

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **NORTON KNATCHBULL SCHOOL**

Ashford

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118838

Headteacher: Mr J Speller

Reporting inspector: Mrs J Greenfield  
7070

Dates of inspection: 23<sup>rd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> September 2002

Inspection number: 249803

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Voluntary Controlled
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Boys
School address:	Hythe Road Ashford Kent
Postcode:	TN24 0QJ
Telephone number:	(01233) 620045
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Humphreys
Date of previous inspection:	5 <sup>th</sup> – 9 <sup>th</sup> February 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
7070	Mrs J Greenfield	Registered inspector		The school's results and students' achievements. How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
14756	Mr J Lovell	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?
20709	Mr D MacIldowie	Team inspector	English	
30553	Mr R Fuller	Team inspector	Mathematics	
2396	Mr M Davidson	Team inspector	Science Educational inclusion	
30695	Mrs G Dinan	Team inspector	Art and design	
27351	Mr M Stanton	Team inspector	Design and technology	
12118	Mr A Paver	Team inspector	Geography	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
2739	Mr I Benson	Team inspector	History English as an additional language	
18076	Mr H Dodd	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
4617	Mrs R Fox	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
31660	Mrs M Young	Team inspector	Music	
4647	Mrs J Evans	Team inspector	Physical education	
1517	Mr D Griffith	Team inspector	Religious education Special educational needs	
4684	Mr D Cullimore	Team inspector	Business education	
24622	Dr D Davies	Team inspector	Drama	
19043	Dr D Lewis	Team inspector	Physics (Sixth form)	

12408	Mr A Frith	Team inspector	French (Sixth form)	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

The Norton Knatchbull School is an average sized grammar school that caters for boys between the ages of 11 and 18. It has grown in size since the last inspection and now has 925 students on roll, 230 of whom are in the sixth form. About nine per cent of students come from a range of ethnic and cultural heritages, including Black-Caribbean, Black-African, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese. The proportion of students having English as an additional language is low and only one student is in the early stage of learning English, for which he receives additional support. As a selective school, it receives pupils from a large number of primary schools in the area who are in the top 25 per cent or so of the ability range. Students' attainment on entry is above average but the school has fewer of the highest attaining students than are usually found in selective schools. The majority of students come from more advantaged social and economic backgrounds and the proportion of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Thirty-six students have special educational needs, which as a proportion of the school population is well below the national average. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need, at 0.86 per cent, is also below the national average. The range of special needs includes speech, communication and behavioural difficulties, visual impairment, physical disabilities and autism.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

The Norton Knatchbull School is a good school and has several very good features. Standards overall are high. The students' very positive attitudes to the school and to their work, together with the good quality of much of the teaching, ensure that they make good progress and achieve well. Strategies to promote educational inclusion and equality of opportunity are effective. Overall, the school is led and managed well on a day-to-day basis but longer-term strategic planning is insufficiently robust. The school provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Standards are well above average overall and are particularly high in English, mathematics and science.
- The good teaching and students' very positive attitudes ensure they make good progress.
- It makes very good provision for students' moral and social development.
- The pastoral and personal support provided for students is very good.
- Very effective relationships have been established with other schools to extend the provision in the sixth form.
- The partnership between the school, parents and students contributes positively to students' learning.

#### **What could be improved**

- Strategic leadership and management and the monitoring and evaluation arrangements are not strong enough.
- The curriculum, including its organisation and structure, affects provision in English, physical education and religious education, and does not fully meet statutory requirements.
- Assessment information, including data, is not used consistently or rigorously enough in many departments.
- The provision for students who are identified as gifted and talented is inconsistent and not all teachers plan work that is sufficiently challenging for the most capable students.
- The provision for and the teaching of personal and social education do not contribute to students' personal development or support the school's aims and values well enough.
- ICT is not used sufficiently in English, science, history, modern foreign languages and religious education to support teaching and learning.

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the school was last inspected in February 1996, standards have improved in the national tests at the end of Year 9, and in the GCSE and A-level examinations. Teaching has also improved considerably, with a much higher proportion of good and very good teaching and much less that is unsatisfactory. This has come about through better systems for monitoring its quality. Satisfactory progress has been made in addressing most of the key issues in the last inspection report, including developing students' skills as independent learners, improving support for students with special educational needs, reviewing staff responsibilities, planning whole-school curriculum development, addressing issues relating to equality of opportunity, whole-school assessment and recording guidelines and meeting legal requirements in art and design, modern foreign languages and reporting to parents. Unsatisfactory progress has been made in ensuring a daily act of collective worship and for the teaching of religious education in the sixth form. Good progress has been made in improving the accommodation and addressing health and safety issues. Overall, the school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and has shown that it has the capacity to improve further.

## 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				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	A	A*	A	E	very high A* well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E very low E*
A-levels/AS-levels	n/a	n/a	A		

The school's results in the national tests for 14 year olds in 2001 in English, mathematics and science were very high, placing it in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Standards have remained at this level since 1998 and have improved at a similar rate to the national trend. When compared with other selective schools, the results in English and science were average, but were well below average in mathematics. The school's performance in 2002 shows some improvement in mathematics and science but a decline in English. Students' current work shows that standards are very high in English, mathematics and science; well above the expected standards in geography, history and information and communication technology (ICT); and above the expected standards in all other subjects other than physical education and religious education, where they are in line with expectations. Insufficient curriculum time is allocated to these two subjects. Overall, students are achieving well in relation to their attainment on entry to the school.

The GCSE examination results in 2001 were well above the national average and have remained at this level and sometimes higher than this for the past five years. The results for 2002 show some improvement over those for 2001. The school sets itself challenging targets and has met its overall target for 2002. Since the last inspection, the improvement from year to year has been broadly in line with the national trend. When compared with other selective schools, the school's performance overall in 2001 was well below average, partly due to the weaker performance of a small number of boys and two boys who did not take any examinations. In all subjects, the results were well above the national averages at grades A\* - C and grades A\*/A, and significantly so in many. The strongest subjects were English, mathematics, science, art and design, design and technology, French, German, geography, history and ICT. From the work seen during the inspection, the school is maintaining these high standards in almost all subjects: students are achieving as expected in mathematics, design and technology and business studies, and achieving well in the remaining subjects.



The A-level examination results were well above the national average in 2001 and have shown a steady improvement since the last inspection. The strongest subjects in 2001, with results that were well above the national averages, were art and design, business studies, chemistry, French, geography, history, ICT and physics. The weakest subjects were design and technology and sport studies. The results for 2002 show some improvement over those for 2001. All students gained pass grades and in most subjects, a greater proportion of students gained the highest grades of A and B. The results of the two weakest subjects in 2001 improved considerably. From the work seen, standards are well above average in art and design, geography, history, ICT and music; and are above average in all other subjects other than biology, where they are average. Most students do well when account is taken of their GCSE performance, and a significant minority are doing very well.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students show great interest, commitment and enthusiasm for their work. This contributes well to their learning and achievement.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Students' behaviour is very good. They behave responsibly in lessons and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good throughout the school. Students treat each other and adults with courtesy, respect and consideration.
Attendance	Attendance rates are well above the national averages for secondary schools and the rate of unauthorised absence was below the national average.

Students' attitudes are a particular strength of the school: this is one of the reasons why students make good progress and achieve well. They have a clear understanding of their social and moral responsibilities. Students are mutually supportive and encouraging.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching throughout the school is good overall and is one of the main reasons why students achieve well. It has improved considerably since the last inspection. There are examples of very good teaching in many subjects and some excellent teaching in mathematics, music and religious education. The teaching is better in Years 10 - 11 and in the sixth form than in Years 7 – 9, having a higher proportion of good and very good teaching. The teaching in English, mathematics and science is good overall. It is very good in art and design, German, music and religious education in Years 10 – 11, and in art and design, geography, history and music in the sixth form. The teaching in geography, French and Spanish in Years 7 – 9, in business studies in Years 10 -11, and biology, physics and French is satisfactory but not as strong as other subjects. The skills of literacy and numeracy are mostly taught well. Most teachers have good subject expertise, which they use well to provide students with challenging work. They expect much from their students, although not always enough from the most capable. Students are keen to learn and work hard in most lessons. The support provided for the small number of students with special educational needs or in the early stages of learning English is effective and they make good progress. A small amount of teaching is unsatisfactory in Years 7 – 11 and occasionally poor. This

results from one or more of the following: covering too much material in the lesson; inadequate planning; difficulties in managing students' behaviour adequately; and lack of involvement of students in the lesson.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is appropriately broad and meets the needs of students well. There are weaknesses in the structure of the school day, which affect some subjects adversely.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Support for students with special educational needs is satisfactory. They make good progress and achieve similar standards as their peers.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	The very small number of students learning English as an additional language receive good support and are making good progress.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school makes very good provision for students' moral and social development and satisfactory provision for their spiritual and cultural development. Good opportunities are provided for taking responsibility.
How well the school cares for its students	Students are cared for well. Arrangements for their welfare, and for checking their personal development, are very good. Procedures for assessing students' progress and attainment are good, but the use of data within departments is inconsistent.

The short 35-minute period for some subjects, for example English, physical education and religious education, is insufficient. Statutory requirements are not fully met in the provision of a daily act of collective worship, the use of ICT to support learning within some subjects, citizenship, or to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. Strategies for developing students' numeracy skills are not as well developed as those for enhancing their literacy skills. Insufficient planned provision is made for gifted and talented students. The range of extra-curricular activities is satisfactory overall, but good in music and sports. The planning of the personal and social education programme is not sufficiently coherent and there are undue variations in the way it is taught. The provision for careers education and guidance is satisfactory. The school's links and partnership with parents are good.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Day-to-day management is effective and there is a strong commitment to inclusion and high standards. There are weaknesses in strategic planning and in ensuring the consistent application of school policies.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, and are developing their role in the strategic management of the school. They fulfil nearly all of their statutory responsibilities satisfactorily.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The analysis of examination results is thorough and there is a good programme of annual departmental reviews. Arrangements for monitoring the outcomes of these activities are insufficiently robust.
The strategic use of resources	The school manages its resources efficiently and effectively, ensuring that money is allocated appropriately to meeting its educational priorities.

There are sufficient staff to meet the demands of the curriculum and they are appropriately deployed for the most part. Accommodation is adequate to teach the curriculum, although there are some weaknesses in music and drama. Resources for learning are good. Suitable procedures are in place to ensure that the school obtains best value for money from its expenditure. The school gives good value for money.

## **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school's high expectations and the good progress made by the students.</li> <li>• They feel comfortable about approaching the school if they have any problems or concerns.</li> <li>• They are kept well informed about the progress their children are making.</li> <li>• The good standards of leadership and management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provision of a wider range of activities outside lessons.</li> <li>• Closer working relationships between the school and parents.</li> <li>• Better consistency in the arrangements for setting homework.</li> </ul>

Inspectors support most of the positive views of parents. They find, however, that there is room for improvement in the quality and consistency of the information provided to parents and in some aspects of management, particularly relating to strategic planning and management. Inspectors judge that the level and extent of homework are appropriate, the range of activities outside lessons is satisfactory, and staff are accessible and take appropriate steps to involve parents in the event of any concerns.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form in this average sized boys' selective school has 230 students on roll and is increasing in size. This term, six girls have joined the sixth form for the first time. A very high proportion of students stay on into the sixth form at the end of Year 11 and a small number join from other local schools. There are very few students from minority ethnic heritages in the sixth form. Four students have special educational needs, two of whom have a statement. The sixth form offers a wide range of A-level and AS courses and, through arrangements with other local schools, particularly with a neighbouring girls' grammar school, and South Kent College, students are able to follow other courses, including vocational courses. The vast majority of students are following a two-year course leading to A-level.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

The sixth form is successful and cost effective. Students work very hard and the majority achieve well in their examination courses. Standards are above average overall. The sixth form caters well for its students through the wide range of courses that is provided. The teaching in most subjects is good and in several it is very good.

**Strengths**

- Students are attaining above average standards overall, with high standards in art and design, geography, history, ICT and music.
- The enthusiastic and challenging teaching enables students to make good progress and achieve well.
- The high levels of personal responsibility that students take for their work and in contributing to school life.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their studies and they are keen to work hard.
- The good arrangements for assessing and monitoring students' academic progress and achievements.

**What could be improved**

- The most capable students are not challenged sufficiently in physics, biology, design and technology and ICT.
- Data is not used sufficiently in physics, business studies, sports studies and German to set challenging targets, to monitor students' progress and to analyse their effectiveness in improving performance.
- The range of enrichment opportunities to support teaching and learning in English, geography and business studies is too narrow.
- The provision for religious education and collective worship does not meet statutory requirements.

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

## THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Good.</b> Courses are planned well and teaching is good. Although A-level results fluctuate from year to year, they are in line with the national average. The number of higher grades has improved significantly recently. Students are confident and enjoy mathematics.
Biology	<b>Satisfactory.</b> A-level results in 2001 were in line with the national average and have improved this year. While teaching is generally satisfactory, not enough is done to raise standards by setting challenging targets for each student and matching the work more closely to these targets.
Physics	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Results in AS and A-level physics have been well above the national averages since the last inspection. However, the curriculum needs to support the development of students' thinking skills more effectively.
Design and technology	<b>Good.</b> Students' attainment is above the national average. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Students' attitudes to the subject are excellent.
Business studies	<b>Good.</b> Standards are well above average. Students are well motivated and achieve well. The teaching is good. Teachers have a good understanding of the examination requirements but students do not have enough first hand experience of business.
Information and communication technology	<b>Good.</b> The AS and A-level results were well above the national averages in 2001. Students are well motivated and learn rapidly. Teaching is consistently good but the most capable students are not sufficiently challenged. Resources for teaching ICT are very good and the courses are planned well.
Sport studies	<b>Good.</b> The A-level results were below average in 2001 but have improved considerably more recently as a result of good teaching and learning. Leadership and management are good. Provision for extra-curricular competitive sport is very good.
Art	<b>Very good.</b> Standards are well above average. Students are very hard working and committed. This is a result of very good quality teaching and the very good leadership and management skills of the head of department.
Geography	<b>Very good.</b> Standards are well above average. Teaching and learning are very good and sometimes excellent. Success is underpinned by excellent relationships and very good planning.
History	<b>Very good.</b> Standards are well above average. The quality of teaching and learning and leadership of the subject are very good.
English	<b>Good.</b> Standards have varied in recent years but they have improved significantly in the latest examinations. There is now a choice of syllabuses to match students' strengths and interests. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and give very helpful advice to individual students, who value the subject both for itself and for its usefulness in their future lives.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
French	<b>Satisfactory.</b> A-level results were well above the national average in 2001 and in line with the average for selective schools. Teaching has many good features but is satisfactory overall. Students are not always required to use French themselves, which means they are not consistently working to their full potential.
German	<b>Good.</b> Results are above average. Teaching is uniformly good and students respond well by applying themselves diligently to the variety of tasks given to them. Skills in reading, writing and listening are well developed, but students do not respond fluently when conversation is spontaneous and unprepared.

In other subjects, including chemistry, Spanish, music, psychology, politics, theatre studies and general studies, work was sampled. Teaching is mostly good and is very good in music. Students make good progress and standards are mostly above average.

### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Arrangements for assessing and tracking students' progress are good. These are supplemented by students' own evaluation of their performance. This helps them to know how well they are doing and to set targets for the future. Students receive good academic advice and personal guidance from their teachers and the arrangements for preparing them for sixth form work are good.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. There is a clear commitment to raising standards and preparing students for their future life beyond school. All students have equal access to all the opportunities the school provides. The monitoring and evaluation of the work of the sixth form, including teaching and learning, are satisfactory.

### 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"> <li>Teachers are readily accessible if they require help or have difficulties with their work.</li> <li>They are taught well and challenged to do their best.</li> <li>They enjoy the sixth form and would recommend it.</li> <li>They receive good information which is clear and helpful.</li> <li>The quality of the assessment of their work.</li> <li>The help they received to assist them settle into the sixth form.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The range of out-of-school activities and enrichment opportunities available to them.</li> <li>Advice about the courses they should follow in the sixth form and about their future options.</li> <li>Having more account taken of their views and being treated as responsible young adults, and given more opportunities for working independently.</li> <li>The help and support they receive when they have personal problems.</li> </ul>

Over half the students responded to the students' questionnaire. Their responses were more negative than the formal discussions inspectors held with over 100 students in Year 12 and Year 13. Current students are positive about the sixth form and proud to be identified with 'their' school. Inspectors support the positive views expressed by the students. They found little evidence to support the views of a

small number of students that the school does not listen or respond sufficiently to their views or that they have insufficient opportunities for working independently, although the school might usefully review its practice in these areas. Systems for supporting their academic development are understood, but not all students are aware of the structure of pastoral support in the sixth form and of the need for them to seek such support where that is required.

## **COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES**

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



## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and students' achievements**

1. Standards overall in the school are high, although not consistently so across all subjects. These high standards are reflected in students' current work and in the school's results in the National Curriculum tests at the age of 14, in the GCSE examinations at the age of 16 and in the A-level examinations at the end of Year 13. Students make good progress and achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. As a selective school, it receives students who are in the top 25 per cent or so of the ability range. The results of the national tests taken at the age of 11 show that students' overall attainment is very high in relation to maintained schools nationally. However, an analysis of the standardised tests undertaken by students in their first term at the school over the past three years indicates that there are comparatively fewer students who attain very highly than might be expected in a selective school.

2. In the national tests in 2001 at the age of 14, when all students are taken into account, the results were very high in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science when compared with those of all maintained schools nationally. When compared with other selective schools, the school's results were broadly average in English and science, but were well below average in mathematics. There are no national figures available against which they can be compared, but there has been an improvement in 2002 in the results in mathematics and science, particularly in the proportion attaining Level 7 and above, but a slight decline in the English results. Since the last inspection, the overall improvement in the school's performance has been broadly in line with the national trend.

