is a positive atmosphere in the sixth form, which shows itself in the way various committees work together for the good of others. For instance, students organise their own social events, sporting fixtures and undertake an impressive amount of charity work. They have a very good sense of community spirit. Many help in lower school classes and others involve themselves in local community groups - for example, by helping out with the local Beavers' organisation. Involvement in a recycling committee helps to ensure students are conscious of environmental priorities.

33. Just under half of all students returned their pre-inspection questionnaire to give their views on what the school provides for them. The vast majority were very positive about life in the sixth form and this was supported by discussions with inspectors. Students enjoy sixth form life and would recommend it to others.

34. Sixth formers have a good say in how activities such as social events, fundraising and sporting fixtures are organised through their own committees. The school considers that students are consulted on a wide range of matters. However, there is no forum for students to express their views to the headmaster and governors to enable them to influence whole school policies and school development. Students had difficulty in pointing to decisions where there had been a clear and formalised response to their views. The school indicates that it is planning to extend opportunities for consultation with students, and it should do so.

35. At the last inspection, students' attitudes and behaviour were described as very good, and since then, they have been very successfully maintained.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

36. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is consistently very good. Of the 48 lessons seen, half were of very good or excellent quality. Almost all the others were at least good and none was less than satisfactory. The teaching meets the needs of girls and boys equally well. Talented students achieve very well as a result of the very good teaching that they receive. In eight of the nine subjects reported in full in Part E of this report, the teaching was consistently very good; in art and design, it was good. In the other subjects taught in the sixth form, there were few lessons that were not at least well taught, and very good teaching was seen in most subjects, including a lesson in which students received guidance in making application to universities. The teaching of both lessons seen in the religion, philosophy and ethics course was of excellent quality. In almost all subjects, students benefit from the very good teaching that they receive and make very good progress. In art and design, they progress well and the good teaching is ensuring that standards are improving.

37. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subjects that they teach. This enables them to inspire students' interest in the work and helps to motivate and stimulate them to achieve very well. For example, in a Year 12 further mathematics lesson on linear programming, the teacher's knowledge of the subject helped the students to appreciate its uses in business; the calculations were made more interesting and relevant because the teacher was able to help the students to appreciate the practical applications that were possible. The teacher's knowledge and competence in using equipment in a Year 13 lesson in ICT ensured that technical hitches were rapidly overcome and the flow of the lesson was not hindered. The teaching of the key skill of ICT was good. In a Year 13 sociology lesson, where students were presented with new concepts, such as 'disenchantment', 'rationalization' and the Weberian, 'iron cage', the teacher's understanding of these ideas ensured that explanations were clear and enabled the students to apply them to their own experience very well.

38. Lessons are consistently very well planned and follow an organised sequence of activities. For example, the teacher of a very good Year 12 English literature lesson planned an excellent progression of activities on how memory can be portrayed. At first each individual student was expected to form a personal view of the topic; this was extended to them working in pairs and questioning each other on their interpretations of memories and then these were shared more widely. The students increasingly took responsibility for their own learning because the teacher's planning of the lesson required this of them. The inspection took place shortly before public examinations and some planned activities involved revision of previous work. Effective lessons were seen in many subjects, and in Year 12

chemistry and physics lessons, for example, teachers planned activities carefully to accommodate the expressed needs of the students.

39. Teachers' management of students is excellent. Relationships between teachers and students rest on trust. Students have confidence in teachers' skills and expertise and respond very well. This enables teachers to present difficult work to students who rise to the challenge because they have ready access to the teacher, both in the classroom, and on an individual basis outside it, should they need further support. Such positive relationships ensure that all students are confident to speak in class and express their own views knowing that these will be received well. Consequently, discussion is often of a high standard; teachers set this standard by listening, receiving ideas and responding positively to them, and students follow their lead. For example, girls and boys in a Year 13 sports studies lesson on leadership, contributed freely to the discussion and learned from each other as well as from the teacher, because relationships were excellent and supported the learning very well.

40. The work with which students are provided is very challenging. In most lessons, teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. All very well taught lessons were rigorous in challenging students' ideas and stretched their thinking and imagination. Subject ideas are explored very well and students are often expected to relate their own experience to the new learning that is presented to them. They respond very well and much successful learning results from students taking on the responsibility to explore ideas and to practise skills using their own initiative. Teachers encourage this and the learning becomes very challenging, but well pitched to the level of students' development in the subject. For example, Year 13 students in a French lesson prepared for consideration of the literature they were studying very well without the need to close direction or intervention by the teacher. In the lesson, the teacher's penetrating questions made them think deeply, question and develop their own opinions in passionate discussion.

41. Teachers use a very good range of methods to assist students' learning. Questions, for example, are used very well and often open up a topic to discussion. They challenge students' views and provoke response. Most teachers' skills in encouraging discussion and helping it along are exceptionally strong and students are, consequently, confident to articulate their ideas. Discussion enables students to clarify their own ideas and to learn from other students as well as the teacher. Teachers' skills in promoting discussion contribute considerably to the impressive standards of students' oral work achieved. Teachers adapt resources effectively to support learning. For example, in a Year 12 business studies lesson, the teacher's choice, preparation and use of case studies presented the students with a very good basis for discussion. Equipment is also used effectively to support learning – for example, in sports studies and ICT. Teachers' oral presentations to students are clear and usually to the point. However, occasionally teachers talk for too long and unnecessarily delay students from undertaking the work set for themselves.

42. The assessment and marking of students' work is very good. Teachers give students effective guidance on what they should do to improve their standards. Marking in English literature is exceptionally helpful and enables students to take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

43. Nearly all students think that they are well taught; they consider that teachers are accessible. Students think that they are helped and encouraged to work independently. Inspectors confirm this is the case.

44. At the last inspection, teaching was very good. It remains very good and some is of excellent quality and contributes very much to the well above average standards that students attain.

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

45. The quality of the curriculum is good for those students who are selected for entry. The school offers a sufficiently broad range of AS and A-level courses, which allow students to build on their academic success in GCSE examinations. However, the school can only accommodate well under half the students who wish to continue their studies in the sixth form, and imposes strict entry requirements. Those students who do not gain entry into the school's sixth form are offered advice by the careers service on educational opportunities elsewhere. A high percentage of Year 11 students who leave the school each year continue in full-time education elsewhere.