3. Assessments undertaken by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2001 and 2002 show that standards in nearly all of the foundation subjects are well above the national expectations, especially at the higher levels. In physical education, teachers' assessments indicate that standards are below expectations. Inspectors consider that the National Curriculum level descriptions have not been applied accurately enough and conclude that standards of students' current work are in line with expectations in this subject.

4. Work in lessons and in students' books confirms that these high standards are being maintained overall in Years 7 to 9. By the end of Year 9, standards in English, mathematics and science are very high, confirming the picture shown by the test results in mathematics and science in 2001, and indicating an improvement in students' attainment in English. In the remaining subjects, students' attainment is more variable. It is well above the nationally expected standards in geography, history and information and communication technology (ICT); above the expected standard in art and design, design and technology, French, German, Spanish, music and drama; and in line with expectations in physical education and religious education. The lower than average amount of curriculum time allocated to physical education and religious education continues to affect standards adversely in these two subjects. The school has made insufficient progress in remedying these weaknesses since the last inspection.

5. In the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations in 2001, the overall results were well above average and were very high for the proportion of students gaining five or more grades A\* - C. These results were not quite as high as those for 2000, which were very high. The slightly lower performance in 2001 was partly due to the weaker performance of a small number of boys who were not good attenders, one who suffered a major accident and was unable to take any GCSE examinations, and another boy of the appropriate age who was in Year 10 at the time. As a result, the school's figures, when compared with similar schools, were well below average and very low when account is taken of the students' performance in relation to their earlier attainment in the national tests in Year 9. In 2002, there was an improvement in the school's overall results, although without national figures against which to compare them, it is not possible to say how significant the improvement is. The school met its targets in 2002 for the average points score and was close to meeting them at five or more grades A\* - C. The school's targets are appropriately challenging.

6. In all subjects, the results in 2001 were well above the national averages at grades A\* - C and were well above average at the highest grades of A\* and A. The results in the GCSE short courses were also well above average in all subjects. The strongest subjects at grades A\* - C in 2001, with results that were significantly above the national averages, were English language, English literature, mathematics, science, art and design, design and technology, French, German, geography, history, and ICT. When compared with selective schools, the results were more variable, with considerable differences evident between the subjects. The school's results at grades A\*-C were better than the averages for selective schools in art and design, resistant materials, electronic products, French, German, Spanish and ICT. In most other subjects, they were similar to the average for selective schools but were not as high in English literature, geography and graphical products. A lower proportion than average gained the highest grades of A\* and A in English language and literature, mathematics, French, German, geography, history and religious education. In 2002, however, most subjects maintained and in many cases improved their results, particularly so in graphical products, but with increased numbers following the courses there was a drop in performance in Spanish and electronic products.

7. Current and recent work indicates that students' attainment by the end of Year 11 is very high in English, mathematics and science; well above the standard expected nationally in art and design, history, ICT and music; above the national standard in design and technology, geography, French, German, Spanish, religious education and drama; and in line with expectations in physical education and business studies. In business studies, students will sit the GCSE examination for the first time in 2003. The overall picture broadly reflects the school's GCSE performance in 2002. Students are making good progress in almost all subjects during Years 10 and 11 and are achieving well. However, the most capable students are not always challenged sufficiently in some lessons.

8. Standards of literacy are above average across the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 and well above average in most subjects in Years 10 and 11. Students are confident speakers and listen well. When required, they read fluently and their writing skills are above average. Standards of numeracy are generally very high and they apply their skills well to support their learning in other subjects, particularly in science, art and design, design and technology, geography, history and physical education. Although students' ICT skills are above average, they do not have enough opportunity to use and apply them to support their learning in English, science, history, modern foreign languages and religious education.

9. Overall, students with special educational needs achieve well and make good progress over time in the majority of subjects. In the 2002 national tests at the end of Year 9, students with a statement of special educational need achieved results similar to their peers. Other students, currently in Years 8 and 9, are predicted to do the same. Four students on the higher levels of need are also predicted to gain grades A\*- C at GCSE this coming year. In ICT, one student with physical difficulties has opted for the full GCSE course and is achieving as well as his peers. Students with specific learning difficulties use word-processing programs effectively to correct and redraft their work. In English, science, history, music and art and design, students develop their skills at a similar rate to their fellow students. Where teachers are well informed about them and teaching assistants provide appropriate support, students' particular needs are met effectively. The extent of the progress that these students make in lessons, particularly where no teaching assistant is available, is closely related to the progress that is made by the other students.

10. The small numbers of students with English as an additional language are reaching similar standards to their peers. Most have good literacy skills and are generally fluent in speaking English. They receive sensitive support in lessons. Only one student is in the early stages of learning English and he receives additional specific support. This student is making good progress. The performance of students with English as an additional language in internal and external examinations and tests is not specifically monitored, neither is data analysed, either on a whole-school or subject basis, to ensure they are achieving as well as they might, although plans are in hand for this to happen this year.

## **Sixth form**

11. The school's overall performance in the A-level examinations in 2001 was well above the national average. The strongest subjects in 2001, with results that were well above the national averages, include art and design, business studies, chemistry, English, French, geography, history, ICT and physics. The results in theatre studies were also well above average, although the small numbers taking the course

make comparison with the national figures inappropriate. The weakest subjects, with results well below the national averages, were design and technology and sports studies. The results of the small number of students entered for government and politics, taught at a neighbouring school, were also much lower than the national figures. The 2001 results compare favourably with the national averages for selective schools. With the exception of English literature, biology, mathematics, government and politics, and sports studies, where they were below the averages for selective schools, and design and technology, where they were well below average, the results in history and music were broadly average and better than average in the remaining subjects.

12. The unconfirmed results for 2002 show some improvement over the figures for 2001 but, without national figures, it is not possible to judge how significant this improvement is. All students gained grades A - E in 2002 and, in the majority of subjects, a much higher proportion gained the highest grades of A or B. Performance in the two weakest subjects in 2001 - design and technology and sports studies - improved considerably in 2002, especially in the proportion of students gaining grades A and B.

13. In the AS examinations at the end of Year 12 in 2001, the results at grades A - E were better than the national averages in all subjects and, with the exception of German and to a slightly lesser extent French, were also better at grades A and B. Other than in business studies, design and technology, German and French, where the results were lower than average, the school's performance in all other subjects was better than the averages for selective schools. The results in 2002 were a little more variable, especially in the proportions gaining the highest grades, but overall are broadly similar to those in 2001.

14. By the end of Year 13, standards of students' work are above average overall. They are well above average in art and design, geography, history, ICT and music, and above average in all the remaining subjects other than biology, where they are average. Students are achieving satisfactorily in English, mathematics, biology and French; well in physics, design and technology, history, ICT, German, Spanish, sports studies, theatre studies and business studies; and very well in art and design, geography and music. The most capable students are not being challenged sufficiently in biology, physics, design and technology and ICT.

15. Students have well developed research skills and a good capacity for critical analysis and problem solving. Communication skills are generally very well developed, enabling students to cope well with the demands of their courses. Students are confident and assured in their speaking skills. They digest and absorb information well and the majority have a good capacity to take notes and organise their work carefully. Skills in the use of mathematics to support learning in their chosen subjects are good, as are their skills in ICT. Through the challenge and the thoroughness of the teaching and their very positive attitudes to work, most students make good progress in nearly all subjects and achieve well. The good support that they receive from their teachers ensures that the less capable students make good progress in relation to their earlier attainment. Students with special educational needs also make good progress in line with that of their fellow students. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds are well integrated, and they make similar progress to other students.

16. Retention and completion rates are high. Few students withdraw from their courses during the sixth form and almost nine out of ten students continue into higher education at the end of Year 13.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

17. Students' attitudes and behaviour are a significant strength of the school. They make a considerable contribution to the good progress that students make and the standards they attain. This was also found to be the case at the time of the last inspection. Students enjoy coming to school and are proud to be part of its community. Their attitudes to learning are rarely less than satisfactory and are mostly very positive and occasionally excellent. Students work at a good pace and show interest, commitment and enthusiasm for their work. They maintain their concentration well, persevering when faced with challenging tasks. They undertake work with enjoyment and confidence, and apply their skills well. Students are mutually supportive and encouraging, and work well together. They listen carefully and sensitively to each other and to their teachers and, when oral contributions are called for, they respond readily and thoughtfully. Students organise and plan their work well and their ability to work independently increases as they move through the school.

18. The attitudes of students with special educational needs to learning are good, which enables them to make good progress. In art and design in Years 7 to 9, the emphasis on all students producing individual work, demanding concentration, fully involves all students, including those with behavioural difficulties. The GCSE course in art and design is taught through the exploration of personal issues, which increases the self-esteem of students with special educational needs. In science and religious education, the inclusive ethos of the classrooms promotes positive attitudes. Students listen to each other well. Students are supported positively by their peers in classrooms, but there are isolated incidents on stairs where students are not sensitive enough to the needs of others.

19. In lessons and around the school, most students behave very well, ensuring that the school operates as a very orderly community that values the rights of all students to learn. Most parents believe that the school's values have a very positive effect upon students and that standards of behaviour are very high. Students treat property and equipment with great care and there is no evidence of vandalism or graffiti. Students respond extremely well to the school's high expectations and an ethos that makes them responsible for their own behaviour and actions, understanding its impact on others. There were 28 fixed period exclusions last year, involving 25 students. These were not generally related to incidents of bullying or other oppressive behaviour. Such occurrences are rare and when identified are dealt with quickly and effectively

20. Relationships throughout the school are very positive. Students treat each other and adults with courtesy, respect and consideration. When working together, they value each other's contributions, constructive criticism and encouragement, and work with a common sense of purpose. The small numbers of girls, who joined the school in the sixth form, are readily accepted within the school community. Students across the year groups work very well together in extra-curricular activities, such as music productions.

21. Students respond extremely well to the school's ethos where they are expected to take responsibility for themselves within a supportive and caring environment. They participate in extra-curricular activities and trips, the school council, and a range of other opportunities, which enable them to make a positive contribution to the school's life and work and that of the wider community. These opportunities enhance their personal and social development. Students use their own initiative to develop aspects of their personal development and to contribute to society in the widest sense, and this is particularly exemplified in their work for charities. Students take charity giving seriously and have links with local, national and African charities and projects. For example, they organise events to support the charities that they have chosen, such as the Kent Air Ambulance Service, local charities such as 'Hospice on the Hill', and international charities such as orphanages and aid-programmes in third world countries and sponsoring the education of an African child.

22. Attendance rates have remained high since the last inspection. In the last school year for which there are comparative figures, the attendance rate of 94.5 per cent was well above the national average. Unauthorised absence at 0.3 per cent was below the national average. The majority of authorised absences occur as a result of illness and medical visits, with some absence for holidays. The very good levels of attendance have a positive effect on students' attainment and progress. Movement between lessons is purposeful. Students arrive in classrooms punctually and lessons begin promptly.

## **Sixth form**

23. Students in the sixth form, which since September includes four girls, have very positive attitudes to learning and to school. They value the opportunities afforded by the school and the support of teachers. They collaborate well and want to learn. For example, students in a Year 12 psychology lesson, in which they were investigating short-term memory, listened to the teacher very carefully and through very good small group discussion, developed their understanding and theories to enable them to present their work confidently using PowerPoint to the whole class. Students support each other well. They also have the ability to take responsibility for managing their own work, using independent research as a means of extending their learning and understanding.

24. The very good relationships evident between students in the sixth form, and between students and staff, benefit their collaborative work and the support they give each other. These very good relationships

apply equally to those students who have recently joined the school and those who have been at the school since Year 7. Relationships between students in the sixth form and other year groups are also very good. Students have a very high respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others, and reflect very well on the impact of their actions on their peers. Behaviour is very good. Students are courteous and trustworthy, show respect for property and take great care of equipment and resources.

25. Students have positive views of the school. During the inspection, many students expressed positive and often very positive views, which reinforced and amplified their responses to a questionnaire sent out before the inspection. Students are particularly positive about a number of aspects, including the accessibility of teachers to provide help, the quality of teaching and the challenge provided by the work, the clarity and helpfulness of printed information that is provided, the quality of assessment of their work and the help that they receive to help them settle into the sixth form. Nearly all sixth form students commented that they enjoy the sixth form and a very high percentage indicated that they would recommend it to others. A minority of students expressed some concerns about the support and help available to them should they have a personal problem, the range of activities provided to enrich their studies, the response of the school to their views, and about the availability and quality of advice regarding their options when they leave the sixth form. Inspectors support the positive views expressed by students. They judge that structures for academic support are well embedded, but note that some students, in making the transition to the sixth form, are less familiar with the structure of pastoral support in the sixth form.

26. The house system provides very good opportunities for older students to support their junior colleagues as prefects, sub-tutors and organisers of a good variety of activities including a number of sports, music and drama. Competition is healthy and involves large numbers of students who would not otherwise perform at a whole school level; sixth formers gain substantially in confidence and experience of offering service to others. The students raise substantial sums of money for charity through 'mufti' days and an inter-house 'mile of pennies' which generates intense competition. The school council offers students' opinions about how the money is donated.

27. Students in the sixth form set a good example for younger students. They undertake a wide range of responsibilities within the school, for example, working with classes lower down the school and acting as mentors. They raise money to buy sixth form diary planners for each student and to improve facilities in the sixth form common room. Levels of attendance are satisfactory but below those found in the rest of the school. They are punctual at the start of sessions.

## **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

28. There has been a considerable improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection, with a much higher proportion of good and very good teaching and a considerable decrease in the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching throughout the school is good overall and results in good learning. It is good or better in 77 per cent of lessons, and very good and occasionally excellent in 26 per cent. In three per cent of lessons, the teaching was unsatisfactory and on one occasion, poor. The quality of teaching is better at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form than at Key Stage 3.

29. In Years 7 - 9, the teaching is good in all subjects other than in geography, French and Spanish, where it is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, the teaching of art and design, German, music and religious education is very good: it is good in all the remaining subjects except business studies, where the teaching is satisfactory. There is some very good teaching in most subjects, with examples of excellent teaching in mathematics in Year 8, and in music and religious education in Year 11. In these lessons, which are characterised by a variety of challenging activities, sharp questioning and stimulating presentation by the teacher, and an enthusiastic response from the students, students make excellent progress and achieve very well. The quality of learning broadly matches the quality of teaching and the students' very positive attitudes and generally good levels of behaviour, concentration and attention mean that they make good progress and produce high standards of work and response. Students work at a good pace and are keen to learn.

30. Unsatisfactory teaching occurs in a small number of lessons, for example, in personal and social education and Spanish at Key Stage 3, in mathematics, in physical education (taught by non-specialists), and business studies at Key Stage 4. In one personal and social education lesson in Year

8, the teaching was poor. The weaknesses in the small number of lessons stem mainly from: including too much material in the lesson so that students were unable to consolidate their learning; inadequate planning and difficulty in managing students' behaviour adequately; insufficient subject expertise to extend students' learning; and too extensive an input by the teacher, which failed to involve students enough.

31. Nearly all teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach and use it well to provide work that challenges the students. In a number of subjects, such as design and technology, geography, history, ICT, modern foreign languages and physical education, teachers have an unclear understanding of the requirements of the National Curriculum descriptions for the higher levels and as a result do not ensure that the work provided is adequately challenging or that the standard of students' work is assessed accurately.

32. In most subjects, the teaching of literacy and numeracy is mostly good. Most departments follow the whole-school policy for developing the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. They encourage the correct use of key words and when marking work, they correct spelling and grammar. Some subjects, for example ICT, physical education and religious education, provide good opportunities for developing all four skills. Numeracy is taught well in a range of subjects. Clear strategies for developing numeracy skills are used in art, for example in understanding proportion in figure drawing and for foreshortening objects to represent perspective. In design and technology, science, physical education and history, as well as art, teachers provide adequate opportunities for students to develop their numeracy skills and apply them in solving problems. In geography, calculations, including correlation and other statistical techniques, are used very well to interpret primary data obtained during fieldwork. In physical education, students competently carry out analyses of fitness programmes.

33. Most teachers plan their work well, ensuring that they provide a range of activities to motivate and interest the students. Some of the planning only identifies the activities to be undertaken and does not identify the lesson intentions sufficiently, that is, the knowledge, skills and understanding that students are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson. The more effective teaching ensures that these learning intentions are shared with the class at the beginning of the lesson and undertakes a review at the end of the lesson to check what has been learned. Such strategies ensure that teachers are able to use this information to plan subsequent work and help students understand what they have learned in the lesson. Teachers' expectations of the quality of response from their students, in terms of the quality and quantity of work and their behaviour, are mostly good, but too often they do not expect enough from the more capable students. This ties in with some of the weaknesses in the planning and in teachers' understanding of the level descriptions in some subjects as not all teachers identify sufficiently clearly in their planning how they are going to challenge the most capable students in the class.

34. For the most part, teachers use an appropriate range of teaching and learning approaches to ensure that students remain focused on their work. At times, teachers direct and control the work too much and allow too little contribution from the class: this is more prevalent in Years 7 to 9. In a few lessons, such strategies are used as a way of controlling students' behaviour and have the opposite effect on what was intended, with the result that students' behaviour deteriorates and relationships become less positive. Overall, however, teachers manage their classes well. They use humour appropriately to defuse potential difficulties. Time is used well in most lessons, although the limitations of the 35-minute lesson causes particular difficulties in some subjects, for example English, physical education and religious education. Resources are used effectively and appropriately in most lessons. The marking of students' work is generally good, but it is unsatisfactory in mathematics. The assessment of students' work is mostly good and provides clear guidance on what they need to do to improve their work and which areas need further improvement. Homework is mostly used well to support class work and students' learning.