46. Almost all students who embark on sixth form studies at the school complete a two-year course, beginning with four AS-level subjects in Year 12 and continuing with three, or sometimes four A-level subjects in Year 13. All courses receive an adequate time allocation. Some provide a residential experience. For example, there is a field study week for students of geography, and an exchange for those studying German. Private study facilities are good and are used well by the students.

47. Students expressed some concerns about provision of activities and courses outside main subjects, careers advice and the way the school listens and responds to their views. In relation to careers advice, at the time of responding to the questionnaire, Year 12 students had not embarked upon the careers programme, which started during the actual inspection week. This factor may well have influenced students' views. On closer questioning of Year 13 students about careers advice, they expressed the view that preparation for university is very good but there is limited advice for the minority who consider employment at age 18. Inspectors agree that careers advice for leavers at the end of Year 13 should be better, but that advice to students about higher education courses and support for their applications to higher education are very good. A measure of the success of sixth form provision is that at least eight out of every ten students go on to study at the university of their choice.

48. Some students were critical of enrichment opportunities. The school has a good and established 'enrichment programme' that involves: key skills, careers, topics on personal development, community involvement, general studies, religious education and sport. The course is timetabled for three hours each week. Visiting speakers contribute to the programme which is compulsory, and viewed by students as an integral part of the curriculum. However, in most other sixth forms, aspects of this programme would be optional. Consequently, the activities to which students referred were additional to those of the enrichment programme, and the combination of their academic subject courses and the enrichment programme leave little time for other activities. The Pupils' Development Programme, which is scheduled for four hours per term, provides personal and social education and further enrichment, such as debates on current issues. All students are encouraged to carry out community service, mainly within the school, but also in other areas, for example with Brownie packs and in primary schools. Those students who choose to do so undertake work shadowing of work experience. Overall, inspectors did not consider that students were justified in their reservations about the enrichment opportunities provided.

49. Overall, the students are helped effectively to become mature and thoughtful individuals. Provision for their spiritual development is satisfactory. Students listen carefully and respect the views of others. In religious education and some other subjects the students add to their experience and further develop their spiritual awareness. However, not all subjects contribute to this area of experience. In lessons and assemblies, they are encouraged to reflect upon, and then question what they see around them in consideration of the human consequences of what they see and hear.

50. The provision for their moral and social development is very good. Students respond well to the opportunities provided to discuss moral issues, such as capital punishment in the Pupil Development Programme. Students have identified the need to work on behalf of, and sponsor, street children in India. All students participate in a community service programme, serving on a range of committees, helping out in lessons and other establishments. Their efforts in organising the annual talent show indicate their commitment and sense of responsibility. These activities and educational visits make a very positive contribution to students' cultural experience. Their experience of a diverse range of cultures relies heavily on the commendable input of religious education, but the contribution from most other subject areas is insufficient.

51. Statutory requirements for the sixth form are met for religious education which forms part of their curricular enrichment programme. However, although they attend assemblies regularly that are acts of worship, they do not have the opportunity every day for an act of collective worship.

52. Curricular opportunities have been well maintained since the last inspection.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

53. Assessment in the sixth form is good. The school provides a full range of data on students' academic performance to all departments electronically, to help them to monitor the progress of all students. The data includes prior attainment from entry to the school, results of Year 9 National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations and is further supported by commercial tests. During each student's first term in the sixth form, a profile of the individual's progress is produced. This gives information on current performance using AS and A-level grades, effort grades and whether the student is meeting work deadlines. This is further supplemented by a full report in the spring term prior to AS and A-level examinations. This provides written commentary on progress together with a grade on performance. In the interim period, students are monitored to ensure that they meet the academic expectations of respective departments.

54. The procedures for monitoring the academic standards of students are good. In the best instances of assessment, monitoring and recording of standards, departments regularly test students to support and inform their current progress. Some departments record data electronically and all departments review, analyse and justify academic outcomes at the end of each year. In the best instances, this reflects both local and national comparisons. The setting and monitoring of academic targets and, therefore, students' awareness of expected overall outcomes are still at a developmental stage.

Advice, support and guidance

55. Students are very well supported in the sixth form. The very good relationships that exist between staff and students and the interest staff show in them help to explain why support is so good.

56. Students undergo a rigorous interview with the headmaster before they are accepted into the sixth form; this is complemented by two formal days of induction. Consequently, students are very clear about what is being offered and their obligations as members of the sixth form. It is extremely rare for a student to leave the sixth form or change courses. However, staff are considerate towards students' personal circumstances and will try and accommodate them as best they can, even when this means repeating a part or full year. A new system where students have both form tutors and personal tutors is working well; the latter are chosen by each student, personally, as the member of staff they feel they best relate to, often their previous form tutor.

57. Students receive information of very good quality about choices in higher education and they are very well guided through the process of applying to university. In the first of a series of careers lessons for Year 12 students, on the theme 'What is higher education?' they gained from the teacher's expert knowledge of the options available, enlivened with interesting and relevant references to former Wymondham students and their chosen career-paths. Although opportunities for work shadowing are encouraged, the provision of careers advice on opportunities for the minority of students who do not wish to move to higher education is insufficient and an area in which the school should improve its provision.

58. There are satisfactory procedures in place to ensure students' health and safety. Staff are very aware and vigilant concerning students' personal and domestic circumstances and there is an appropriate understanding of child protection procedures.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

59. The school has a good partnership with parents. In turn, parents are supportive and, as the local school, it is very popular. Unfortunately, because of the lack of accommodation, the sixth form can only take approximately one half of all students who wish to join. Parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire and those at the pre-inspection meeting were positive in their praise of provision for the sixth form and the high standards that students are helped to achieve.

60. The majority of parents replied positively to most areas in the questionnaire, as can be seen in the summary of response in Part B of this report. They are especially pleased about the strong work ethic, the good progress that students make, the good teaching and strong leadership. Positive comments were made about the degree of independent work students are expected to do, the academic atmosphere in the sixth form and the good mix of both supervised private and independent study. Parents have no major concerns about the sixth form and inspectors fully agree with all their positive views.