35. Overall, the teaching of students with special needs is satisfactory. In Years 7 to 11, students learn and are managed well in the majority of subjects. All members of staff have been circulated with data on students who require specific help and support. Staff consistently use the information on students' individual education plans to provide for their specific needs. Targets are precise and helpful in identifying learning, behaviour and medical needs, but these are not regularly monitored by teachers and teaching assistants to check how lessons are aiding students' learning and identifying and recording where additional subject support may be needed. Where they are used well, for example in English and

ICT, appropriate intervention meets the needs of students well. In history, the planning identifies students' specific needs effectively, and teachers match their style and method of teaching, for example explaining tasks more fully, as well as monitoring their progress carefully. In English, tasks are made more specific. Students are given additional time and support in art and design to produce work on which their progress can be assessed accurately. In many subjects, there are now more opportunities for students to use computers and, where this is happening, it improves their learning. Students who need them are provided with appropriate equipment, such as laptop computers or handheld electronic personal organisers, and aids for enlarging text and pictures. In music, instruments are adapted for wheelchair users. Teaching assistants, who are provided for students with the highest level of need, give effective support to them and to other students in the class. In English, teachers share their planning with the teaching assistants at the start of lessons so they can provide better support to students. Teachers and teaching assistants relate well to students.

36. The teaching of the small number of students with English as an additional language is good and they make the same progress as their peers. Students from minority ethnic heritages are integrated well into lessons and contribute in the same way as their peers.

37. There is an unacceptably wide variation in the quality of teaching and learning in personal and social education, ranging from good to poor, and overall it is unsatisfactory. The most successful work occurred in a Year 7 lesson designed to diffuse students' apprehensions about transferring to a new school, and in a Year 11 lesson on developing students' short-term memory and listening skills. Both lessons contributed positively to students' personal development. In too many lessons, however, the work lacks challenge and interest, and fails to motivate the students, who consequently gain little from their experiences.

38. The school has made good progress in addressing the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. Teachers now use a wider range of teaching approaches and encourage students to take greater responsibility for managing their own learning, but there is scope for extending these approaches even further. Subject teachers make a greater contribution towards supporting students with special educational needs and as a result, these students are making better progress. Some progress has been made in identifying the needs of gifted and talented students, but the effectiveness of the strategies is hindered by the lack of consistency across the departments and a whole-school overview of the provision for these students.

## **Sixth form**

39. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good overall. In around four-fifths of lessons the teaching is at least good and in just under a third it is very good and occasionally excellent. Out of the 74 lessons seen, no teaching was less than satisfactory. The effectiveness of the teaching makes a strong contribution to the good progress students make and the high standards they attain. The teaching is very good in art and design, geography, history and music; satisfactory in biology, physics and French; and good in the remaining subjects. There are examples of excellent teaching in art and design and geography.

40. One of the strongest features of sixth form teaching is the depth of knowledge, understanding and expertise that teachers have of their subjects and the enthusiasm that they convey to students. This results in most students being given an up-to-date view of their chosen subjects and presented with appropriately challenging work that makes considerable intellectual demands on them. In a few subjects, including physics, biology, design and technology and ICT, the work does not challenge and stretch the most capable students sufficiently: consequently they are not always achieving as well as they might. At times, some of the work, especially discussion, is directed too closely by teachers and allows insufficient opportunity for students to contribute their thoughts and ideas.

41. The small number of students with English as an additional language or with special educational needs receive appropriate support from their teachers enabling them to make good progress, in line with that of their peers. However, not enough is done to monitor and record the progress of students with special educational needs against the targets in their individual education plans.

42. Lessons are generally planned well and provide students with a range of tasks and activities to take their learning forward effectively. Occasionally, the learning intentions of lessons, in terms of the knowledge and skills that are to be developed, are not made explicit in the planning or shared sufficiently with the students so that they can check what they have learned and how well they are learning. The very good relationships that teachers have forged with their students are a particularly strong feature of the teaching in the sixth form. Students maintain high levels of concentration, work productively and respond well to skilful teaching. As a result, they make good advances in their knowledge and understanding. Detailed marking generally gives students an accurate view of the standards they have reached and helpful guidance on what they need to do to improve. Homework is used effectively in nearly all subjects to support and extend the work in lessons and to develop students' skills of working independently. The key skills of communication and application of number are taught well, but a few subjects, for example biology, business studies, sport studies, history and French, make insufficient use of ICT to support learning and to extend students' skills in this area.

43. The students' responses, both in the pre-inspection questionnaire and in inspectors' discussions with them, give strong endorsement to the quality of the school's teaching. A high proportion of students consider that they are well taught and challenged, their work is thoroughly assessed and teachers are readily accessible to them. Rather fewer believe that they receive sufficient guidance on how to undertake independent study or that they are well informed about their progress. Inspectors agree with almost all of their views but consider that the systems for setting targets and monitoring students' progress towards meeting their targets in some subjects, such as physics, business studies, sports studies and German, are not sufficiently systematic or robust.

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

44. Overall, the range of curricular and other opportunities offered to the students is satisfactory. There are strengths but there are also a number of balancing weaknesses. The breadth and balance of the curriculum are good. In Years 7 to 9, the whole range of National Curriculum subjects is provided. English teachers teach drama and there is a particular strength in modern foreign languages where all students select two languages from French, German and Spanish. Students in Years 10 and 11 have a good choice of GCSE subjects, with all students taking nine and a half subjects. The school's policy is to offer a narrower range of subjects than in some selective schools and to concentrate on enriching its quality rather than increasing the number of subjects to be studied. A good range of short courses in the various aspects of technology, including food technology, ensures that the requirement to teach technology to all students is met. A small number of students do not achieve their preferred choice of technology subject. Short courses are also available in other subjects, such as religious education and geography. Students are able to follow two languages from a choice of French, German and Spanish.

45. The curriculum does not fully meet statutory requirements. In particular, there is no explicit provision for the teaching of citizenship in Years 7 to 11 nor has the school completed a comprehensive audit of what takes place in departments. The school does not meet its statutory obligation to provide a daily act of corporate worship. As the discrete teaching of ICT accounts for over half of the timetabled time available in the computer rooms, not all departments are able to use ICT enough to support teaching and learning in their subjects as required by the National Curriculum. Many subjects, including English, science, geography, modern foreign languages, religious education, business studies, sports studies and history, make insufficient use of ICT to support teaching and learning. However, students make very heavy use of computers before and after school, at lunchtime and at home.

46. The school does not meet the recommended minimum of 25 hours of teaching time per week in Years 10 and 11. The organisation of the school day has weaknesses and was highlighted as a key issue in the last inspection report. Not enough has been done to address the key issue since that time. The school is still in the process of reviewing its options and has consulted staff. No decisions have yet been made, partly because of a desire to maintain curricular links in music at sixth form level with a neighbouring school. The number of students involved is a small proportion of the total sixth form population. The current organisation of the school day continues to affect a number of subjects. It constrains the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy in English effectively in Years 7 to 9, although English staff do not always make the best use of the single lesson. It is too short for physical education lessons to be productive because of the time lost in changing. There is insufficient time to



teach the Agreed Syllabus in religious education in Years 7 to 9 or to teach the GCSE short course in religious studies. For some students, the mornings are too long and it affects their break times.

47. Overall provision for literacy is satisfactory. There is a whole-school policy for developing the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Most subject departments follow this in that they encourage the correct use of key words and the marking of spelling and grammar. Some subjects, for example ICT, religious and physical education, provide good opportunities for developing all four skills. The school's numeracy policy is inadequate. It is but a brief statement of intent, lodging the major responsibility for teaching numeracy within mathematics without defining the contribution of the other curriculum areas of the school. Numeracy is developed well in a range of subjects but its provision lacks overall strategic planning.

48. The provision for activities outside the classroom to enrich the experience of students and to support learning outside the school day is satisfactory. This judgement represents a balance of positive and negative factors. Provision for extra-curricular activities in music is excellent and there is a very wide range of opportunities for listening, practising and performing to a high standard both within and outside of school. For example, the swing band has played for a number of years in a national promenade concert for schools in London. The physical education department promotes a wide programme of inter-school fixtures throughout the year. The traditional sixth form games afternoon is co-ordinated well with other schools to provide regular fixtures and is supported by a strong programme of team practices. The provision for recreational sports activities outside the classroom is limited. A homework club is held twice a week and the computers in the library and ICT rooms are heavily used before and after school, and at lunchtimes. The study of languages is underpinned by exchange visits to France, Spain and Germany. A number of departments, including history, geography, English and science, enrich their provision through a range of organised trips and visits. The art department promotes a busy programme of extra-classroom study.

49. The school's commitment to equality of access and opportunity for all its students, expressed in its statement of aims and values, is achieved in almost every aspect of the life and work of the main school, and provision is good. Academic courses are matched to the needs of students. All students, irrespective of their backgrounds, have access to them and to any associated visits and trips. However, students in Year 10 who are following the GCSE short course in religious studies are prevented from attending assembly as that time has been allocated to their GCSE work to make up for a shortage of lesson time. All students, including those who speak English as an additional language, from minority ethnic backgrounds, including refugees, or have special educational needs, are treated equally with the main body of students. For example, the building has been modified to ensure that students who use wheelchairs can join their classmates in their studies: they also accompany them on school trips. Staff with pastoral responsibilities spend a good deal of time helping disaffected students to succeed in their studies. A key and necessary development due for implementation this year is the evaluation of the GCSE results of students from minority ethnic groups, something that is already done for students with special educational needs. The school's policy for equal opportunities has not been reviewed since before the last inspection but this is now in hand. Improvement in this area since the last inspection has been good, including the appointment of a senior member of staff to oversee this aspect of the school's work.

50. The school has an admission policy that welcomes students with special educational needs who fulfil other selection criteria. The range of needs of the present students includes those affecting communication and interaction, cognition and learning, behaviour and emotional development, and sensory, physical and medical needs. Provision for students with dyslexia is provided in school through the organisation of teaching groups in English. Four students are disapplied from the National Curriculum for some subjects, including science and physical education. Alternative provision is given in science. In physical education, although participation in games presents difficulties, those aspects of physical education relating to health, appreciation of performance and an understanding of the rules of games are not given sufficient attention. The school has close working links with a local clinic, which provides counselling and guidance sessions. Some students attend an off-site inclusion unit for attendance and behaviour, and the school link provided by the special needs coordinator, who also teaches there one morning a week, is effective and mutually supportive.

51. Since the last inspection, the number of students with special educational needs has increased. The awareness of classroom staff of the support required has been helped by the circulation of a booklet outlining clear procedures for referral following the change in the Code of Practice, and explaining and highlighting specific needs in a useful manner. The special needs co-ordinator has also run social learning groups at break times, and personal and social education lessons for students with autistic needs. Since the last inspection, a special needs faculty working group has been set up to establish stronger links between subjects and the special needs co-ordinator. It meets at least once a term over a number of lunchtimes with representatives from all subjects, including the named governor for special needs. In all lessons, students take their lead from the teacher and accept prompting and support.

52. The overall provision for students' personal, social and health education is unsatisfactory. For a significant minority of students, the systematic acquisition of knowledge and understanding is inconsistent, and opportunities to reflect on their own values, attitudes and behaviour, as well as those of others, depend too much on the interpretation of the current programme by individual teachers. There has been little change in the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. The most effective lessons are well-prepared and managed, follow the agreed programme closely and the students are interested and keen to participate. Unsatisfactory lessons are poorly planned and managed, and students are not gainfully involved.

53. The quality of curriculum planning for personal, social and health education has improved since the last inspection and is satisfactory. Heads of year have amended the programme to ensure greater emphasis on equal opportunities. Additional materials have been purchased to support the development of multi-cultural education within the programme. In key topics such as drug education and sex and relationships education, form tutors are able to call upon the support of more experienced year tutors; however, staff do not always make use of this support.

54. A number of external agencies make an effective contribution to the teaching of aspects of personal, social and health education; for example, students in Year 9 meet people from a range of occupations to reinforce their work on careers. This happens more frequently in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. The monitoring and evaluation arrangements undertaken by the heads of year are unsatisfactory and in need of further development to ensure that the personal, social and health education programme is implemented consistently.

55. The provision for careers education and guidance is satisfactory. A well-stocked careers library provides excellent support for students and they appreciate the quality of this information and its accessibility. Students comment that they have received useful support from their subject teachers about their future careers. A programme of guidance is provided for all students as part of the personal and social education programme but observation of these sessions suggests that the quality of teaching and teacher commitment is variable. The result is that some students do better than others when it comes to learning from these sessions. All Year 11 students are offered work experience. Evidence from employers and students suggests that this is very successful. The school does not have a work experience co-ordinator at present as the previous incumbent has changed his role.

56. The school has very good relationships with its partner institutions. It plays an active role in local community affairs, which enrich the curriculum. Headteachers from the many contributory primary schools appreciate the liaison system, whereby secondary teachers visit Year 6 pupils in their schools, prior to inviting them to secondary 'taster' days. Particular mention is made of the school's Jazz band, which performs at the Ashford Festival and has raised £2,000 for a local Parish Church building fund. A number of students from a nearby non-selective school have enjoyed and profited from the opportunity to take part in the school's Maths Club. This secondary school also commends the transfer arrangements into the sixth form offered to their higher achieving girls. Other secondary schools in the area value the links they have with the school and praise, in particular, their co-operation in setting up the Chart Base Project and involvement in the pilot Connexions project.

57. The school has very good links with local industry, commerce and business as well as the local hospital, where students in Year 11 are offered work placements. Participating employers praise the school for its close monitoring of students during their placements and the follow-up evaluations. Students are invariably considered to be well motivated and interested and, as a result, some have been offered employment after successful placements.

58. The school provides very well for students' moral and social development, and the overall provision for their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. The awareness of staff of their responsibilities in these areas is not yet secure. Where there are strong features of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the school's taught curriculum, not all subjects have policies, undertake specific planning, or monitor the provision.

59. Overall, the provision for students' spiritual development is satisfactory. Very good opportunities are provided in religious education to extend students' spiritual experiences and to widen their horizons, as when students explore issues of belief, learn to value reflection, and visit important religious places of worship in London. Students in Year 7 are supported by Year 12 mentors while they reflect on their first weeks in school, and then at the end of the year. In geography, students are shown awe-inspiring pictures of places of outstanding natural beauty. English provides good opportunities to consider religious and spiritual themes in literature. Art and design, drama and music all deal well with spiritual aspects of life and death through studying poetry, customs and cultures, and listening to and composing music. There is a lack of attention to exploring or highlighting human and spiritual issues in most subjects, particularly in science.

60. The arrangements for a daily act of collective worship, which include house, year and form assemblies, are generally unsatisfactory. The lack of adequate monitoring means that the quality of provision and the requirement for all students to have a daily act of collective worship are not fully in place. Students in Year 10 miss one assembly as a result of the timetabling of their GCSE course in religious education. There was no collective worship in form assemblies during the inspection. The school guidance booklet for form assemblies, with its emphasis on pastoral activities, is not helpful to staff as a support for collective worship. The quality of collective worship in house and year assemblies has a number of weaknesses. Time is not used well, presentations are not always appropriate for the age groups present and attention to atmosphere is lacking. In addition, the involvement of and interaction with students is limited, visiting speakers have too little time and are not given enough guidance about the need for an inclusive message, and staff do not do enough to reinforce the value of the activity. Topics are recorded, which are in line with broad Christian beliefs about the importance of sharing, caring, community values, awareness of others and individual responsibility. However, there is insufficient planning for whole-school themes to ensure that the time in assemblies is used effectively to enhance and reinforce the school's ethos and values. For instance, an impressive and well received celebration piece by three student jazz musicians was introduced as an example of team work, but without planning, it remained an isolated event lacking an effective link to allow students to reflect on human and spiritual values at a deeper level.

61. Provision for students' moral development is very good. Staff evidently care about the students. There is a sense of order in every room. Adults are very good at setting boundaries for students, which they reinforce through high expectations of individual behaviour. This consistent approach increases students' awareness of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour and increases their trustworthiness. Students learn about right and wrong. They apply their understanding in lessons such as physical education, music and drama. In general, students care about each other and their environment. Students are allowed in classrooms throughout the day. They learn how to treat people with differences with respect. In English, geography, history and art and design, students consider the moral implications of war, crime and punishment and other moral issues. In science, students learn to care for living things. In practical subjects, they learn about routines, fair play, accepting the decisions of others and the norms and values of games and taking part.

62. The school makes very good provision for students' social development and is effective in promoting an ethos in which students are proud of the school's community values. Students co-operate informally and in structured activities well. Their relaxed social interaction reflects the inclusive approach of all staff when responding to and supporting students. In religious education, students debate topical issues about gender, families and animal rights, and in art and design, history and music, they learn about the political and social norms of the past and present. In drama, students explore a range of social issues through improvisation. They are encouraged to provide leadership in music in playing with others. Project work and research, including the use of the Internet, encourage independent learning in geography and science. Students benefit from opportunities to be part of school teams, to take part in drama productions and in their involvement with other schools, including modern language exchange trips

to other countries. As yet, the school council does not provide sufficient opportunities for students to develop their social skills through taking responsibility for organising themselves.

63. Provision for students' cultural development is satisfactory. Good opportunities are available for students to take part in their own and other cultural traditions of the area, in dramatic performances, and musical concerts. Visits to theatres, magistrates' courts and places of work locally and in London are undertaken. Students enter county and national competitions and go on European tours. In English, geography, art and design, music, German, drama and religious education, students are encouraged to appreciate the traditions of their own culture today and in the past. In English, they also explore the poems of other cultures. In art and design, they are taught about the European, African and Japanese influences on art. In music, an African drumming workshop took place in school. Although students from different cultures are successfully integrated into the school, the school gives insufficient attention to preparing students to live in a multi-cultural society and fails to exploit all the opportunities for their cultural development, which the rich diversity of the school offers. Subjects in the curriculum do not adequately reflect the contributions that different cultures have made in world history, literature and mathematical and scientific thinking. This aspect of students' development is more evident than at the last inspection but is still not a strong feature of the school. Cultural development through learning is satisfactory but there is insufficient highlighting of the cultural diversity of Britain or the celebration of the cultural heritages of some of the students.