61. A small minority of parents are not happy about how helpful homework is in supporting students' progress, the way they are kept informed about how students are getting on and the relationship between home and school. The inspection found that the provision for homework in the sixth form was very good. It is carefully planned, marked incisively and closely linked to work completed in class. There are two evenings each year for parents to consult with teachers and nearly all parents attend. Regular reports are informative and indicate clearly how students are getting on. This amounts to good provision. Relationships

between school and parents are good and there is informal liaison at other times if there is a concern about a student.

62. The positive relationships between school and parents, described in the last inspection report, have been successfully maintained; students continue to be very well supported.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

63. The leadership and management of the sixth form by the headmaster and his senior colleagues provide very well for the needs of current students. Students are enabled to reach well above average standards in A-level examinations, and the vast majority gain places in universities of their choice, including those with highly competitive entry requirements. Standards have been very well maintained since the last inspection. The quality of teaching is very good and ensures that students learn very successfully. Although students enter the sixth form having attained very well in GCSE examinations, they progress very well and their A-level examination results show very good added value from the standards that they attained in GCSE examinations. The day-to-day management of the sixth form meets students' needs very well and subject departmental leadership is effective in helping to maintain very good standards of teaching and learning.

64. The headmaster and governors established the sixth form in 1992. At the last inspection in 1997, it numbered 100 students. Now there are 154 students. The sixth form is very successful and standards are consistently well above average as a result of the very good teaching and learning that leadership ensures that students receive. The record of the last ten years is most impressive. However, partly because the sixth form is very successful, many more students apply to join than can be accommodated and practice is to stipulate an entry requirement of seven grades A* to C in GCSE examinations and, at least, grade B in any subject to be studied in the sixth form. Students who do not meet these criteria are not admitted to the sixth form although they are keen to stay on at age 16 and they are strongly supported by their parents in making application.

65. The school is currently unable to accommodate more sixth form students in the buildings that are available. The headmaster and governors have a long-held vision for the expansion of the sixth form. The school development plan indicates the intention to increase the size of the sixth form from its current size of 154 students to 200 by September 2003 to give the students who want to stay on equal access to the opportunities available. The school lacks enough accommodation to take in more sixth form students and the target to increase numbers to 200 was reached after the local authority agreed in the last financial year to fund some new permanent buildings on the site. However, the authority's funds were exhausted by other issues considered to be of higher priority and the school did not receive the additional accommodation. The school has applied six times to gain the status of a specialist school for the performing arts, anticipating that new buildings could be acquired from a successful outcome of these applications. However, its applications have been consistently rejected. Consequently, leadership has been unable to meet its target to expand the sixth form.

66. The aims of the school express very clearly the purpose to provide an education of high quality for local people. Entry to the sixth form is currently selective on grounds of students' prior attainment, and many local applicants are turned away, including many who might well follow advanced courses. The school has not yet adapted its planning to the disappointing circumstances of the withdrawal of the anticipated new accommodation

promised by the local authority. If school aims are to be met, new planning, for buildings and expansion of the curriculum to take current circumstances into account, is required to provide a realistic vision for the future of the sixth form.

67. The governors have worked closely and supportively with the headmaster to ensure the very successful development of the sixth form during the last ten years. They monitor standards closely and link with subject departments to inform themselves of the quality of teaching and learning. Their vision, and the planning shared with the headmaster for the further development of the sixth form within the context of the aims of the school, awaits revision. Since the last inspection, they have met the statutory requirement to provide sixth formers with their entitlement to religious education. Although students attend thought-provoking assemblies, governors do not meet the statutory requirement to provide all with the opportunity for an act of collective worship every day.

68. The school monitors its performance very well to check on the standards attained and on teaching. Data describing results in examinations are collected, analysed and interpreted to guide the setting of academic targets for subjects and to help identify underachievement. Performance management is in place and is being used effectively to identify teachers' needs for professional development. However, staff who are not teachers are not included in the system and, therefore, the school does not extend their skills as much as it could.

69. The school makes very good use of its below-average income. Spending on the sixth form is in line with what it should be, based on the respective income allocated per pupil and sixth form student. The sixth form is cost-effective. Class sizes are not unduly small and the school achieves its priorities to maintain impressive standards and sustain provision of very good quality. Best value principles are well applied. The sixth form's performance compares very well with that of other sixth forms; students are challenged very well by the teaching of the curriculum and the enrichment programme. Well established procedures ensure that competition for services is efficiently managed; however, although reconciliation of the school's budget is agreed annually with the local authority, an audit is well overdue. The principle of consultation with students is recognised by the school and students have committees through which they can express their views. However, no formal system through which they can express their views to the headmaster and governors is yet in place, but the school recognises this need and indicates that such a system is planned.

Resources

70. There is a full complement of teaching staff in the sixth form, and a good match between the demands of the curriculum and the teaching expertise available. Teachers have good access to appropriate training and guidance. Induction arrangements for newly qualified teachers are supportive of their professional development and appreciated by these staff.

71. The sixth form uses well grouped accommodation and has private study areas and common rooms available to it. In physical education, the accommodation is very good with students benefiting from extensive playing fields, gymnasium, and the facilities of the local leisure centre. However, specialist accommodation in general is often old and worn and no more than of adequate standard in science and music, for example. Some buildings are not accessible to physically impaired students. A rise in the number of pupils in the main school has intensified pressure on the accommodation and many single mobile classrooms are in use. However, without additional classrooms, including subject specialist ones, the sixth form cannot admit the many more students who apply to join it.

72. Learning resources are satisfactory overall. They are satisfactory in most subjects, and good in English, science, humanities and physical education. Provision for computers

has improved greatly since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. There are enough machines available for students' own use during time for private study.

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, the last year for which nationally valid comparisons are available.