## Sixth form

64. Curriculum provision for Year 12 and 13 students is of good quality. It is broad and balanced, and offers a wide range of rich and varied learning opportunities. However, it does not make adequate provision for religious education or a daily act of collective worship for all sixth form students and, as a result, statutory requirements are not met. The range of enrichment activities is not wide enough in English, geography and business studies.

65. This school provides an extensive range of AS and A-level courses. Since the last inspection, in addition to National Curriculum subjects provided in Years 7 - 11, the sixth form provision also includes psychology, politics, sports studies and theatre studies, as well as French and German for business courses. There is shared provision with a neighbouring girls' school for students wishing to study music and classical civilisation is studied at the neighbouring girls' school, while female students come to this school for design and technology. The teaching of the AS course in music is shared between the two schools. The partnership with a local high school enables students to have access to a range of vocational provision. The local further education college provides a range of short certificated courses to complement students' mainstream courses and the provision of key skills: this includes the development of communication and application of number and the development of ICT skills that are regularly assessed and certificated. In addition, students have access to a complementary programme of extra-curricular activities, work shadowing and weekly community service. The important links between this school and its three partner establishments ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of a large number of post-16 students in the area.

66. Access to all of this provision is explained clearly to Year 11 students and their parents orally and in the sixth form prospectus. The entry requirements for each course are clearly established and the choice of courses is supported by discussions with subject staff and counselling and advice from the head of sixth form and the careers service. The induction to the sixth form, in the period after the end of GCSE examinations in Year 11, helps students to gain an insight into their proposed courses. Through this process, the school is successful in ensuring balance within the programme for each student, that there is smooth transition in learning from Year 11 into sixth form studies and that each learner's expectations and aspirations are met. The quality of the provision is monitored and evaluated within subject departments. Levels of retention are high. The careful monitoring of the performance of each student and their attitude and response to the demands of their courses reassures the school that students' learning needs are met.

67. The school's commitment to equality of access and opportunity for all its students, expressed in its statement of aims and values, is achieved in almost every aspect of the life and work of the sixth form, and provision is good. Students, irrespective of background, are able to gain access to leadership roles, for example in the prefect team and through sports activities. Courses of study are equally accessible to all students, as are extra-curricular opportunities. The one practical matter needing attention, noted during the inspection, is the lack of changing and showering facilities for the female students who have recently joined the sixth form. As is the case also in the main school, the success of the school's procedures for ensuring equality of access and opportunity are not systematically monitored and evaluated, a similar position to that found in the last inspection. However, a senior member of staff has been appointed to co-ordinate this aspect of the school's work and, overall, improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

68. The provision for careers education and guidance is good. Students make good use of the careers library, which is accessible for much of the school day and contains a wide range of paper-based and electronic resources. Ninety-seven per cent of students progress to university from the sixth form although increasing numbers are taking a gap year between school and university. An effective careers programme is in place for groups of students but one-to-one advice about university application currently falls to a small group of mainly senior school managers and is not sufficiently well co-ordinated.

69. All Year 12 students are offered work experience and evidence from employers and students indicates that it is very successful. There is, however, no work experience co-ordinator to monitor the quality of provision or ensure that all students are learning from the activity.

70. The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is similar to that in the main school; that is, very good provision for their moral and social development and satisfactory provision for their spiritual and cultural development. Similarly, whereas there are strong features of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the school's taught curriculum, there are no subject policies, no planning, and no monitoring or current whole school audits. The study of literature in English provides good opportunities to explore such spiritual themes as epiphany, and to ask searching questions about religious conflict in the sixth form. Art and design, German, drama and music all deal well with spiritual aspects of life and death through the study of poetry, customs and cultures, and listening to and composing music. There is a lack of attention to exploring or highlighting human and spiritual issues in science, in particular, and in business education.

71. The requirement for all students in the sixth form to have a daily act of collective worship is not fully in place. The quality of collective worship when the sixth form met together was satisfactory and included time for reflection, but form assemblies do not meet requirements. In English, students consider the moral implications of colonialism, and in French and German talk about topical issues. Students in Year 12 combine with a neighbouring girls' school for an annual religious education conference to explore moral issues. This does not fulfil statutory requirements, but the event is well organised with outside speakers invited on topics about which students have been consulted.

72. The school is effective in promoting an ethos in which students are proud of the school's community values. Students are encouraged to take the initiative in English and to lead discussions. In geography, student autonomy is a strong feature. Students benefit from opportunities to be part of school teams and to take part in drama productions, and their involvement with other schools, including German exchange trips to other countries. Preparation for students to join and value the diversity of the multi-cultural society of which they are a part is satisfactory. In particular, geography and art and design teach them to appreciate their own cultural traditions and the diversity and richness of other cultures. Subjects in the curriculum such as science and business education do not adequately reflect the contributions that different cultures continue to make to economic, scientific and mathematical thinking.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

73. Procedures for ensuring students' welfare are good, as was the case at the time of the last inspection. The school provides a secure and supportive environment, which is inclusive and has a strong community ethos. It promotes very high levels of respect and courtesy. Teachers and staff have high expectations of students and act as very good role models. They have a very good understanding of students' personal development, and are effective in developing students' confidence and in promoting concern and respect for others and very good standards of behaviour. Teachers have a clear understanding of students' academic progress, although the assessment procedures are not always used consistently.

74. Staff know students well. The monitoring and support of students' personal development are very good and, combined with targeted support, contribute to the high standards they attain and ensure that all students are able to benefit from the opportunities offered. Students feel that they are well supported and speak highly of the commitment and dedication of staff who give freely of their own time to provide support, guidance and encouragement. The very good relations between staff and students ensure that students are confident in approaching staff with any problems.

75. There are very good procedures for monitoring and promoting high standards of behaviour and a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong. They are based upon high expectations and individual responsibility, to which students respond very well. The effectiveness of the procedures and strategies and the response of students, combined with the very good relationships within the school, have a very positive effect on their academic and personal development. Whilst bullying or other oppressive behaviour is not a significant problem, the school is rigorous in resolving problems and mediating in the case of difficulties which may arise in friendships.

76. The procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality are effective in ensuring very good levels of attendance. Parents are contacted on the first day of any absence if there are any concerns and there is very effective liaison with the education welfare officer. The attendance of all students on the special needs register is carefully monitored and noted if there is a concern. As attendance affects the

achievement of some of these students, appropriate steps are taken to contact parents and the education welfare officer.

77. Child protection procedures, which are based on those of the local area child protection committee, meet requirements. The designated teacher for child protection has undertaken training and the awareness and understanding of all teachers and support staff have been raised through in-service training. The school is vigilant and sensitive in exercising its responsibilities. Good links exist with the relevant outside agencies, which provide support when necessary.

78. The school has a satisfactory health and safety policy, together with appropriate supporting documentation. The health and safety issues identified at the time of the last inspection have been addressed satisfactorily. Staff have a sound understanding of health and safety issues. The day-to-day management of health and safety matters is good and students are taught safe practices in lessons. Equipment is checked and departments review safety assessments regularly, although documentation is not held centrally. Whole-school risk assessments are not formally recorded, which is a weakness. Evacuation procedures are regularly practised and any identified issues addressed. Many staff are trained in providing first aid and they provide good support and care to students in need of attention. Accidents are appropriately recorded, as well as the use of Paracetamol, in accordance with the local education authority's guidelines.

79. The needs of students across a range of learning, behaviour, social, medical and physical needs are understood and identified appropriately. Annual reviews for students with special educational needs are carried out as required. In lessons, however, teaching assistants and subject teachers do not keep weekly records of any significant progress by students or assessment data to inform individual education plans and future target setting. Teaching assistants do not have their own copies of these plans and not all teachers understand their use in monitoring progress. The Code of Practice register is circulated to all staff, but does not contain sufficient information about the achievements of students with special educational needs, and inappropriately includes students who no longer require additional intervention. New software is being used appropriately for writing individual education plans but these do not provide profiles of students or information on their progress over time to help all staff plan effectively. Staff receive insufficient data on students with special educational needs to be a useful working profile for teachers or to help the special needs coordinator track students' progress and achievement over time, and assist in the regular monitoring and review of targets. At the time of reviews, all subjects are consulted but a sample of returns shows that some subjects are not clear about their responsibility for providing support in the classroom and highlights difficulties rather than the appropriateness of targets and whether they are being met.

80. There is an accurate register of all students who have English as an additional language and all teachers have these details. Only one student is in the early stages of learning English and he is provided with one and a half hours of external tuition. The school maintains close links with the local education authority support team and receives regular reports on the student's progress. Like all other students, the attainment and effort of those who have English as an additional language are monitored regularly. The majority are attaining above average standards. Sensitive support is provided in lessons. However, the performance of these individual students in internal and external examinations and tests is not specifically monitored or data analysed, at whole-school or subject levels, to ensure they are achieving as well as they might.

81. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good and are a significant improvement on the arrangements that existed at the time of the last inspection. The school's assessment policy is detailed and comprehensive. It stresses the importance of students receiving feedback about their performance, which should be informative and understandable and provide encouragement for the future. Regular assessments take place as students pass through the school and the effort and attainment of every boy in Years 7 to 11 is monitored every nine weeks in each subject. Subject teachers inform students of their grades and the reasons for them, with the details distributed to form tutors, heads of department and heads of year. Parents are also sent a print-out of the monitoring results. The form tutor and year head interview students who are a cause for concern and in extreme cases parents are invited into school. The use of assessments is regular and effective in most subjects but the role of form tutors in discussing and monitoring students' academic performance is inconsistent.

82. The school has developed a comprehensive database of assessment information, which is accessible to each department. This includes Key Stage 2 test results, scores in standardised tests, which are taken soon after entry to the school, and any subsequent assessment or examination data. Subject staff are expected to use these data as the basis for target setting for individual students. Heads of department have the flexibility to use these data in the most appropriate way for their subject in order to monitor the work of the department and of individual students, and to compare the performance of each year group. Overall, this is successful: the flexibility encourages departments to use their initiative, but it also produces inconsistencies. All subjects maintain good records of marking and of longer-term assessments. Particularly good procedures for assessment have been introduced in English, mathematics, art, geography, history and music. Students' self-evaluation skills are developed well in drama, forming an important part of most lessons. Information from subject departments is not used sufficiently to support assessment in ICT. There is evidence of much good practice, indicating the potential for further improvements as all subjects bring the quality of their procedures up to the standards of the best. These differences are evident to parents when they receive the annual school reports, as each subject area adopts its own system for the amount of detail and the style of presentation of the assessment information.

83. The use of assessment data to inform curricular planning is satisfactory in most subjects but is unsatisfactory in science where there is insufficient collaboration between physics, chemistry and biology. Within subjects, the use of assessment data to modify provision is limited and the school should aim to spread the good practice currently found in history, music and art. Plenty of reliable assessment data is being generated by the school, but teachers do not use it sufficiently to modify their day-to-day teaching. Therefore, some students are not achieving as well as they might.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Assessment***

84. Since the last inspection, much improved procedures have been introduced to monitor students' attainment and progress. Teachers make use of a range of information on which to judge the progress of students over time and this is used to monitor their progress. Reviews are undertaken five times a year with students about their progress, coupled with strategies to encourage self-review and evaluation of performance. This is successful, as students know how well they are doing and how to improve. Students are trained to evaluate their progress and this enhances self-responsibility and maturity. Teachers keep students informed about the progress they are making and give guidance on targets for the future. Reports sent to parents are informative on what students have achieved and what they need to do to improve.

85. Teachers reliably assess individual pieces of work and students are provided with accurate information about their progress and attainment. Students confirm that they are provided with a clear picture of how they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The assessment system in the sixth form taking place every six or seven weeks, together with a student's own self-evaluation, enable any trends to be detected quickly. Those progressing well are encouraged to raise their aspirations and those causing concern are offered extra help and support. The history department sets a high standard in this respect and provides a good example of best practice. Departmental practice in physics, business studies and sports studies is not as robust.

### ***Advice, support and guidance***

86. Overall, support and guidance for sixth form students are good. The arrangements made to prepare students for study in the sixth form and the induction programme, which starts at the end of Year 11 and includes team building exercises such as 'Operation Paintball', are successful. The induction programme includes advice on areas such as motivation and study skills. Those students who join the school in the sixth form receive good support from form tutors and their peers to ensure that they settle in quickly and become part of the school community. Students are expected to take responsibility for their own actions and to provide good role models for other students: the majority respond positively to these high expectations. Staff are readily available to provide good individual academic and personal guidance, although some sixth form students are not fully aware that, on occasions, they may need to seek personal support if an issue is not identified by staff. Good provision is made for those students who



have English as an additional language and sensitive support is provided in lessons. This applies equally to students with special educational needs. Detailed marking enables the quality of the provision for these students to be carefully monitored.

87. Arrangements for health and safety, child protection, first aid and students' welfare are satisfactory and are the same as those reported for the main school. The school's arrangements for monitoring and promoting attendance in the sixth form are good and the school recognises that overall levels of attendance in the sixth form are lower than those found amongst students in the main school. The school is taking appropriate steps to encourage higher attendance amongst the minority of sixth form students whose attendance is unsatisfactory and whose absence impacts adversely on the overall attendance level. The school's monitoring of attendance shows that those students who do not attend school regularly do not make such good progress.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

88. Parents have very positive views of the school and of the education it provides. The effectiveness of the school's links with parents continues to be good. The school tries hard to involve parents in its work and life for the benefit of students. The partnership between school and home is promoted through the provision of a satisfactory range of communications and information on students' learning. The school has recognised the need to improve the way it communicates with parents and has included this as a priority within the school development plan.

89. Over a quarter of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and a small minority attended the pre-inspection meeting. Parents are particularly pleased with many aspects of the school's work, including the school's high expectations, the ease with which they feel that they can talk to the school about problems or concerns, the information that they receive about their child's progress, the quality of leadership and management, the progress that students make and the quality of teaching. However, a minority of parents have concerns about the arrangements for homework and the range of enrichment activities provided outside lessons. Inspectors agree with the positive points made by parents, although they judge that there is some room for improvement in the quality of information provided to parents and in some aspects of management. They deem homework to be effective and the range of activities outside lessons, including extra-curricular activities and visits, to be satisfactory.

90. Parents' contribution to students' learning at school and at home to their wider activities is very good. This is shown by the very good support which parents provide for students' homework and the high levels of attendance at consultation evenings. The members of the hardworking committee who run FONKS (Friends of Norton Knatchbull School), and those who support its work, organise a range of activities to raise money for the school. This support is appreciated by students and staff as it makes a positive contribution to the resources and facilities available to support students' learning, which has a positive impact on their attainment.

91. The information provided for parents about the life and work of the school is satisfactory. Reports on students' progress are satisfactory overall. The annual reports are written with care and value students' work, identify what they know, do and understand, provide good encouragement and also comment on attitudes towards work. However, they do not consistently identify for parents what students need to do to improve their work. The annual reports are supplemented by consultation evenings and interim reports which provide grades for attainment and effort. Parents support consultation evenings well and the attendance at these meetings is monitored to enable staff to follow up those parents who do not attend. Staff try to ensure that parents are involved in their children's learning and development and to involve them at an early stage in the event of any concerns being identified. The headteacher and staff are readily accessible to parents. Parents of students with special educational needs are consulted regularly and take part in regular and annual reviews. Their views on the support provided for students are positive.

92. Parents' views of the sixth form are very good and generally reflect those expressed by parents of students in the main school. From discussions with current sixth form students, some of whom have only recently joined the school, it is clear that sixth form students are proud of 'their' school and value its ethos and the support and encouragement of the school community. Parents and students are provided with satisfactory information about the life and work of the school and about students' progress. This

information, combined with regular academic monitoring and individual reviews, provides students with a good understanding of what they need to do to raise individual performance and improve their grades.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

93. There are strengths and weakness in the quality of leadership and management in the school and overall it is satisfactory. The headteacher has a clear commitment to raising standards further and, with the support of his senior management team, has implemented a number of effective strategies to raise expectations in the school, including the monitoring of teaching and learning in which he has played a significant role. In addition, since the last inspection, and under the headteacher's leadership, the school has fully embraced a commitment to educational inclusion and equality of opportunity and this is reflected explicitly in the school's work and ethos. In this respect, the school has made very good progress since the last inspection when it was identified as a key issue and the headteacher's role in making these changes has been considerable. The aims of the school are evident in all of its work.

94. The school works efficiently on a day-to-day basis. Routines are well established and run smoothly. Administrative staff are courteous and helpful and give good support to senior managers. Senior managers have clearly delegated areas of responsibility and undertake these in an effective manner to ensure the smooth running of the school. Some of the responsibilities that are undertaken by these staff could more effectively be undertaken at a less senior level, giving them more time for strategic management and ensuring the consistent implementation of the school's priorities. As a senior management team they meet regularly with the headteacher. These meetings are used to review progress, consider a range of administrative issues relating to day-to-day management and to determine future action. As such, they are successful. As a group, the senior management team is less successful at longer-term strategic planning, managing the implementation of national initiatives, including citizenship and the provision for gifted and talented students, and holding heads of departments and other middle managers firmly to account for what they do and the consistency with which they implement school policies and expectations. Consequently, the progress that has been made in implementing some initiatives across the school has been unsatisfactory. Regular meetings on an individual basis between the headteacher and his senior staff do not occur at present, but plans are in hand for this to happen shortly.

95. Governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and of their role in its governance. They are very supportive of the headteacher and relationships are very good. The governing body fulfils most of its statutory responsibilities well, other than in the provision for citizenship, religious education and a daily act of collective worship. They are improving their skills and procedures for holding the school to account for what it does and, through their recently set up monitoring committee and their visits to the school, are well placed to make significant progress in the future. The strength of their role in contributing to strategic management is less evident, and many governors recognise this as a weakness that they need to improve.