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	28	89	87	36	43	5.5	5.8
Biology	7	100	88	14	34	6.0	5.5
Chemistry	17	82	90	18	43	4.2	5.9
Physics	14	79	88	14	40	4.3	5.7
Economics	4	100	89	50	36	6.0	5.5
ICT	12	10	86	0	23	4.2	4.6
Sports studies	9	100	92	11	25	5.8	5.1
Art and design	7	86	96	14	46	5.2	6.6
Music	1	100	93	100	35	10.0	5.7
Geography	16	100	92	25	38	5.5	5.7
History	12	100	88	25	35	5.3	5.5
Sociology	11	100	86	45	35	6.9	5.3
English literature	9	100	95	67	37	7.1	5.9
French	3	100	89	100	38	8.7	5.6
German	2	100	91	100	40	10.0	5.8

GCE A level (Advanced Supplementary)

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	6	100	62	33	15	3.0	1.5
German	1	100	82	0	13	3.0	1.9

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics and physics but biology and chemistry were sampled. In a Year 13 biology lesson, where students were revising for forthcoming examinations, the teaching was inspirational. The lesson was taught at a fast pace and students responded very well to the opportunity of sharing their ideas and knowledge with the rest of the class. In another revision lesson for Year 12 students, good teaching allowed students to talk about any difficulties that they were experiencing and the teacher responded very well to students' concerns. As a result, all students gained confidence in their ability to deal with examination questions. A-level biology results were well above average in 2001 and students consistently achieve these very good standards. In chemistry, A-level results were below average in 2001, but standards seen in a Year 13 lesson were well above average. Very good teaching, based on very good relationships, ensured that students made very good progress with their understanding of how to tackle typical examination papers. Another revision lesson for Year 12 was also well taught.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- The teaching and learning are very good.
- The most competent students reach high standards.
- Teachers help students to take responsibility for their own learning and to develop good skills of independent research.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not use computer software enough to support their learning.

73. In 2001, students' A-level examination results were in line with national averages. Ten of the 28 students entered gained A or B grades. A-level results in 2002 from a similar number of entries were better, with half achieving A or B grades. Further mathematics A-level results in 2002 show that all students gained pass grades and four of the seven gained grades A or B. Boys and girls did equally well. On average, students often do better in mathematics than in their other subjects. Results in Year 12 AS examinations in 2001 were strong, with 35 of the 38 students gaining pass grades. The 2002 results were similar. The subject is very popular with students. Most conclude their courses, achieve very well, and gain the standards to be expected, given their results in GCSE examinations.

74. The standards of work seen in Year 13 mathematics lessons were well above average. Students' note taking is of a high standard. They have a good grasp of mathematical concepts. They are able to express their understanding confidently and to recognise links between mathematical topics. Standards of work seen of the few Year 13 students taking further mathematics were excellent; the students were seen to work very effectively with the teacher on revision for imminent examinations. In Year 12, students have completed the first term of their course, and have filled gaps in their understanding from their previous work for the GCSE examination. They show a firm understanding of new mathematical techniques.

75. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers encourage students to develop their study skills by asking them to give presentations to the class about the current work. They enable students to develop their mathematical ideas independently and encourage good

debate among the class. As a result, individual students in one lesson were able to explain logarithm function, binomial expansion and aspects of trigonometry with confidence. Students studying further mathematics each gave a resume of aspects of linear programming and they showed good understanding of its applications to commerce or industry. The teacher used this exercise well to assess students' progress effectively, to offer advice and to provide a basis for further development of the topic. Independent research is a recurring feature of teaching and is valued by the students, and reflects their excellent rapport with teachers and their very positive attitudes to learning. Students use graphical calculators effectively but do not use computer software regularly enough in support of their learning.

76. The subject is well led. All teachers work very hard and are very committed to securing high standards. A-level standards have been well maintained since the last inspection.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Standards in AS and A-level examinations are high and continue to rise.
- Teaching is very good and teachers are enthusiastic and their knowledge and understanding of the subject are excellent.
- Students are very interested and concentrate especially well.
- Leadership and management are very good and contribute strongly to successful learning.

Areas for improvement

- The use of new technology is under-developed.
- The overall quality of the accommodation is generally insufficient.
- There is a lack of extra-curricular activities in the subject.

77. Since 1998, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of students attaining the grades A and B in A-level examinations. Results in 2001 were below average but improved markedly in 2002, when two thirds of students attained grades A or B. Similarly, the proportion of students gaining the pass grades of A to E is regularly above the national average. Students achieve much better than expected from their previous results in GCSE examinations.

78. The standards of work seen during the inspection were well above average, and students were achieving very well. In both Year 12 and Year 13, students showed that their earlier knowledge of the subject was well founded and that they had good understanding of key concepts. Students in Year 12 understand the basic principles of mechanics and are able to resolve and combine forces and calculate moments in appropriate units. In Year 13, they show intelligent appreciation of the vastness of the universe. During an introduction to cosmology, they showed very good understanding of a challenging view of early models of the solar system. Most students cope very well with the considerable demands of both AS and A-level courses, although some show less well-developed skills in their making and taking of notes. Students' communication skills are good and they contribute willingly and spontaneously to good, cogent debate.

79. The overall quality of teaching is very good. In some lessons it is excellent. Teachers' expectations are high, and students try hard to meet these. All teachers show exceptional subject knowledge and understanding. They have very good relationships with the students

and use time and resources effectively. In a Year 13 lesson explaining unexpected movements of the planets, students' responses were focused and mature and their confidence was, properly, very high. Teachers encourage students to make good use of ICT when presenting information but, in general, computers are not used enough. Teachers' preparation of lessons is excellent and students gain a very good understanding of the requirements of examinations in lessons that run at a brisk pace. Teachers ensure that students are fully aware of the aims of the lesson and understand the activities that they are asked to do. Students are attentive and work productively. In Year 13, there is a general air of increasing maturity, responsibility and self-assessment, and students are quick to benefit and make very good progress. The regular assessment of work and the guidance provided by teachers are exemplary. Students feel well informed and recognise that their learning needs are well supported.

80. Students' learning is very good. In the lessons observed, the quality of students' work was very good. They generally show good understanding and their files and the recording of practical work are properly organised. They respond well to careful guidance and advice from teachers and most students take considerable pride in maintaining their folders to a high standard. Since the last inspection, the number of students choosing to do physics has steadily increased and, more recently, so has the number of girls. However, in the present groups there are still many more boys than girls. No students have left the courses that they began during the last few years.

81. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The number of students choosing physics has increased, standards have improved and there is clear direction to the development of the subject. The head of physics has been appointed since the last inspection and significant changes have been made which support learning well. He handles people with sensitivity and supports staff and students with considerable skill. This directly benefits students' learning. However, accommodation is barely satisfactory and there is a lack of extra-curricular activities for the subject.

BUSINESS

The school currently teaches economics to Year 13 students but intends to offer only business studies in future. The present Year 12 students are therefore studying business studies at AS level. Both subjects were sampled during the inspection. In a Year 13 economics lesson, the teaching was good. The teacher ensured that students were fully involved in a discussion about changes to monetary policies over time. The teacher's good subject knowledge enabled students to consolidate their knowledge of specialist vocabulary and use it appropriately, with growing confidence, as the lesson progressed. Good teaching in a Year 12 business studies lesson helped students to learn about different sources of funding for businesses, through a variety of interesting activities.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus of the inspection was on AS and A-level courses in information and communication technology.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- Results in A-level examinations are above average and show an upward trend.
- Students work with enthusiasm and commitment.
- Teaching is very good and teachers have very good subject knowledge and high expectations of students.
- Assessment is used very well to support learning.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not always provide enough opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning.
- The main classroom is too small and makes teaching and learning difficult.

82. A-level results in 2001 were close to the national average and the grades gained in 2002 were higher still. Students achieved good results in AS examinations in 2001 and 2002. They begin the course with well-developed skills in ICT but they exceed expectations in relation to their results in GCSE examinations to achieve very well. There is no significant difference in the attainment of girls and boys. Very few students do not complete their courses. However, many more boys than girls take the subject.

83. The work seen during the inspection confirms that students are currently achieving well above average standards. Students have a good grounding in the subject. They are competent users of industry-standard software. They are able to apply their knowledge to comment on the nature and purpose of specific legislation and how these affect business. Year 13 students, working on their major project, show a good working knowledge of databases. They are able to identify the most appropriate ways of applying software to solve problems. Most have a clear understanding of the assessment criteria for analysis and apply them with a high degree of accuracy. They confidently find solutions that will meet the needs of users, and produce solutions that combine the correct degree of complexity with ease of use to match the knowledge of the end-user. Year 12 students have made good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the broader definitions of ICT. They find the course challenging, particularly when working with the more complex features of the database software, but successfully extend their use of the powerful functions available. Some have difficulty in exploring problems in sufficient detail in order to meet the assessment criteria. However, overall, students manage all aspects of the course effectively, including testing and analysis. Higher attaining students consider a range of possible solutions and apply their decision-making skills effectively with sound reasoning to make final choices.

84. Teaching and learning are very good. All staff have very good subject knowledge. The recent installation of projection equipment is enabling staff to enhance their teaching with good presentations to students. Students' obvious enthusiasm is clearly linked to the enthusiasm teachers have for the subject. Teachers prepare lessons well. They make effective use of oral and written assessment to ensure that students know the progress that they are making in lessons. They have high expectations and manage students very well, giving them every opportunity to reach their full potential for learning. On occasions there is a disproportionate amount of input by teachers, and this places insufficient responsibility to

learn by the students, themselves. Teachers generally use time well and ensure that students' needs are met through consultation with individuals.

85. Both Year 12 and 13 students have an enthusiastic and positive approach to the subject. They appreciate that although the accommodation is small, the very good support from staff gives them every opportunity to succeed. Whether working individually or in groups, students always work well together. There is a readiness to help one another, discuss work and make contributions that benefit the whole class. The vast majority of students have computer equipment at home, and this enables them to access and transfer information from school to home easily.

86. The subject is very well managed despite the considerable demands on the head of department who is also the network manager and whole school ICT co-ordinator. He is supported by experienced, well-qualified and committed staff who assist one another and the students effectively. Technician support is helpful and adequate to meet current needs. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was on AS and A-level physical education.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very well.
- The teaching is very good.
- Students make a very good response to their studies and their lessons.
- A-level examination standards are above average.

Areas for improvement

- The setting of targets to enable students to improve their standard is not used well enough.
- The subject's contribution to students' understanding of diverse cultures is insufficient.
- Some students' skills to relate theoretical knowledge of anatomy and physiology to real events are underdeveloped and require improvement.

87. Students' results in AS and A-level examinations are consistently above average. All students passed the AS-level examinations of 2001 and 2002. Similarly, in 2001 A-level examination results were above the national average. Half the A-level candidates gained grades A or B in 2002 – a very good result. Students generally exceed the grades expected from their standards in GCSE examinations two years earlier, and this constitutes very good achievement.

88. Year 12 students build well upon the good level of knowledge and skills that they gained from their previous experience in the subject. High attainers show very good knowledge of anatomy and physiology when they describe the effects of the build up of pressure in the heart and the role of muscular contraction in that process. Students with lower attainment find analysis of the anatomical and physiological topics to be difficult and often resort to description rather than evaluation. Most have good knowledge and understanding of the origins of school sports. They are able to identify the links between their own experience of competitive school games and the introduction of team-games in public

schools, by headmasters such as Thomas Arnold. Most students are able to relate their learning in this module to the current sporting world.

89. Overall, students in Year 13 are producing work of above average standard and are achieving very well, relative to their attainment in GCSE examinations. In theoretical work, students make good progress in increasing their knowledge of the psychology of sport, and the nature and development of elite performances. However, a minority continue to find the anatomical and physiological aspects the most difficult, and apply their knowledge, only inconsistently, to what occurs in practical sports. They are able to discuss in detail such topics as the nature of leadership and how sport is organised in this country. High attainers produce very good work and quickly and consistently refer to current events to illustrate the points they wish to make. In students' written work, they use technical vocabulary well, although lower attainers find difficulty in defining terms in depth.

90. Students use the Internet mainly for researching homework, although in class it was used to identify the latest official news concerning the troubles associated with the forthcoming Cricket World Cup. Numeracy is supported effectively when students use graphs to show how their week is divided up between various activities. In lessons, the students have numerous opportunities to develop their speaking and listening skills, such as when they presented views on different styles of leadership.

91. Overall the teaching is very good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to challenge students appropriately to ensure very good learning. The best teaching involves high expectations, a good range of open-ended tasks, and the very good use of a wide range of teaching methods and resources. The questioning of students' depth of understanding is inconsistent, and plenary sessions are not always effective enough to reinforce the main learning points of lessons. Teachers' marking is regularly completed and contains supportive comments. Although teachers set targets for students to reach, there is insufficient short-term target setting to aid students' learning.