96. The school lacks a clear strategic view of its direction over the next few years. The school improvement plan, which is for the current year only, is not set within a context of the school's longer-term development and lacks sufficient rigour and coherence. The priorities in the plan are appropriate to the work of the school but lack tight enough timescales, indicators of success to enable progress to be checked and information on how the plan is to be monitored and evaluated. Nevertheless, the senior management team and the governing body regularly review progress in implementing the plan.

97. The way the school monitors and evaluates its performance is mostly satisfactory but in some areas is not systematic enough. Senior staff undertake a thorough analysis of the school's examination performance, the outcome of which is used well to identify strengths and weaknesses and to inform subsequent action. Data from standardised tests, together with students' performance in the national tests at the age of 11 and the tests used to select students for selective education, are collated effectively and are used to set targets at individual student, department and whole-school levels. Heads of year use them effectively to monitor the overall progress of students. These data are not used consistently in all departments to monitor and review students' progress on a regular basis in the subject, to set challenging targets for groups of students, especially the most capable, or to inform planning, teaching and learning. As yet, not enough is done on a whole-school basis to analyse the progress and performance of different groups of students, for example from different minority ethnic backgrounds.

98. The role of heads of departments in leading and managing their departments is satisfactory overall, with examples of good and occasionally very good practice. They generally give clear guidance and direction on how the subject is to develop and in almost all cases ensure that the school's aims are reflected in the department's work. They are less good at monitoring and evaluating on a consistent basis the quality of teaching and learning through regular lesson observations, the scrutiny of students' work and analysing and using performance data to monitor students' progress and set challenging targets for them. There are considerable weaknesses in some of the departmental development plans. In some cases, there are no plans; in others they lack specificity and do not relate sufficiently to whole-school priorities. The monitoring of these plans at a senior management level and ensuring the consistency of approach across the departments is insufficiently robust. Senior staff have a link role with specific departments and undertake a departmental review each year. These reviews are effective in enhancing the communication between senior managers and the departments and in getting a good overview of progress and the work of the department. They are not as effective in checking whether departments are implementing the school's priorities within the required timescales consistently and thoroughly. Systems to ensure the accountability of subject managers and to ensure consistency of approach are not rigorous enough at present.

99. Leadership and management of special educational needs are satisfactory. The requirements of the new Code of Practice are in place. The special needs co-ordinator has undertaken specialist training and has shared this with all staff. Relevant information and data are being used to identify students' needs on entry, supported by appropriate visits to contributory primary schools. The monitoring of students through reviews is good and ensures they receive effective support. Students play a full part in this process. Annual reviews of students with a statement of special educational need take place in accordance with the Code of Practice, and are attended by parents and students. The school has regular visits from the educational psychologist and also makes appropriate use of local authority services for specialist teaching and advice. Teaching assistants are used strategically, to reflect funding levels and the school's commitment to inclusion, and to meet students' needs. The school site is accessible for students in wheel chairs. Resources for students who need specialist equipment in lessons are good. The school's special needs strategy fully supports the school's aims and values of developing each student's potential to the full. The school's policy has not been updated to reflect current practice and does not explain clearly how the support for students with special educational needs is distinct from that provided for their pastoral care, for students with English as an additional language and those who are gifted and talented. There is no special needs handbook which collates the policy with school and departmental procedures, identifies the range of data that are available and identifies special needs priorities.

100. The school uses additional funding for special educational needs well for its designated purpose. The school budget and additional funding are used to fund a special needs co-ordinator post, three special needs tutors working alongside a student making a staged return to school, and four teaching assistants attached to students with a statement. The governors take seriously their responsibility for special educational needs and they produce a full report annually for parents.

101. The school's budgeting is prudent, based on realistic financial planning, and is driven by its educational priorities. Governors retained a larger than usual surplus last year to assist in meeting any shortfall arising from a change in the funding arrangements. This proved to be a justified strategy. The governors make a satisfactory contribution to the planning process by maintaining a clear overview which is developing a more strategic approach. Governors bring to discussions a wide range of experience and expertise, combined with a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Financial planning is effective and the school's educational priorities inform budget setting. Priorities are clearly identified and correspond with the school's current needs. The link between educational and financial planning is close, and specific proposals are costed appropriately. Priorities are related to raising students' standards of attainment.

102. Systems of financial control are good. Financial information is very readily available and reports are very carefully prepared and analysed by the finance officer and regularly presented to the headteacher and the chair of the governors, as well as being presented to meetings of the governing body. Financial procedures and controls are operated with a high degree of efficiency.

103. Satisfactory procedures are in place to ensure that the school obtains best value for money before committing itself to expenditure. Comparisons are made and the impact of expenditure reviewed, although in some cases heads of department do not link this review sufficiently to the impact on students and the standards they attain. Assessments are made of the cost effectiveness of proposed expenditure and consideration is given to evaluating the subsequent impact of the expenditure on agreed policies. The school carefully accounts for the funds and grants which it receives and in all cases, they are used for the purposes designated.

104. The school uses its available resources appropriately to support students' learning. Overall, the school makes good use of its staffing, accommodation and other resources. Students benefit from the efficient way that staff and rooms are deployed. Overall, in terms of its level of expenditure, the quality of education provided and the achievement of students in relation to their prior attainment, the school provides good value for money.

105. The school's use of new technology to support management and students' learning is good. For example, attendance is monitored very effectively with the support of new technology and interactive whiteboards are used particularly well to support teaching in subjects such as mathematics. Students use equipment with confidence, for example, when using a digital camera to record artwork.

106. The overall provision for staffing is good. In most subjects, teachers are well qualified and experienced. The provision for English is currently good, although standards were affected last year by a number of staff changes. Since the last inspection, the number of specialist teachers of physical education has increased, making a significant impact on teaching and learning. A number of mathematics teachers also teach ICT; their ICT skills are used to advantage in mathematics lessons. The support given by technicians is good in ICT: the art department has inadequate support. The head of music, who is deeply committed to extra-curricular activities, has insufficient time for administration, including the co-ordination of the work of a large team of peripatetic teachers. The governors' personnel committee is concerned that some teachers are over-burdened by tasks that could be undertaken by others.

107. No newly qualified teachers have started at the school this year. In recent years, the deputy head has organised a comprehensive year-long induction programme for those new to the school. Very good support has included familiarisation with school policies and practices, a review of aspects of teaching and staff development. Support for other teachers, new to the school, is satisfactory and has included being invited to areas of interest in the induction programme. The school is used regularly for initial teacher training, with the benefit that some of the newly qualified teachers gain employment at the school.

108. The structure for providing staff development is well established and generally reflects priorities identified in the school improvement plan, departmental responses to curriculum innovation and the particular needs of individual teachers identified through performance management. More training is required for business education teachers to familiarise them with the requirements of the GCSE course that they are teaching. A series of one-hour training sessions were held in the summer term for middle managers. Topics, including lesson observation, monitoring teaching, leading a department and writing schemes of work, were judged to be effective but their impact has not been evaluated.

109. Overall, the accommodation is satisfactory for teaching the curriculum and governors have deliberately adopted strategies to improve the accessibility of the building through the provision of ramps, two lifts and disabled toilet accommodation. Some aspects of the accommodation, such as the school's extensive site are very good and in some curriculum areas such as mathematics, history and design and technology, standards of accommodation have a positive impact on students' learning. In music, the lack of storage, small size of rooms and poor soundproofing have an adverse impact on both teaching and learning. During examinations, for example, music practice often has to be curtailed to afford proper examination conditions for students. In art and some other areas, the general appearance of the accommodation is 'tired' and detracts from the very high standards of displays around the school and in outside areas. Drama also suffers from the lack of an appropriate blackout in the drama studio. Displays are used very effectively to celebrate students' work and achievements and to link to areas of the curriculum and extra-curricular activities.

110. The range of learning resources is good and expenditure on resources is slightly above the national average. Heads of department make annual capitation bids and most departments are well resourced. Learning resources are particularly good in ICT. Students have access to many computers, all of which are connected by Broadband to the Internet, and are able to access the school's Intranet from home or school. The ratio of students to computers is broadly similar to the national average. The library is well resourced and used effectively by students.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Leadership and management***

111. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The sixth form is an integral part of the whole school, sharing and reinforcing its values, and contributing effectively to its ethos. As such, it plays an important part in setting a good role model for students in the main school to emulate. The head of the sixth form manages the provision effectively on a day-to-day basis and knows the students well. Form tutors provide appropriate support to students as required.

112. Overall, the governing body fulfils its responsibilities satisfactorily: it has a clear view of what sort of sixth form it wants and monitors its performance in examinations carefully. It has not ensured, however, that provision for religious education and a daily act of collective worship meets statutory requirements. Its priorities include increasing the number of students in the sixth form, opening the sixth form to female students, and widening the range of courses, including vocational courses. The sixth form review committee, made up of governors and staff, has been instrumental in focusing attention on a range of issues relating to the development of the sixth form. As with the main school, the governing body has not yet articulated its vision for the future of the sixth form in a longer-term strategic plan.

113. The way sixth form performance is monitored and evaluated reflects the procedures in the main school: a thorough analysis of examination results, including value-added analyses, is used well to help set targets for improvement. In addition, there are some good systems for monitoring and reviewing the progress of students on a regular basis and involving them in evaluating their own performance, although these are not applied consistently in all subjects. Similarly, the school's procedures for monitoring teaching have been applied appropriately to the sixth form. As with the main school, this is not undertaken regularly or consistently enough.

114. The sixth form is cost effective. The funding received for the sixth form is spent appropriately on providing for the students and the sixth form does not receive extra funding from funds allocated to students in the main school. Similarly, money meant for the sixth form is not used to subsidise spending elsewhere. The school has good links with neighbouring schools to extend the provision available for students, including vocational subjects. Relationships between the schools are very positive and the joint teaching arrangements are efficient. The principles of best value are applied appropriately to ensure that expenditure is cost effective. In terms of the high standards it achieves, the sixth form provides good value for money.

### ***Resources***

115. As with the main school, the accommodation is satisfactory overall for teaching the sixth form curriculum. Limitations in the accommodation are similar to those experienced elsewhere in the school. The accommodation available to students for socialising and independent work is satisfactory for the number of students in the sixth form.

116. There is a good range of specialist resources to support learning in the sixth form and to reflect the requirements of the sixth form courses. The biology department has access to a video camera and other departments have sufficient resources to enable students to engage in individual activities such as researching on the Internet, in books and on CD-ROMs. The careers library is well stocked with books and videos, and students make good use of the computer facilities and the library as a whole.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

117. The school should:

- (1) improve the quality of strategic leadership and management across the school, by:
- developing a longer-term plan for the school's development over the next three to five years to provide a clearer context for shorter-term planning;
  - sharpening the school's shorter-term planning through its improvement plan;
  - ensuring that all departments have development plans, which take account of whole-school priorities and are sharply focused;
  - implementing more robust systems and lines of accountability to ensure greater consistency across the school and within departments;
  - monitoring and evaluating more effectively the school's progress in meeting its intentions and priorities.

*[Paras: 94 - 98; 113; 132; 137; 151; 152; 163; 191; 198; 205; 208; 225; 230; 241]*

- (2) improve the organisation and structure of the curriculum and meet statutory requirements, by:
- extending the length of the teaching time to meet recommendations;
  - changing the timing of lessons to address weaknesses identified in this report;
  - implementing a programme of citizenship as required under the National Curriculum;
  - ensuring that the provision for a daily act of collective worship meets requirements;
  - providing adequate time for religious education to ensure coverage of the Agreed Syllabus.

*[Paras: 34; 44; 45; 49; 60; 94; 95; 123; 180; 199; 201]*

- (3) use assessment, including performance data, more consistently and rigorously in some departments to set students individual targets for improving their learning and in the planning of future work, by:
- ensuring that teachers in design and technology, geography, history, ICT, modern foreign languages and physical education have a more accurate understanding of the National Curriculum levels;
  - ensuring that all subjects use the best practice in the school;
  - continuing to monitor the work of departments rigorously.

*[Paras: 31; 33; 79; 80 - 83; 91; 97; 98; 129; 137; 144; 152 -154; 162; 170; 172; 184; 191; 196; 203; 208; 213; 230]*

- (4) improve the provision for gifted and talented students, by:
- establishing more rigorous systems for identifying these students;
  - appointing a member of staff to co-ordinate the provision across the school;
  - ensuring that all departments plan work that is adequately challenging for the most capable students;
  - extending teachers' understanding of the higher levels in some National Curriculum subjects;
  - monitoring and evaluating the quality of provision more effectively.

*[Paras: 33; 38; 94; 136; 147; 148; 176; 206];*

- (5) improve the provision for students' personal and social development, by:
- sharpening the content of the programme as a whole to ensure adequate progression in the development of students' knowledge and skills from year to year;
  - ensuring that teaching and learning approaches are more appropriately geared to helping students develop their skills of making informed choices about issues relevant to their own lives;
  - extending the time available for personal and social education;
  - monitoring and evaluating more effectively this aspect of students' personal development.

*[Paras: 30; 37; 52 - 55]*

- (6) extend the use of ICT to support learning in English, science, geography, modern foreign languages, religious education, business studies, sport studies and history.

*[Paras: 8; 45; 119; 120; 123; 137; 159; 186; 187; 204; 224; 240; 254; 287]*

### **Sixth form**

- (1) Provide better challenges for the most capable students in physics, biology, design and technology and ICT.

*[Paras: 14; 40; 222; 229; 246; 235]*

- (2) Use data more effectively in physics, business studies, sports studies and German to set challenging targets, to monitor students' progress and to analyse their effectiveness in improving performance.

*[Paras: 41; 43; 113; 230; 241; 252; 292]*

- (3) Extend the range of enrichment opportunities to support students' learning in English, geography and business studies.

*[Paras: 64; 240; 269; 282]*

- (4) Extend and improve the provision for religious education and collective worship to meet statutory requirements.

*[Paras: 64; 71; 112]*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	149
	Sixth form	74
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		64

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
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#### Years 7 – 11

Number	4	31	76	31	6	1	0
Percentage	3	21	51	21	4	1	0

#### Sixth form

Number	2	21	39	12	0	0	0
Percentage	3	28	51	18	0	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

#### Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	695	230
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	20	4

#### Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	6	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	32	4

#### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	28

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	33
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	19



## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.2
National comparative data	8.1

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	154	0	154

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	153	152	152
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	153	152	152
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (95)	99 (97)	99 (97)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	92 (69)	99 (96)	94 (92)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	153	152	154
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	153	152	154
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (96)	99 (98)	100 (99)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	97 (91)	99 (96)	97 (91)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	118	n/a	118

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	111	116	117
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	111	116	117
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	94 (98)	98 (99)	99 (99)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	55.3
	National	39.0

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

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	87	0	87
	Average point score per candidate	19.6	0	19.6
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	87	0	87	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	19.6	0	19.6	n/a	n/a	n/a
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	n/a
	National		81.0

### 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	837	26	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	1	2	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	3	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	3	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	1	0	0
Any other ethnic group	11	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	18	0	0

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

### Teachers and classes

### Financial information

#### Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	56.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.4

#### Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	11
Total aggregate hours worked per week	322

#### Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Financial year	2001/02
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	£
Total income	2,923,717
Total expenditure	2,855,906
Expenditure per pupil	3,187

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.4
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**Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	25.0
Key Stage 4	21.6

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

Balance brought forward from previous year	225,232
Balance carried forward to next year	293,043

### ***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	21.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	23.7
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Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	925
Number of questionnaires returned	259

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	37	50	10	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	51	42	5	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	22	65	8	2	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	58	17	5	2
The teaching is good.	33	60	5	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	50	44	5	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	45	3	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	67	30	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	21	58	16	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	51	43	2	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	47	43	5	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	15	52	15	5	14

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

### ENGLISH

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

#### Strengths

- High standards of attainment in both language and literature.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge and the positive relationships between teachers and students promote effective learning.
- The subject's very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The high quality of marking and advice to students.

#### Areas for improvement

- Some teachers should use a greater variety of approaches to teaching and learning.
- More extensive use of ICT should be made in English lessons.
- Single lessons in Years 7 to 9 should be better planned.

118. Standards in English at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were very high compared to the national average, and were in line with other selective schools. Over time, they have been consistently very high, although there was a drop in the proportion of students gaining the higher levels in 2002. In the GCSE examinations in English in 2001, standards were significantly higher than the national average and close to those for selective schools. In literature, they were slightly below other selective schools, but significantly above the national average. There has been a steady improvement in the English language results since 1998, while standards in literature have been consistent. In 2002, there was an increased proportion of the highest grades of A\*/A in literature.

119. By the end of Year 9, standards of work are very high. Students listen with concentration and understanding. They are very articulate in discussion, although some of their spoken answers are short unless they are encouraged by the teacher to develop their argument. Reading aloud at sight is nearly always fluent and accurate, and frequently expressive. Their responses to the books they read, including challenging authors like Shakespeare and Dickens, show a high level of understanding and appreciation. In a Year 9 lesson, students were able to explain how the author used descriptive details to build up the characters of Mr Bumble and Noah Claypole in *Oliver Twist*. When writing stories based on their reading, they show a very good grasp of detail and the relationships between the characters, for example in *Goodnight Mr Tom*. When writing original pieces for different purposes, the work of most students is grammatically correct and well organised. Their writing is frequently entertaining and thought-provoking. Students with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well above average standards in written and spoken English. The same can be said of those students for whom English is a second language, who make a full contribution to class discussions and achieve a high standard of accuracy in their written work. Although many students capably use word processing to enhance their written work, not all of them use computers to give authenticity to original publications such as brochures and newspaper pages. Overall, students make good progress between Years 7 and 9 and achieve well in relation to their earlier attainment on entry to the school.