92. The students are highly motivated and approach their studies maturely. Very few do not complete the courses that they begin. They work well together in groups and excellent relationships are established. All appreciate the support and encouragement given to them by their teachers, and they enjoy the lessons. They take an obvious pride in their work and persevere with their studies. This attitude is particularly noticeable in their approach to coursework.

93. There is a very good programme of sports for all students during the weekly enrichment lessons. The students are generally positive about their experiences and appreciate the opportunity to swim, play squash or table tennis, or participate in fitness sessions conducted by the staff of the local leisure centre. All sixth form students are able to engage in the very good range of extra-curricular provision, and many do so. They demonstrate responsibility, and contribute positively to work in lessons in the main school, extending their skills of citizenship well. There is a strong tradition of success in a range of sports at county and district levels and beyond.

94. Leadership of the subject is very good; staff and students share a strong commitment to improve standards further. The schemes of work do not consistently identify opportunities for the setting of work for students of differing potential. Insufficient direction is provided for students to enable them to set short-term targets to enable them to improve their performance. Accommodation is very good and the students benefit from the facilities of the leisure centre. Although resources are good overall, teachers lack a whiteboard in the sports hall to enable them to give written reinforcement of key objectives in lessons. The subject makes a strong contribution to the students' moral and social development, but the

resources available for teachers to enable students to gain a greater understanding of the diverse nature of world cultures are insufficient.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was on art and design and design, but music was also sampled. Only two students are studying music at present. The teaching in the observed lesson was satisfactory but teaching and learning were hampered by the unsuitable accommodation. A small, inadequate office doubles as a practice room and classroom for music, but students have no real desk or table at which to work.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- A-level examination results improved in 2002 and AS level results were good.
- Students' very positive attitudes lead to good independent learning.
- There is good teaching, especially of large-scale two-dimensional work.
- Life-drawing early in the Year 12 curriculum results in good standards in this aspect of their work.

Areas for improvement

- Better use of assessment data would enable the department to judge for itself the value added to students' standards between GCSE and A-level examination results.
- Too little creative use of ICT restricts the range of students' portfolio work.
- Students have no studio where they can reliably leave work out for development in free periods.
- Staff expertise in textiles could be better exploited in the curriculum.

95. From a high standard at the time of the last inspection, students' A-level results have declined significantly and in 2001, were well below the national average. A-level examination results were much improved in 2002, and AS level results were good. All AS level students stayed on into the current Year 13. All are girls, as are all but one of Year 12. Some students' GCSE examination grades were below C, making a weaker entry standard than is usually expected. Very few students do not complete their courses.

96. Year 13 students have maintained their good standards from AS level, with good achievement evident this year from lower attainers. Two-dimensional work is often in very large scale and students' written studies show good research about an interesting variety of subjects. Numbers are small, but Year 13 students' standards are above average overall. Girls speak articulately about their work. Their technical skills, especially with two-dimensional media are good. Practical work and the initial stages of their personal studies indicate that most should attain high grades in their A-level examination. Several students intend to continue with the subject into higher education, and to do so they have undertaken a bridging project with the local university. This creates a good extension to the very useful work in life-drawing which they did in Year 12. This opportunity is also open to the current Year 12, who benefit greatly from drawing and painting the visiting life models, as part of their curriculum during the first phase of their AS level course. This provision is unusual, providing studies of the human form in a wide variety of media and styles for students' portfolios. This aspect of Year 12 students' attainment is above average. Other elements show an average range of attainment for the Year 12 students. Some have very good drawing skills, while others have more difficulty with proportionality, scale and tone. The model booked for the

Year 12 lesson seen had cancelled, but the benefit derived from these sessions was evident in students' ability to draw clothed figures in the lesson. Most drawing shows good understanding of anatomical structure. Numerous life drawings of good quality form a strong component of students' portfolios. Those in both year groups are achieving well, and gaining the standards to be expected, given their prior attainment in GCSE examinations.

97. Teaching is good and enables students to learn well. Students' learning is significantly improved through the opportunities for life studies. Teachers' knowledge is secure and planning is directed closely to meet individuals' needs, particularly in Year 13. Students are encouraged to explore critically a good range of themes on different topics. Teachers promote succinct communication appropriately through these studies, but few students use ICT, except as a word-processing tool. This is surprising, given the emphasis on this key skill elsewhere in their curriculum. The creative use of ICT in students' portfolios is insufficient. One member of staff is also a textiles teacher, but these skills are likewise little represented in students' work. In all lessons, the main teaching method is one-to-one support with resulting discussion which ensures that all are equally included. These sessions are useful in providing students with the information that they need to improve, as well as assessment of their standards. Teachers successfully encourage students to become independent learners. The learning atmosphere in lessons is well focused through the quiet discussions between teacher and student. Students' own very positive attitudes make a significant contribution to their learning and they are enthusiastic about their courses. They visit local galleries, using first-hand information gained from these visits appropriately in their work, but there is little evidence of visits further afield in students' portfolios.

98. Department management is satisfactory. The department uses data too sparingly, so teachers and students know little of how standards compare with students' potential. The tracking of progress is underdeveloped. Accommodation is satisfactory, but with no dedicated studio space, students have restricted access to their work other than in lessons.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on geography and history but religion, philosophy and ethics was sampled. In the two sampled lessons of the latter subject, the teaching was excellent and provided exceptional, vibrant support for students and encouraged them to want to contribute to class discussion. In Year 12, the teacher and students competently supported their arguments with references from the bible and evidence of their in-depth reading to discuss the ethical and medical ethics of abortion and euthanasia. The most competent students explained these issues clearly. Students in Year 13 consider the meaning of conscience. Talented students give very coherent explanations of the views of a conscientious objector. Students manage their extended essays well. Many students described the subject as their favourite. In 2002, the first group of AS students were very successful and many have continued to A-level in Year 13. In a Year 13 sociology lesson seen, the teaching was very good. The teacher explained the concept of secularisation very clearly to students and helped them to build on their existing knowledge very effectively. Students grasped the concept quickly and contributed articulately to the ensuing discussion, showing above average standards of attainment. A-level results in sociology are consistently well above average.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards in A-level examinations are often above average.
- Students achieve very well; they have good subject knowledge and their fieldwork is of a high standard.
- Very good teaching promotes very good learning, especially in Year 13.
- Leadership and management are very good and students' progress is closely monitored.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient opportunity for lower attainers to improve their written skills.
- Students have insufficient access to subject specialist accommodation.