120. By the end of Year 11, standards in both English language and literature are very high. Students' spoken presentations are lively and persuasive, and they deal with serious issues such as crime and punishment with maturity and confidence. In class discussions, their answers are often extended and clearly argued, although a minority continues to go for the shortest response. The oral responses to a pair of Wilfred Owen's war poems in a Year 11 lesson were outstanding in their perception and their ability to illustrate points with apt quotations. The quality of reading aloud, even with an unfamiliar text, is impressive. A Year 10 class studying *Macbeth* showed a high level of intellectual curiosity and explored the language and imagery in considerable depth. Written work on literature is generally well structured, analytical and effectively supported by close reference to the text. The most capable students show outstanding ability to handle complex issues such as the responsibility of different characters for Eva Smith's death in *An Inspector Calls*. When studying non-fiction such as magazine articles on the

morality of trading with developing countries, many students show very good understanding of the issues raised and are able to argue their own viewpoint very effectively. In an advertising pamphlet for a top hotel, some students used scanned photographs and appropriate fonts to create a very professional publication. The use of ICT in English work is variable and infrequent, however. Students with special educational needs continue to make good progress and most of those for whom English is an additional language reach a high level of competence in spoken and written English. The small number of students from ethnic minority backgrounds are fully included in lessons and they work at the same high level as their fellow students. For the great majority of students in Years 10 and 11, their achievement from Year 9 is better than expected.

121. Improvement in the provision for English since the last inspection has been good. Standards have been raised in Years 7 to 9 and maintained in Years 10 and 11. Effective schemes of work have been drawn up and are closely followed by most teachers. The re-drafting of work to improve its quality is now common practice in all years. The identification of gifted and talented students and targeted provision for them is not as well established.

122. The quality of teaching and learning has also improved considerably and it is now good throughout Years 7 to 11. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and the teaching in nearly all lessons was good and often very good. Very effective planning of most lessons enables students to build on their previous knowledge and skills, so they make good progress. Because teachers have good subject knowledge (very good in the case of set texts for GCSE), the students have confidence in them and they are keen to follow their model. Very good relationships between teachers and their classes and high expectations contribute to a working climate in which the students are attentive and intent on success. The great majority of students clearly enjoy their English lessons, and in all years their attitudes and behaviour are very good. Teachers have a good awareness of their students' learning, and adopt suitable strategies to ensure that they understand the work. Marking is regular, detailed and analytical. Even the most capable students are given advice on how to improve their work still further, and they respond well to the challenge. In a minority of lessons, too much teacher talk restricts the opportunities for students to be active and independent learners. The range of literature and language work covered by some classes has been narrower than that required by the scheme of work, possibly because of frequent staffing changes during the previous school year. Nearly all classes in Years 7 to 9 have some very short lessons, and work is not always planned to suit the time available so less is achieved than could be with more suitable activities. Although teachers make insufficient use of ICT in the teaching and learning of English, the rich diet of literature and varied language activities experienced by most classes have a very strong influence on their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Most students are mature for their age and they are capable of reflecting on serious issues. They respect each other's views and work very well together when required in group or paired activities.

123. English is well led and managed. The teachers share a commitment to high standards and the department contributes well to the students' academic and personal development. The well-structured scheme of work gives clear direction and covers all the requirements of the National Curriculum. All students have a common entitlement to a course that includes drama for all and the opportunity to attain high standards in both language and literature studies. Teachers retain a degree of autonomy within the scheme, and this should be more closely monitored to ensure that all classes receive the same wide range of learning experiences. The progress of individual students and classes is very effectively recorded and monitored. Priorities for development are appropriate, and include more use of ICT and the extension of the National Literacy Strategy throughout Years 7 to 9. This latter development is currently hampered by the timetable because 35 minute periods do not enable the recommended lesson structure to be followed.



## MATHEMATICS

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

### Strengths

- Standards in the tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations are very high.
- Teachers have very high expectations of students, focus on rapid development of their learning and understanding, and challenge talented students effectively.
- Students' progress is monitored rigorously by half-termly tests throughout their time at the school.

### Areas for improvement

- Teaching lacks a variety of approaches: students spend much of their time completing examples from textbooks and have very little opportunity to discuss mathematics.
- Marking on a day-to-day basis is inadequate: work that is marked is devoid of comments to help students increase their understanding.
- The best practices used by some teachers should be used to form a departmental policy and inform all teaching.

124. Students' attainment by the end of Year 9 is very high. In the national tests in 2001, the results were very high when compared with maintained schools nationally, with almost four out of five students gaining the higher Level 7 or above. When compared with other selective schools, the school's results were well below average overall but were similar at the higher Level 7 or above. When they join the school, students have well above average standards in mathematics and they achieve well throughout Key Stage 3. In the 2002 national tests, more of the school's students, nearly a quarter, attained the highest level or recorded exceptional performance, an improvement since the last inspection when there were none.

125. In the GCSE examinations in 2001, the results were significantly above the national average but not quite as high as those for selective schools, particularly in the proportion gaining the highest grades. Almost all students attained grades A\*-C, and a third gained the highest grades of A\*/A. Students achieved as expected. The results for 2002 show a slight improvement over those for 2001. The increase in the proportion of the highest grades in the GCSE examinations is a significant improvement since the last inspection.

126. The standard of students' current work at the end of Year 9 is very high in relation to the national expectation and is in line with the most recent test results. Students are particularly good at interpreting more complex questions and finding a solution using a range of techniques, which they have acquired. They are very well versed at working independently and at pace. Talented students are further challenged with questions, which require an in-depth understanding of principles. In a lesson about probability, these students answered questions about the possible outcomes if dice with various numbers of faces were used. Students have a wide mathematical vocabulary, they understand concepts of proof and convey mathematical meaning through the consistent use of symbols.

127. By the end of Year 11, standards of work of the more capable students are in line with the highest GCSE grades. These students consolidated their knowledge of transformations of graphs prior to the study of the relationship of trigonometric functions. As in previous years, all students are successfully working towards the higher grades of GCSE. In one class, students found difficulty in formulating hypotheses to be tested statistically, but they were proficient in the manipulation of indices. Students are particularly good at GCSE coursework investigations requiring the application of analytical skills to problems, using their ability to deduce a general rule. These skills are developed very well during Key Stage 3. Together with a high level of understanding of algebraic and arithmetic processes acquired during Years 10 and 11, students produce very cohesive reports. The careful monitoring of their progress, with tests every half term, motivates students and ensures that they reach the high targets set for them.

128. The teaching is good overall, and rarely less than satisfactory. It is slightly more effective in promoting good and very good learning in Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4. The good relationships between students and with their teachers ensure that the time in lessons is used efficiently. A strength of the very good teaching is the pace and the variety of experiences in the course of lessons, enhanced

by the setting of appropriately challenging homework. In two lessons of the study of bearings and working with angles in Year 8, both classes used individual whiteboards to good effect for mental work and enjoyed tackling a variety of questions requiring interpretation and measuring and drawing of angles. In one of the lessons, the excellent use of an interactive whiteboard to underpin learning helped students estimate angles and appreciate bearings through the use of a snooker game simulation.

129. Teachers are typically very good at analysing what students can do and understand, and planning the development of their skills accordingly. They set high standards for the presentation of long multiplication and division in Year 7. Teachers are generally aware of the additional support needed by students with special educational needs and provide it effectively. They identify and help those who are underachieving and carefully support students for whom English is an additional language. Generally, however, examples within students' own experience are not used to introduce complex topics, which are presented in the abstract with too much reliance on examples from a textbook. Students in Year 11 found indices and ratios unnecessarily difficult because of the lack of this link. Marking is generally inadequate. Even when students' work is marked, there is rarely advice or guidance given by the teacher. The marking during the first three weeks of the current term shows a significant improvement in this respect compared with that of the previous year; as a result, students have learned more by following the advice given. This should be universally established and maintained.

130. Teachers are good at emphasising the use of correct mathematical terminology and guiding students to express themselves lucidly and logically. No discussion, pair or group work or experiments were seen during the inspection nor were any mathematical activities designed to promote students' social, moral, spiritual or cultural awareness. Since the last inspection, ICT has been developed as an integral part of the mathematics curriculum; all students study a variety of topics using ICT. A particularly good example occurred in a Year 9 class, in which students developed a very clear understanding of gradient and intercept of straight-line graphs and their representation in a formula using ICT.

131. The mathematics department does not provide regular extra-curricular activities. Talented students enter the United Kingdom Mathematics Challenge and are very successful. Provision for talented students at Key Stage 4 is not strategically planned, but currently a small group of students in Year 10, having achieved GCSE standards, are working towards A-level. The most capable students currently in Year 11 will sit the GCSE examinations in November and then begin their A-level studies.

132. Mathematics is taught by an enthusiastic and dedicated team, inspired by an innovative head of department who is himself at the forefront of the development of mathematics teaching and learning. Strategic planning is weak and the department lacks detailed, fully documented, guidance in the departmental handbook to ensure that all teachers adopt best practices, including the implementation of a wider variety of teaching styles, which are less reliant on textbooks – an area identified for improvement in the last inspection. Uniformity in marking and recording procedures on a day-to-day basis and relating standards for all year groups to national standards have also not been established. The use of resources such as the interactive whiteboard are not planned sufficiently to ensure that all students in a particular year group have a similar experience. The monitoring of students' progress is very effective in improving performance, but clearer guidance to staff on widening the range of teaching approaches is needed to help students reach higher standards and enjoy mathematics more.

## SCIENCE

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

### Strengths

- Standards in tests and public examinations are very high.
- The generally good teaching results in effective learning.
- Good relationships and the productive use of time and resources help students to learn well.
- The improvements that have been made to the accommodation enhance teaching and learning.

### Areas for improvement

- Ensure a closer match between the work provided and students' target grades for tests and examinations.
- Increase the use of ICT to support learning in science.
- Monitor and evaluate more rigorously all aspects of the work of the faculty, especially individual students' progress.

133. In the tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001, the results were very high compared with all schools nationally and in line with the average for selective schools. Students achieved well when account is taken of their attainment when they joined the school in Year 7. Over the years since 1997, the improvement in the results has been similar to the national trend. The 2002 test results were similar to those for 2001, except that a higher proportion of students gained Level 7, indicating that the school has been more successful in teaching the more capable students. The GCSE examination results in 2001 in double award science were significantly better than the national average. The results were average for selective schools at grades A\*-C and above average at the highest grades of A\*/A. Students did slightly better in science than in their other subjects on average. They also did slightly better than the school had expected, based on predictions from the students' Year 9 test results. The GCSE results in 2002 were a little better than those in 2001 at grades A\*-C, but were not quite so high at grades A\*/A.

134. The test and examination results point to good achievement between Year 7 and 11. This is confirmed by inspection evidence from lessons and students' work. Progress is more rapid between Years 7 and 9 than later. By the end of Year 9, students' attainment is very high, which is maintained throughout the GCSE course. Frequent and interesting practical work helps to ensure that standards in the skills of scientific enquiry are developing at a similar rate as the more knowledge-based parts of the syllabus, and contribute to developing understanding. Some variation between the progress of different groups of students occurs within this overall good picture. Students from minority ethnic groups, students with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language make good progress overall. The setting arrangements in Years 10 and 11 are of general benefit to students in that the teaching can be addressed to meeting the needs of students who are more similar in their performance than is the case in Years 7 and 8. The position in Year 9 is part way between these arrangements, and clearly has worked well, as judged by the better test results in 2002. However, irrespective of how classes are arranged, too little is done consistently to match the work to the needs of the most and least capable students, be the class mixed ability or setted. Sometimes the work is too easy for the highest attaining students, and they are not kept working at full pitch. At other times, the work is at too fast a pace for less capable students so that their knowledge, skills and understanding have not developed sufficiently before they have to move on. In these instances, their progress is satisfactory, or even occasionally unsatisfactory, rather than good. Gifted and talented students are achieving appropriately.

135. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Most importantly, no unsatisfactory teaching was observed during this inspection, unlike previously. A wider range of learning and teaching strategies is now used, so that students learn much more from firsthand experience, thus maintaining their interest. As a result of this improvement, students' learning and their achievements, which were previously described as sound, are now better than expected. The accommodation has been improved, with two newly built and spacious laboratories with good storage, although there is still more to do, especially with the small laboratories on the ground floor. These laboratories are cramped and one is unsatisfactorily laid out.

136. The generally good teaching results in good learning and achievement. The teaching is predominantly good, and ranges from satisfactory to very good. The teaching of students in Years 10 and 11 is consistently good. Strengths in teaching include teachers' good knowledge of their subject and course requirements, leading to overall sound expectations. Teachers' explanations are clear and, in the best lessons, students are closely questioned to ensure that they understand both previously taught and new work. Good relationships, effective management of practical activities and the contribution of laboratory technicians all help to ensure that time is fully used for learning. There are plenty of resources for students to experience science firsthand, other than ready access to ICT. Textbooks and often very good quality school-produced notes and worksheets support independent learning. Homework is a regular feature and it relates well to the work done in lessons. Several aspects of teaching are weaker and they slow the rate at which students learn. The purpose of lessons is not consistently explained to students in terms of the knowledge, skills and understanding they are expected to have developed by the end of the lesson and its associated homework. Most importantly, too often all students are taught the same work, irrespective of their level of attainment. Teaching of scientific prediction is variable, sometimes accurate and challenging, other times missed completely from practical investigations. The end of lessons is not always well organised to give enough time to check on how well students have progressed. In most respects, however, students are receiving a good science education, although one which could be even better.

137. The head of faculty had been in post for only a few weeks at the time of the inspection, but has already identified several key developments to focus on, especially greater use of data on the standards students are attaining. The faculty improvement plan she has inherited is dated and fails to provide a vision for the longer-term development of science. Arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the work of the faculty, especially what impacts directly on students' progress, are not well developed. Insufficient use is made of information on students' progress to modify the curriculum. The use of ICT relies heavily on access outside lessons and so is not supporting students' progress in scientific investigations. Plans to remedy this lack of resources are in hand.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Strengths

- Standards are above the national expectation by the end of Year 9, and the GCSE results are well above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Year 10 and 11.
- The attitudes of students to their work are very good.
- The encouraging ethos in the department helps all students to make good progress, regardless of their earlier attainment or background.
- The weekly assessment of homework provides students with knowledge of their own rates of progress.

### Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient technical support to allow teachers to spend more time on teaching tasks.

138. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. More time is now allocated to Years 7 and 8, which is having a good impact on raising standards. By the end of Year 9, the majority of students are attaining standards that are above the national expectation, confirming the assessments made by teachers in 2002. The GCSE examination results in 2001 were significantly better than the national average and were better than the average for selective schools. Standards by the end of Year 11 are well above the national expectation. Given that many pupils start in Year 7 with poor skills and a low knowledge base in the subject, students are achieving well by the end of Year 9 and very well by the end of Year 11.

139. Students have good levels of specialist subject vocabulary, in line with the policy for literacy, produced and used by the department. They use a wide range of media effectively, including graded pencils, paint, printmaking media and sculpture. They work with increasing confidence, skill and imagination because teachers actively teach drawing and other practical skills, on a sequential, step-by-

step basis. Students have good knowledge of a wide range of artists from different times and cultures, including more contemporary artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, Georgia O’Keeffe, Piet Mondrian and Barbara Hepworth. They make good comparisons between their own work and that of other artists, using the colour range, line quality and style of these artists in some of their topics and projects as a starting point. The use of sketch-books is a real strength of the department. Weekly homework exercises are taken very seriously and contribute well to students’ finished work pieces.

140. In Years 10 and 11, students build successfully upon the rich and varied experiences gained in Years 7 to 9. They make very good progress and achieve well. They begin to develop further the skills learned in ICT and utilise them well for personal enquiry in research topics. They sustain concentration through extended themes, develop ideas well and adapt appropriately to more rigorous ways of working towards GCSE requirements. Students make very good use of homework projects to practise skills and make preparatory sketches, mainly from first hand and some good quality secondary source materials, such as books, the Internet or visits to galleries. Students are keen to talk about their work and ideas, have good reasons for their decisions and know how they want their work to develop.

141. The quality of teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11, where teachers interact on a more individual level with students. Teachers are confident, all have specialist expertise and very good subject knowledge. They have high expectations of their students and strike a good balance between providing whole-group and individual help. All teachers in the department have recently benefited from training in ICT in relation to art education. This has enabled them to produce high quality visual materials for students as well as interesting presentations using PowerPoint, a computer generated way of making whole-class teaching more visually stimulating. All teachers track students’ progress on a weekly basis and give very good verbal feedback to explain the grades awarded, which ensures that students know what they need to do to improve further.

142. Students’ attitudes and behaviour are extremely good. They enjoy lessons and respond very favourably to the opportunities provided. The department provides very good enrichment to the curriculum, through arranging visits to museums and galleries in London and taking groups to Barcelona, Paris, Amsterdam and New York.

143. The department is very well managed. The head of department has very clear ideas for future developments and is directly responsible for the way that ideas and skills are shared between all staff in the department. Leadership is supportive and enthusiastic and is the main motivational force in sustaining high standards. The displays by the art department are of good quality. The very good work of the department would benefit the general environment around the school and ensure that it is brought to a wider audience. The department lacks sufficient technician support to assist teachers in the preparation of learning resources.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- The extensive use and application of ICT to support learning.
- The quality of making in graphic products and food technology.
- Students’ good attitudes and behaviour have a positive impact on standards.
- Teachers’ command of their specialist subject helps students to learn well.

### Areas for improvement

- Raise students’ attainment at the highest levels.
- Monitor and evaluate teaching and learning more rigorously.
- Improve the teaching of critical evaluation skills.

144. The assessments undertaken by teachers of students at the end of Year 9 in 2001 indicate that standards were above the national average, although fewer students gained the higher levels than in other foundation subjects. The situation was similar in 2002, although not quite as marked. The standard of students’ current work is also above the standard expected nationally by the end of Year 9, reflecting the

assessments undertaken in 2001 and 2002. However, inspection evidence shows that the most capable students are attaining exceptional performance in graphical products and food technology, but this has not been reflected in the teachers' assessments previously.