99. In 2001, the 16 candidates attained average results overall in the A-level examination. Four of the eight boys involved attained either an A or B grade and their results were well above average. Most students usually achieve very well, and as well as might reasonably be expected from their previous GCSE examination results. However, the relative performance of girls has fluctuated. High attainers do well. The very high standard of fieldwork is a marked feature of all students' attainment. In 2002, results were strong and 11 of the 21 A-level candidates attained grades A or B. AS examinations started very well in 2001, and 19 of the 26 students attained grades A or B. Results were nearer to the school average in 2002, when seven of the 20 students gained grades A and B and all passed the examination. Students achieved less well in aspects of physical geography. Geography is a very popular subject and students generally complete the courses that they start. Standards have been well maintained since the last inspection.

100. The work seen during the inspection confirms that the standards attained by current students in both years are well above average. In Year 12, the most competent students use their prior knowledge and understanding of migration from their GCSE examination course well. Wider reading about population changes enables them to present very well informed views in class discussion. A minority of students draws on their personal experiences of international migration and different cultures to present coherent and well-balanced arguments. Students read aloud and speak confidently. From informed discussion, teachers add further experiences of migratory patterns. Fieldwork is very well supported with statistical analysis and the use of ICT, for example, to link the profile of a beach with the size of particles of shingle. In Year 13, A-level students respond well when they consider the development of tourism and the preservation of Antarctica, for example. They make good progress when working in small groups to make very good use of their well-ordered notes to prepare a flow chart for a presentation to answer an examination question. Lower attaining students find difficulties with the planning, organisation and composing of essays.

101. Overall, the teaching and learning are very good. They are better in Year 13 than Year 12. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge. Most of the lessons are well planned to include a stimulating range of activities. This allows the teacher to check frequently on students' understanding and the accurate use of terminology. However, occasionally, weaker planning of lessons reduces the pace of learning and students' participation. For example, in a physical geography lesson, students were less certain of how quickly more affluent countries should have reacted to a typhoon in the Solomon Islands, because many students were not aware of the physical conditions. Relationships between the teachers and students are very good. Students value the time given to them beyond the lesson and their support of teachers in preparation for examination. Teachers give much attention to the interpretation of

questions. Students learn particularly well from the detailed marking of their work and their organisation of clear and effective notes.

102. The department is very well led and managed. The good sequencing of topics and the up-to-date case –study materials contribute significantly to the high standards in examinations. Students’ progress is carefully monitored. Teachers receive very good support from the head of department. However, no lessons are taught in specialist accommodation and this is unhelpful to the process of learning.

History

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very well.
- The teaching is very good; thorough planning of lessons encourages students to learn successfully and make very good progress.
- The procedures for assessment are accurate and consistent.

Areas for improvement

- Some students are not skilful enough to write at length.

103. A-Level results in 2001 were close to the national average. Three of the twelve students gained grade A or B. Although this was below the school’s average for the attainment of grades A and B, all students passed the examination. Girls reached well above national standards in 2000, and three of the four boys gained a grade A or B. Year 12 AS students in 2001 attained very well, when 21 of the 28 students gained grades A or B. In 2002, AS results were similar to those in other subjects, and 13 of the 35 students gained grade A or B. 2002 A-level students attained high grades in their previous GCSE examinations and maintained these high standards at A and AS-level. This represents good achievement. Few students do not complete the courses that they begin. History is a very popular subject in Years 12 and 13 and groups are large.

104. Standards of work of the current Year 13 students are well above average. Almost all students are achieving very well, and most make very good progress. Students draw on previous knowledge effectively and deal competently with new ideas and information. They analyse historical sources critically, and evaluate a wide range of evidence in support of well-balanced and effective arguments. These skills were well applied in essays of higher attainers, for example, where they showed thorough knowledge and understanding of Tsarist Russia in 1905. The essay included a very good analysis and synthesis of evidence drew readily on contemporary events in Europe. In contrast, a few lower attaining students found Bismarck’s foreign policy a difficult topic; their writing did not analyse the question’s requirements enough and they wrote too much that was not directly relevant to the question. Students read aloud in class and discuss issues maturely. They are expected to read widely, and use ICT for further research prior to lessons.

105. Teaching and learning are very good. Teaching was very good in three of the four lessons seen and one was good. Very good learning results from teachers’ skills in directing students’ enthusiasm and commitment to the subject. Discussion between the students and the teachers and within small groups is very well informed - for example, when their searching questions probe issues concerning the Irish Question from 1905. Year 13 students work in pairs and are challenged to identify and to date, accurately, written sources of evidence in the twentieth century. Some students find the writing of essays difficult. However, a strong feature of the teaching is the assessment of students’ written work; marking is very

supportive. Students learn very well from the return of their assignments and set their own targets for improvement. Teachers then provide a model answer to give students a valuable framework to support their revision. They provide very helpful guidance to students on techniques with which to manage the examinations.

106. The acting head of department is providing sensitive and good leadership to an experienced team who support one another well. Schemes of work are well planned and reflective of the department's intellectual rigour and their determination for students to reach the highest standards.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English literature and French, but work in German was also sampled. Numbers of students studying German in recent years have been very small, but AS and A-level results have been well above the national average. In the German lessons seen, the teaching and learning were good.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very well and gain excellent results in AS and A-level examinations.
- The teaching is very good and enables students to develop their understanding of challenging texts very well.
- Students have mature attitudes to their work; their very good relationships with teachers and respect for each other have a positive effect on their learning.

Areas for improvement

- Criteria for evaluating the success of the department and students' achievement are not clear enough.

107. A-level examination results in 2001 were well above the national average. They were even better in 2002 when three-quarters of students gained the highest grades, A and B. Students achieved very well, building well on the good results that they had previously gained in GCSE and AS examinations. Their results were significantly better than those they achieved in their other subjects. AS examination results in 2001 were also very good, but even better in 2002, when all 18 students gained grades A or B. Once they are committed to the courses, nearly all students complete them. There is no significant difference in the achievement of girls and boys.