145. In 2001, the GCSE examination results overall were well above the national average. The results in resistant materials and electronic products and graphical products are broadly similar. In comparison with other selective schools, the results at grades A\*-C were above average in resistant materials and electronic products but below average in graphical products. At grades A\*/A, the results were better than average in electronic products and average in resistant materials and graphical products. In 2002, the results overall were broadly similar to those for 2001 in resistant materials, showed some improvement in graphical products and food technology, but were lower in electronic products.

146. By the end of Year 9, most students are able to draw independently upon a wide range of sources of information. They are able to make preliminary models, including computer models, to explore and test their design ideas; for example, Year 9 students simulated the operation of electronic circuits using computer software when designing an alarm. By the end of Year 11, the most capable students research their own design projects extensively and there are some stunning examples of graphic products, including some exceptional three-dimensional product modelling and packaging, for example the 'Blockbuster Torch'. Other examples of good quality work include a bicycle trailer made in resistant materials and sensory analysis carried out in food technology.

147. Students' use of an extensive range of computer applications, including computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture, is having a positive impact on standards. The school's 'Technology' website provides valuable support to all students and in particular GCSE students in Years 10 and 11. However, students' skills of critical evaluation are underdeveloped at both key stages, particularly in the case of the more capable students.

148. The quality of teaching is good overall. The teaching in Years 7 to 9 ranges from satisfactory to very good and is good overall. In Years 10 and 11, the teaching is good and sometimes very good. The most effective lessons have clear learning objectives, are very well managed and organised, are stimulating and have a brisk pace, as for example, when Year 7 students designed and made hot bread snacks in food technology and when students designed and made card packages in graphical products. Good lessons are well planned and managed but tend to be less well paced. Students in Year 11 are provided with very good support in their coursework because teachers closely monitor their individual progress and give constructive comments that help them to improve their work. However, the teaching of design skills does not provide the most capable students with opportunities to develop more rigorous and objective evaluation skills, which are tightly linked to a product specification. Specialist teachers have good subject knowledge and this has a positive impact on learning. Very good provision is made for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the department, for example, in the 'Ready Steady Cook' house competition.

149. Homework is used effectively to help students to consolidate class work, to prepare for lessons and to develop their technical vocabulary. It has a positive impact on standards. Much has been done to support the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills by way of high quality classroom displays containing technical vocabulary and the provision of well-structured worksheets to support students' designing. Students with special educational needs also make good progress, particularly in designing; for example, they make effective use of laptop computers.

150. Students' attitudes are generally very good and have a positive impact on standards. They enjoy design and technology and take pride in their work. They are willing to participate fully in lessons and readily offer answers to questions from their teachers. They share tools and equipment fairly and handle them safely. They are eager to do well and take responsibility for clearing and tidying up work areas at the end of every lesson. Design folders and written work are kept neat, tidy and properly organised.

151. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The subject leader is enthusiastic and sets a good example for his colleagues. There are systems in place that enable him to monitor standards of teaching and learning. However, after evaluating the design and technology curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment data, departmental meetings do not yet focus enough on action to improve standards. A significant majority of students' reports are unsatisfactory because they do not report progress in the

subject or set targets for improvement. The design and technology curriculum meets statutory requirements.

152. The department has an impressive system for collecting assessment data on students. All teachers have access to it but further work is necessary to ensure assessment data is used effectively to enable all students to reach the highest standards of which they are capable. The scheme of work is well balanced and provides students with a broad experience in all aspects of designing and making and in a range of materials. The departmental development plan does not make clear links with the school development plan and therefore it is difficult for the department to set out clear directions for the way forward and to decide how improvements can be systematically phased in. Accommodation for design and technology has improved significantly since the last inspection. The level and quality of technician support are good.

## GEOGRAPHY

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

### Strengths

- Standards are well above average by the end of Year 9.
- The teaching is good overall, particularly in the GCSE course, enabling students to make good progress.
- Teachers' expectations of work and behaviour are high and students respond well to these demands.
- The use of numeracy skills in geography is excellent whilst literacy and ICT skills are used well.
- Very good resources strengthen and support teaching and learning.

### Areas for improvement

- Improve the use of data to measure students' progress in Years 10 and 11 to identify and stretch capable students who may be coasting.
- Improve teachers' understanding of the characteristics of the highest levels of the National Curriculum to challenge students further.
- Improve the consistency of curricular provision in Years 7 to 9 and provide more opportunities for practical work in Years 8 and 9.

153. By the end of Year 9, the assessments undertaken by teachers over the past three years indicate that standards are well above average. This is confirmed by students' current and past work and of the consistent, cumulative assessment system in the lower school. Progress over time during Year 7 to 9 is good. At present, teachers do not differentiate clearly enough between Levels 7 and 8 of the National Curriculum and are unable to identify clearly what is exceptional performance. Students make satisfactory progress during Years 7 and 8 and good progress in Year 9 so that by the end of the key stage they attain well above the standard expected nationally. They are achieving well in relation to their earlier attainment on entry into the school.

154. Geography is a popular examination option chosen by large numbers of students each year, some of whom opt to follow a short course. The GCSE examination results in 2001 were significantly above the national average for all maintained schools. When compared with other selective schools, the results were below average, especially at the highest grades of A\*/A. When students were matched with their performance in the core subjects at the age of 14, they did less well than expected. The department claims to attract a number of students who are relatively less capable onto the GCSE course but were unable to demonstrate this from data about their prior attainment. Problems of teaching and of examination technique at GCSE have also been identified and, as a result, a new examination syllabus is in place and teachers have undergone training with the examination board. These developments have led to an improvement in standards. The results in 2002 showed a slight improvement, particularly at the highest grades of A\*/A. When compared with their performance at the age of 14, students' achievement was as expected. Whilst the department accumulates accurately measured scores from effective and regular marking, it does not yet compare them sharply enough with any base line information to identify and encourage those boys who are not working to their full capability. From their current work, students' attainment by the end of Year 11 is above the national expectation.

155. The teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. The teaching is better in Year 9 and in the GCSE course than in Years 7 and 8. Some of the teaching in the GCSE course is very good. A team of five, three of whom are part time, teach within the department; one is a non-specialist who, with one other, teaches in another department. These teachers are sensibly deployed to make best use of their strengths in Years 7 and 8. One of the specialist geographers has heavy responsibilities outside the department and another is part-time. The specialists are very good geographers whose enthusiasm, skill and management of materials and explanations of them allow the students to develop very good knowledge and understanding of geography.

156. Teachers' expectations of work and behaviour are explicit and high, and students, whose behaviour is always at least good and often very good, respond well to these expectations. The focus of lessons is always on achievement and the need for control mechanisms is rare. Teachers take good care of their students. Relationships between students and their teachers are very good and contribute significantly to teaching and learning. Basic geographical skills are well taught. Students use atlases and their indexes well. Students in Year 7 receive good training in the use of skills, for example on a field trip to Rye, in making field sketches and measuring micro-climates in the school grounds. There are insufficient practical opportunities for students in Years 8 and 9 to apply and extend their skills.

157. The transfer of students' very good mathematical skills to support learning in geography is excellent. Teachers require students to use higher level statistical methods for their course work. Students comprehend statistics and manage number in a variety of forms very well. One Year 11 student was quick to correct a printing error which affected a judgement of statistical significance and another used his very good mathematical skills and easy familiarity with ICT to produce an outstanding beach profile. However, this work is not yet planned formally within departmental documentation.

158. Literacy skills are used well, particularly in the lower school, to develop students' knowledge and understanding of geography. Students are required to write in a wide range of styles: for example, postcards, letters and imaginative writing of newspaper reports of a volcanic eruption as well as extended reports about a range of topics. Students have very good listening skills and their speaking skills are developing well. Liaison with the school's librarian is effective in ensuring good use of book boxes, and library visits are made to teach research methods, for example, whilst learning about vulcanicity.

159. There is insufficient use of ICT to support learning. Access to the computer rooms is difficult so that not all students are able to receive formal teaching of geography using ICT. The department is unaware of which students have no access to a computer at home in order to target any support. Nevertheless, teachers make very good use of ICT for research and for word and data processing. Web sites are given as sources for homework and for further study.

160. Lesson planning is broadly satisfactory but has some weaknesses. Not all students receive the same experience across the lower school and not all lessons begin with a clear statement of the learning objectives or include a check at the end to ensure they have been met. In lessons where the teaching is otherwise satisfactory, the pace of learning is often too sedate; such lessons generally have a narrow range of activities across the long 70-minute double lesson and sometimes teachers talk for too long before setting the students another activity. The most effective teaching includes a wide variety of interesting activities delivered at pace so that the students become closely involved in their learning. Students with a physical impairment are well supported in their learning and included in practical work. The support for students with special educational needs and others having difficulty with course work is good. Teachers are aware of their individual education plans, which are available in the department, but these were not used to assist planning in the lower school.

161. All teachers make very good use of a variety of visual stimuli to which the students react very well. The new interactive whiteboard is well used by one teacher. All rooms have video players and overhead projectors which are in constant use. The upper course of the River Tees and the formation of waterfalls were well illustrated by means of a video. Providing worksheets for students, which are the same as those projected onto the screen, aids learning, although the quality of some of the notes, handwritten by teachers, is unsatisfactory. One room has superb photographs of the Grand Canyon and the Yosemite Valley used well to stimulate observation and analysis. Equally strong is the use of open-ended questioning so that students are obliged to use what they know and understand to answer questions and to solve problems. Consequently, their knowledge and understanding, which they can use equally well to



think laterally, develops very well. The most capable students in Years 7 and 8 are not sufficiently extended. The best teaching uses a wide variety of learning materials. Students develop good learning skills and become adept at taking responsibility for managing their own work. This leads to the very good standard of GCSE course work. Many students are very effective in collating and synthesizing information from a variety of sources.

162. Marking is uniformly thorough and comments are helpful. Marks are recorded but this information is not used sufficiently sharply to identify areas for improvement. Whilst retrospective analysis of examination performance is secure, there are no secure calculations of the added value between the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11. Reports to parents are of good quality but lack clear targets for improvement.

163. Leadership is good because it is effective in solving problems as they arise, for example with the GCSE results in 2001. A strong annual review system ensures that senior managers are aware of what happens in the department. However, development planning does not include all targets for improvement. Accommodation is adequate though in need of decoration. Ventilation is unsatisfactory in some rooms, which are over-heated. The department is very well stocked with an unusually wide variety of teaching materials and fieldwork equipment. All students have a text book to take home. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

## HISTORY

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

### Strengths

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations are well above average.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good.
- Teaching and learning are of good quality.
- Leadership and management of the subject are good.
- Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good.

### Areas for improvement

- The assessment of students at the end of Year 9 for those attaining above Level 6 is insecure.
- Target setting is currently informal and lacks agreed written targets.

164. Standards by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are well above average. Although students enter the school with standards in history that are in line with the national expectation, the good progress they make in Years 7 to 9 enables them to reach levels that are well above those for students of a similar age nationally. This trend is evident over the last three years. By the end of Year 11, students reach standards in their GCSE examinations that are well above the national average. The proportion of students gaining grades A\*- C and the highest grades of A\*/A is, in both cases, well above average but broadly in line with those for selective schools. The GCSE results in 2002 were similar to those in 2001.

165. The standard of work seen during the inspection is similar to that achieved in external examinations. All students, including those with special needs and English as an additional language, make good progress in the development of their knowledge and understanding as they move through the main school from Years 7 to 11. They build constantly on their previous learning. They make very good progress in improving their level of historical skills, especially in the use and analysis of a range of sources. On entry to the school, these skills are less well developed, especially among less capable students, than historical knowledge and understanding. By the end of Year 11, many students have gained significant levels of understanding of the periods of history they have studied. They have developed comparable levels of skill in their use of evidence, in understanding different points of view, in constructing accounts of events and in drawing conclusions that are well supported by evidence from a range of sources.

166. Students also make progress in developing their skills in literacy, use of number and application of ICT. In their writing, they show particular aptitude in writing for a range of audiences, they read fluently and with understanding and speak clearly, presenting their nascent ideas and well-structured responses

to questions with conviction. Their listening skills are less well developed although, as students move through the main school, these improve and, by the age of 16, contribute to their learning within whole class and small group work. Students have a secure understanding of number sequences and chronology, and use these with increasing skill as they move through the school. The opportunities for the use of ICT are developing well, especially with the increase in computer provision. The teachers have a high level of commitment and skill in the use of ICT, even though they have not yet received training through the government-funded programme. Students also regularly use computers before, during and after school for their history research and assignments. Students' attitudes are very good and contribute to the progress they make in their learning and personal development.

167. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching is never less than satisfactory, but more often it is good. Teaching is well planned, takes account of the learning needs of all students in the class, including those with special needs and English as an additional language, provides significant challenge, has good pace and is well supported by a range of methods and learning resources. Teachers have very high expectations of their students. The good progress students make in their learning builds on the good relationships that exist between learners and with their teachers. In two lessons, where the teaching and learning was satisfactory, although the work for each class was carefully planned, the range of resources chosen to help students explore the learning was insufficient to allow them to make very good progress. For example, in a Year 8 lesson to consider the characteristics of kings and queens from Henry VIII to George I, students had insufficient understanding of the concept of monarchy from the resources being used to make an informed judgement about the relative power of each. Students made commendable efforts but momentum in learning slowed as the available evidence was revisited and further understanding achieved. Although this process skilfully helped to restore the rate and pace of learning and the achievement of the lesson objectives, there was insufficient time to tackle any extension work.

168. Where teaching was good, for instance in a Year 11 lesson, students' contributions to their analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the Weimar republic were of high quality. The teacher's approach, inviting students to contribute to the analysis, resulted not only in a detailed and well-informed consideration of the strengths and weaknesses but also a lively discussion about the political, economic and industrial climate of the period following the treaty at the end of World War I. Students went on to suggest reasons for the rise of the Nazi Party. The pace of learning was very rapid and progress was greatly assisted by the strategic interjections of the teacher seeking even greater depth of understanding than that already achieved. The points made by students were well structured, carefully argued and supported with reasons and evidence.

169. The good teaching and learning students experience provides them not only with important opportunities to learn and understand the content of the topic being studied, but also to consider the moral, ethical and social dimensions within their studies. The Year 11 students studying the Weimar Republic also made important references to the moral dimension presented in their arguments, as did Year 9 students in their discussions about the introduction of the enclosure of land. This subject makes a good contribution to the moral and social aspects of students' personal development.

170. The department enjoys good leadership and enables the teachers, all of whom are well qualified, to work together in a coherent team, planning, reviewing and sharing good practice at their weekly meetings. The department regularly monitors the attainment and progress of all students and the head of department has observed her colleagues teaching. All students have access to a good quality curriculum. The subject is well resourced and is housed in a suite of very well appointed rooms. Students' work is regularly marked and detailed feedback, especially for Years 10 and 11, provides clear guidance about the standards reached and which areas need further improvement. However, as part of the drive to raise standards, further work needs to be undertaken on: understanding the end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum level descriptions, especially those leading to judgements about exceptional performance; and the development and monitoring of agreed written targets for all students.

171. Progress since the last inspection has been good. For example, standards have risen; the quality of teaching and learning has improved; the curriculum structure and assessment procedures for students' work are now effective; and accommodation is of better quality and provides a more stimulating environment for learning.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Standards at GCSE, both full and short courses, are well above average.
- The teaching of ICT is consistently good.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes to work are very good.
- The resources and accommodation for ICT are very good and have significantly improved since the last inspection.
- The ICT department is managed very effectively.

### Areas for improvement

- Provide more challenging work for the most capable students.
- Improve the reliability of teachers' assessments of students' attainment at the end of Year 9.
- Increase the time allocated for ICT in Years 7 to 9.

172. Teachers' assessments undertaken at the end of Year 9 in 2001 indicate that standards were well above the national average. The assessments undertaken in 2002 suggest that standards were lower than those in 2001. The scrutiny of students' work and observation of lessons suggests that teachers' assessments are too severe and a greater proportion of students are attaining the higher National Curriculum Levels of 7, 8 and exceptional performance. Students are currently attaining well above average standards by the end of Year 9.

173. All students in Years 10 and 11 follow a GCSE course in ICT. Most follow the short course but the number opting for the full course is increasing each year. Over the last three years, the results in the full course have been well above average. In 2001, all ten students gained grades A\*- C, with all but one obtaining the highest grades of A\* or A. These results were better than those for other selective schools. In 2002, significantly more students opted for the full course and although there was a slight drop in the proportion attaining grades A\*- C, the results remained well above the national average. The results of the GCSE short course in 2001 was also well above the national average and have improved over the last three years.

174. In Years 7 to 9, students develop a good understanding of the different aspects of ICT. In Year 9, students find things out by considering from which sources to gather information, and develop ideas to make things happen. For example, they use spreadsheets to calculate the month by month income and running costs for a hypothetical Leisure Centre. The analysis is presented using charts and graphs, and the most capable students show a secure understanding of the use of the 'forecast' function. The majority of students are able to interpret the information they find and question its accuracy as they are aware that wrong information will produce inaccurate results. By the end of Year 9, most students can intelligently review their work, often without being prompted, and identify ways in which the work can be improved. Such good practice is regularly reinforced by the teachers who stress the necessity to design, analyse and evaluate. Good standards of literacy are achieved at this key stage as students make careful decisions about their use of language in newspaper style reports they write, using Word or, more typically, Publisher. Numeracy skills are also enhanced when students create formulae and process data using spreadsheets.