108. Current Year 13 students are building very well on their success at AS level and are already achieving well above average standards. They are confident and articulate and many express their ideas at length during discussions. The many high attaining students deal very competently with the complexities of difficult texts. They make mature, personal responses to the poems of William Blake, for example, showing good understanding of the poet's themes and imagery. A few lower attaining students find it difficult to analyse how the writer uses language to create effect but they are making very good progress with this skill. All students are well aware of the social and historical contexts of set texts and use this knowledge effectively in their essays. They structure their essays very well and relate answers directly to the question in the title, although a few struggle to express their ideas in writing as fluently as they might.

109. Year 12 students are also making very good progress from their earlier GCSE standards of work. They have a very good understanding of plot, character and themes in Jill Paton Walsh's novel *Knowledge of Angels* and Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. Most students make close reference to the text to back up their views in well-structured essays. In both Years 12 and 13, students organise their files well, showing very good note-taking skills and an ability and willingness to research independently.

110. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and enables students to attain outstanding results. Teachers plan very well. For example, they provide students with carefully planned essay titles that gradually increase in difficulty. This enables students to develop their ideas and understanding and to respond thoughtfully to increasingly challenging questions. Teachers have very high expectations, as shown by their excellent, extremely full comments on students' work. They challenge even the highest attaining students to improve their skills of analysis further and have the knack of focussing students' attention directly on key ways of improving their work. Similarly, they ask incisive questions in class, enabling students to think and learn in depth during class discussions. Their management of classes is very good, based on excellent relationships that give students the confidence to develop and share their own ideas. Teachers use a very good range of teaching methods and a rich variety of activities and resources that interest students. For example, Year 12 students acted out part of Carol Ann Duffy's poem *M-M-Memory* in pairs and as a class, expressed personal memories individually in prose and poetry and shared these with each other. They then compared Tennessee Williams' thoughts about memory in his stage directions to *The Glass Menagerie*. As a result they deepened their understanding of ways in which language can reflect the ephemeral nature of memory. Teachers also encourage students' independent learning very well by asking them to research and prepare presentations for the rest of the class. Teachers' own knowledge of texts is very secure. Occasionally there is a comparative lack of pace and involvement of students in lessons when new units of work are being introduced.

111. Students' very positive attitudes towards the subject make a significant contribution to their very successful learning. They are mature, confident and appreciate their excellent relationships with teachers. They feel that teachers push them to do as well as possible, but also provide plenty of support if they find work difficult. They rightly consider that there is an over-emphasis on tragedy in the Year 12 texts that they study.

112. Standards have greatly improved since the last inspection, when they were close to the national average. The recently appointed head of department provides good leadership. He has enabled teachers to work well as a team, as shown by the good support provided for less experienced teachers. Although students attain well above average standards in examinations, there is insufficient use of performance indicators to enable the department to evaluate the success that is achieved.

French

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

Strengths

- Students' very good progress leads to consistently high standards in A-level results.
- Teaching is very good: teachers' use of modern technology and expert use of French enhance students' learning.
- The study of the language promotes students' personal development.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not use ICT enough to aid independent research skills and the drafting of written work.
- Further contacts with French-speaking countries, through email, web-cam, study visits, exchanges, or work placements would benefit students' learning.
- Few students, especially boys, continue the study of languages.

113. Comparatively small numbers of students, including very few boys, have taken A-level examinations in French in the last five years, but two thirds of candidates have been awarded higher grades. In 2001 only three candidates were entered, but all attained grade A or B, as did five of the six students in 2002. These results are evidence of very good attainment. Recent results at AS level, however, have not been quite as good. In 2001, eight of the 13 candidates gained A or B grades, but in 2002 only four of the 14 were awarded higher grades. Very few students discontinue their courses.

114. Students' achievement, in the lessons seen and in written work analysed during the inspection, confirms the very good progress that they make. In Year 12, students compile a considerable volume of written work. They write confidently on a variety of complex themes, respond well to a high level of challenge and show evidence of individual thought and independent study. By Year 13, writing skills are very good, in some cases excellent, culminating in a high standard of written coursework. Students make very good progress in the fluency and accuracy of their writing. However, they make little use of word processing to aid the drafting of written work, or of the Internet for independent research or email contacts.

115. In the Year 12 lessons seen, students' oral skills have already advanced significantly from the level required by GCSE examinations. They are now able to contribute fluently to discussion of topics such as women's role in Islamic societies. By Year 13, they are capable of detailed discussion of literary works. Their listening skills are well developed and they understand and respond to French spoken at native speed.

116. The teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They present students with a high level of intellectual challenge, to which they respond very well. Teachers' expert use of French and their skilful questioning techniques ensure that students speak the language with considerable confidence and fluency, enabling them to express mature and well-considered views. The enthusiasm of the teachers is infectious; students enjoy lessons and have very positive attitudes to study of the language. At times, however, teachers' enthusiasm can lead to their dominating discussion. The introduction of the use of the web-cam to capture students' oral presentations and discussions has been a strong motivating influence and also enables students to assess their own performance and improve their skills. Marking is detailed and provides helpful suggestions on how students can improve their work, as do reports home to parents. Teachers' planning is very good. A variety of activities ensures pace, focus and interest, so that students concentrate very well. In one Year 12 lesson, the teacher provided learning resources that were very useful in helping students to cope with difficult new language, and

use it productively. Lessons are, however, sometimes too teacher-centred, with little opportunity for work in pairs or small groups, to enable students to develop independent or co-operative learning.

117. Leadership of the subject is very good and gives clear direction to the work of the teaching-team. Schemes of work are well organised and a comprehensive programme of in-service training has ensured that teachers are up-to-date with the latest developments in the subject. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good: regular monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice help to maintain the present high standard of teaching; results in A-level examinations are consistently well above average. However, the Year 12 class has four teachers and this makes the monitoring of students' progress problematic. Students too find that it interferes with the continuity of their learning. A short visit to Paris is to take place in the near future as enrichment of the curriculum, but no extended study visit is planned and this situation is unhelpful to their learning of the subject. The exchanges arranged for younger pupils are not available to sixth form students.