175. Standards are well above the standard expected nationally by the end of Year 11 in both the short and full GCSE courses and students make good progress between the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11. They deepen their knowledge and skills in the areas of the subject developed during Key Stage 3 and by the end of Year 11 all students can reliably create and interrogate files, create and manipulate spreadsheets, and produce desktop published work of a high standard. The most capable students design work that shows a very good sense of the intended audience and they carefully evaluate their work, making intelligent suggestions for improvement. They are also able to discuss some of the social, ethical and moral issues associated with the use ICT and the Internet. The subject makes an effective contribution to students' moral and social development.

176. The quality of teaching is consistently good at Key Stage 3 and is occasionally very good at Key Stage 4. Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good and most explain the prime learning objectives at the start of the lesson and revisit them near the end of the session. In a significant number of lessons, however, the work provided for the most capable students is insufficiently challenging. The best lessons show good planning, with well-timed activities used to maintain the students' interest and teachers providing clear explanations to enable students to understand complex processes. In the concluding part of these lessons, teachers use effective questioning to check what progress the students have made. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, where students were designing a data capture form for buying a car, the teacher made regular interventions to individual students as they worked at the keyboard. In response to overhearing students discuss the merits of Word or Publisher, the teacher provided an excellent summary of the relative benefits of each using the interactive whiteboard. At the end of the lesson, the students were able to demonstrate their understanding of the work covered by answering probing questions asked by their teacher.

177. Students behave well in lessons and often help each other. They are enthusiastic and clearly appreciate the fact they can work independently without the necessity to share computers. They treat the equipment with care and demonstrate respect for each other and their teachers. The majority of students work at a good pace and concentrate throughout the lesson. Students like to be provided with help-sheets to support class work. This gives them greater independence and enables the teacher to focus more on helping individual students rather than having to repeatedly explain the techniques required for the program or application being used. In some lessons that are otherwise satisfactory overall, explanations are usually not clear and students do not have a clear understanding of the purpose of the lesson. Teachers circulate well during lessons, supporting students to overcome difficulties and assessing the quality of their work. Students with special educational needs receive effective support and make good progress. Similarly, students learning English as an additional language are supported well in lessons and also make good progress.

178. Leadership and management of the ICT department are very good. The co-ordinator has a good overview of the strengths and weaknesses of the subject and recognises that more needs to be done in terms of monitoring the progress of students, particularly the most capable students. Detailed schemes of work are in place and the head of department provides excellent support and guidance for the large number of non-specialist teachers involved in teaching ICT as a discrete subject. The department also provides expert advice in the use of ICT to support other subject areas. All departments give students subject-specific experience of ICT. The best examples occur in mathematics, where use of an interactive whiteboard clearly enhances learning, and in art and design, where students use a digital camera and scanner to create composite images from their own work and images taken from secondary sources. Departments also book lessons in the main computer suite to give students hands-on experience of how ICT can be applied in each subject area, but these opportunities are not frequent in some subjects.

179. Improvement since the last inspection has also been very good. The ICT department has increased significantly in size and complexity and now comprises four suites of modern computers, all of which have efficient Internet access. Additional equipment such as data projectors and digital cameras are also available for teachers to use. In addition, there are small computer suites in most subject areas and in the library. This amount of hardware creates a substantial amount of administration and maintenance work and, while the technical support is currently of a very high quality, it is insufficient.

180. Since the last inspection the school has increased the amount of ICT being taught and now each class in Years 7, 8 and 9 receives one 35-minute period per week. In reality, students rarely receive the full 35 minutes of teaching time since they often have to walk from a distant part of the school campus. This results in at least five minutes being lost as students change lessons and puts the school well below the current DfES recommendation of a minimum of 40 minutes teaching in ICT per week at Key Stage 3.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

### Strengths

- Students attain above average standards in all three languages.
- The good attitudes of students.
- A committed, enthusiastic team of teachers.

### Areas for improvement

- Extend students' use of the foreign language in lessons.
- Use the National Curriculum levels more accurately to assess attainment at Key Stage 3.
- Extend the use of ICT within lessons to support learning.

181. In the assessments undertaken by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2001, standards were considerably higher than the national average for all maintained schools and very high when compared with boys' results nationally. The assessments undertaken in 2002 compare favourably with those for 2001. The GCSE examination results in 2001 were significantly above the national averages in French and German and were well above average in Spanish. When compared with all selective schools, the GCSE results in 2001 at grades A\*- C were better than average in French and German and about average in Spanish. This is in marked contrast to the national trend where girls consistently outperform boys. In 2002, the results at grades A\*- C in all three languages were slightly lower than those for 2001 but at grades A\*/A they were better in French and German but lower in Spanish. Over half of those students entered for French in 2002 gained the highest grades.

182. The work seen during the inspection confirms these above average standards. Most students, including those with special educational needs, attain above average standards and make good progress as they move through the school. They achieve well, with achievement better in German at Key Stage 3 than in French or Spanish. Beginners in German and Spanish work almost immediately above national expectations for the start of the course but beginners in French are not quite as well advanced because too little consideration is given to their previous learning of the language in the primary school. More capable students in Year 9 use reflexive verbs accurately in French; in Spanish, they have mastered past and present tenses, and in German, they write fluent letters to pen friends in the past and present tense. Students in Year 11 make good progress, achieve well and attain high standards. In German, more capable students use the foreign language for asides and general comments and prepare useful prompt cards to support their oral work; in Spanish, they understand extended reading passages such as a story about Merlin and Excalibur in the foreign language, and in French, they answer questions accurately on topics such as health and fitness. Less capable students complete similar exercises with more basic errors and less fluency.

183. Teaching is good overall. It is better in German than in French and Spanish, particularly at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 3, teaching is uniformly satisfactory in French, satisfactory overall in Spanish, ranging from unsatisfactory to very good, and good in German, ranging from satisfactory to very good. In Year 10 and 11, the teaching is good in French and Spanish, and very good in German. Strengths include teachers' good knowledge and understanding which result in good accents and well developed listening skills, and some effective teaching of the basic skills, particularly literacy, resulting in sound knowledge of grammatical structures. A particular feature of the best teaching is that teachers praise and encourage students regularly and establish an environment where they take risks and learn well; for example, in a Year 10 class where students became ambitious in their use of Spanish when using the language laboratory to talk about their homes. In a Year 11 German class, the clear, focused start and the teacher's good use of German meant that students used the language for real communication and made very good progress; pair and group work were used extensively to encourage them to practise the work being taught. As a result of this good teaching, learning is also good overall. It is better in German than in the other two languages. Weaknesses relate to inconsistencies in the way in which teachers approach their work. Although most are extremely meticulous and focused, some are not as diligent. They do not always require students to use the language themselves and there are inconsistencies in marking. Some books are marked conscientiously with helpful developmental

comments; others have little evidence of marking and few comments. Parents commented on this during the parents' meeting.

184. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The new head of faculty has already shown clear educational direction for the work of the department and heads of subject are working well. Day-to-day management is good and there are structures in place to improve communications and to ensure efficient use of time when dealing with the routine jobs encountered by all three departments. There are systematic approaches to the monitoring of teachers' work through observation of lessons and of exercise books although this is an area ripe for further development. Assessment procedures in Years 10 and 11 are good and are tightly focused on GCSE requirements. They are not as secure in Years 7 to 9, where the National Curriculum levels are not always used accurately to measure students' attainment. There has been considerable turnover of staff recently and some new teachers are encountering difficulties in dealing with students at this early stage of the year. This is partly because expectations are not high enough but also because some teachers are using challenging methods, which students are not used to. Schemes of work are adequate in German but are not detailed enough in either French or Spanish to support new and inexperienced staff.

185. Attitudes in the majority of lessons are very positive. Exceptions to this include one or two Year 9 lessons where students were disaffected and played up. In a Year 9 Spanish lesson, unsatisfactory teaching resulted in unsatisfactory behaviour and learning. In some examination classes, students are not doing as well as they might, mainly as a result of lack of motivation rather than as a result of inadequate teaching. For example in a Year 11 German group, most students were heading for the higher GCSE grades, but one or two students on the grade C/D boundary lacked the motivation to involve themselves fully in the lesson.

186. The modern languages department contributes significantly to the cultural development of students through the many trips and exchanges offered. In French, students have the opportunity of a day trip to France in Year 7; an exchange in Year 9 and an exchange in Year 10 to Rheims. In Spanish, they have a trip to Spain in Year 9 and an exchange to Asturias in Year 10. In German, they have a trip to Duren staying with families in Year 8 and an exchange to Bad Munstereifel in Year 10. The overall curriculum provision in languages is good. There is a generous allocation of time throughout the key stages and many students study two languages to GCSE. Three foreign language assistants help to maintain the high oral standards of students and courses are well matched to students' capabilities. Although there are opportunities for students to use computers during their learning, this is an area for further development.

187. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall. There is now a much larger take up for languages in the sixth form and steps have been taken to ensure that the provision complies with requirements by buying new textbooks and ensuring that the programmes on offer meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. However, issues regarding students' use of the foreign language remain; too few opportunities are provided for working independently and computers are still not used enough within language teaching.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Students attain high standards by the end of Year 9 and very high standards by the end of Year 11.
- The good and often very good teaching contributes significantly to students' learning.
- The very good contribution made to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- Instrumental lessons and ensembles are of high quality.

### Areas for improvement

- The quality of the accommodation for music is unsatisfactory.
- The departmental development plan lacks clear vision and financial implications.

188. By the end of Year 9, standards in music are above average and are well above average by the end of Year 11. The assessments undertaken by teachers at the end of Year 9, and work seen in lessons and on recordings confirm a picture of attainment that is above the standard expected nationally. Students, including those with special educational needs and English as an additional language, make good progress between Years 7 and 9. They are able to refine and improve their work making musical decisions. They can discuss pieces of music confidently and write considered reviews of their music. During a lesson on musical variations, students showed good understanding of the process. One group added a drone and chords to vary Frère Jacques. Another wrote a contrasting part for guitar using tab notation in order to complement the main tune. This shows good understanding of instrumental possibilities and using ideas heard on a recording played at the beginning of the lesson.

189. The GCSE examination results in 2001 were well above the national averages and similar to those achieved by students in other selective schools. Over the past three years, there has been an increase in the number of students achieving the highest grades of A\*/A. Standards are very good in performing and composing. The high quality instrumental teaching for examination students assists them with their work. Students use a wide variety of stimuli for their compositions. Pieces reflect film music, Caribbean music and music accompanying a computer game. Students use tonality effectively and show very good understanding of instrumental colour.

190. Students learn well because teaching is good and often very good in Years 10 and 11. The musical knowledge and high quality demonstrations by staff ensure that students want to learn; they take pride in their work and are well motivated to reach high standards. Activities are linked so that time is not wasted, despite the scattered nature of the music accommodation. Skills are practised and evaluated regularly. Homework is set regularly to reinforce and develop skills learnt in class. Students are able to practise their work during lunch times. Lessons are well planned and students' work is assessed carefully. The use of ICT is planned carefully and used regularly. This means that by Year 10, GCSE students are competent and familiar users of different programs for their compositions. Regular mini disc recordings are made and students reflect carefully on their work. Good questioning helps students develop their answers and give justifications for them through oral and written work. Despite the lack of musical vocabulary displayed in the classrooms, students use musical language in their discussions. The more capable students are set activities so that they achieve highly, although, at present, some students are hampered by not using correct finger technique when using keyboards. An excellent lesson with Year 11 students enabled them to understand and appreciate the social and historical context of Purcell's music. A very good working atmosphere was created where students were confident in their opinions and also challenged the teachers' opinions, showing mature and reasoned argument. They develop others' answers and display a wide range of musical knowledge. This showed how the basic answers to examination questions are augmented to ensure students achieve high marks.

191. Leadership and management are good. The head of department leads by example and students appreciate his hard work. There are good assessment procedures so that students' work and progress are carefully monitored. Students review their work and set targets annually. This time scale is too long. It needs to be done more often so that goals can be more easily achieved. The current financial arrangements for the department mean that it is very difficult to produce a development plan showing clear vision and the financial implications about the future. As a consequence, there is a lack of long term planning. However, teachers give very freely of their time, support each other and provide a very strong musical environment for their students. A strength of the department is the very high standard of instrumental work. Students are accomplished musicians and perform on a range of instruments. The jazz ensembles perform in school and within the county. The students, who belong to the senior jazz ensemble that played in assembly during the inspection, show exceptional improvisatory skills and musical awareness. The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

192. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards and the quality of teaching have improved and students' musical skills are much improved. However, the quality of accommodation remains unsatisfactory. Rooms are small, uncarpeted, shabby and in poor decorative order. This means they become noisy during practical work. Storage facilities are limited.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good and consequently students have very good attitudes to their work.
- The department makes a significant contribution to the social and moral development of students.
- Very good displays celebrate students' achievements.
- There is very good provision for extra-curricular competitive sport in Years 7 to 11.

### Areas for improvement

- Improve the balance of activities in Key Stage 3.
- Improve the assessment procedures, including teachers' assessments and the reporting to parents.
- Produce a departmental handbook and a long-term development plan to guide the work of the department.

193. Students' attainment by the end of Year 9 is in line with the standard expected nationally, although a significant number of students are attaining higher standards than this. This shows an improvement over the assessments undertaken by teachers at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2001, which indicated that standards were below average. By the end of Year 11, standards are also in line with the national expectation, although a number of students are attaining higher standards than this. At present, students do not have the opportunity to study for a GCSE examination or a vocational qualification in physical education.

194. Students achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry and make good progress as they move through the school from Year 7 to Year 11. Students with special educational needs are fully included in the physical education programme and make good progress. By the end of Year 9, students have a sound knowledge and understanding of skills and techniques in games, gymnastics and health-related exercise. In games, students perform games skills with increasing control and co-ordination, and in competitive play use the principles of attack and defence with confidence. In Year 9 football, students are able to control the ball effectively, changing pace and direction, and have a good understanding of the rules of the game. In Key Stage 3, students perform gymnastic skills with increasing control and fluency, although their movements lack quality and variety of level, speed and direction. Students do not achieve as well in gymnastics as they do in games.

195. By the end of Year 11, students use more advanced techniques and skills with increasing precision and accuracy. A number of more capable students in Year 10 are able to anticipate moves in order to outwit their opponents and respond effectively to changing situations in a competitive game. Health and fitness are an integral part of every lesson at both key stages and students have a good understanding of how to prepare for and recover from exercise. In Year 10, health and fitness is taught as a discrete unit of work and students are beginning to design and carry out a training programme using technology to monitor their personal performance.

196. The quality of teaching and learning is good. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection as a result of an improved team of specialist teachers. The specialist teachers are knowledgeable and confident in teaching a range of activities and are good role models for the students. Students are well managed and organised, they change quickly for lessons and standards of sportswear are excellent. Lesson planning is good and teachers give positive praise, encouragement and feedback, so improving students' confidence and performance skills. The quality of continuous assessment is good overall but the assessments undertaken by teachers at the end of the key stages do not reflect the level descriptions accurately enough. The annual reports to parents do not reflect fully students' knowledge, skills and understanding in physical education.

197. Students' attitudes to learning are very good. Students enjoy their lessons and respond well to the high expectations demanded of them. As a result, behaviour and participation levels are high. They use the specialist equipment and facilities with due care and attention and are aware of their own and others' safety. Students develop good social and co-operative skills in group work, and in competitive team play, they demonstrate fair play and good sporting behaviour.



198. Leadership and management are good overall. Day-to-day procedures are effective. Schemes of work are good and clearly identify progression, with good practice developing in the use of literacy, numeracy and ICT. For example, students in Year 9 have carried out research projects on using mathematical skills to analyse the performance of professional sports players. The department works well together as a team and staff give generously of their time, making a significant contribution to competitive sport. Procedures for monitoring teaching and learning are good overall with the introduction of team teaching with the non-specialist teachers to improve their subject knowledge. The lack of a long-term strategic development plan, which clearly identifies targets for improvement, is a weakness and the department handbook is in need of review. The department office does not accommodate the needs of the team.

199. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and students benefit from a wide range of activities. However, in Years 7 to 9, a significant amount of time is allocated to games, which affects the balance of the programme. Single 35-minute lessons do not allow sufficient time for students to consolidate their learning and this has an impact on what can be achieved. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, students were unable to apply their gymnastic skills of jumping into a sequence using both the floor and apparatus. In Key Stage 4, students do not have the opportunity to choose to study two areas of activity in depth from Year 10. The provision for extra-curricular competitive sport is very good. There are good procedures in place to support the more talented students and a large number of students represent their school in a wide range of sporting activities, with many selected to play for local teams and to represent the county.

200. The department has made good progress in raising standards since the last inspection. As a result of improving specialist staff, the quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly. However, staffing continues to be an issue where non-specialists teach a number of games lessons. Displays are now very good and celebrate students' achievement both within and outside school, and include match reports, students' projects and contemporary issues in physical education and sport. Games continue to dominate the curriculum in both key stages and the lack of indoor space continues to restrict the range of activities taught.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Standards are well above the national average in GCSE examinations, and students are achieving well by the end of Year 11.
- Teaching and learning are good, with effective use of questions to meet different needs.
- Very good management of students, reflected in good relationships and very good spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The introduction of a short course at GCSE for all Year 10 students in 2002.

### Areas for improvement

- The amount of time at Key Stage 3 does not enable the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus to be met.
- Sharpening the planning at Key Stage 3 to meet the needs of different groups of students more effectively and to provide them with clearer targets.
- Provide more opportunities for the use of ICT to support teaching and learning.

201. Students enter the school in Year 7 with average recall of some of the main features of the religions they have studied in primary school. By the end of Year 9, their attainment is in line with the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus for students of this age. Their progress overall is limited by the single 35-minute lesson time available for the subject in Years 8 and 9. In Years 7 and 8, students understand the importance of particular practices and beliefs in Islam, Christianity and Hinduism. They benefit from visits to well-known places of worship in London and the use of artefacts and video in lessons. By Year 9, students know that religions have their own views on moral issues such as the treatment of animals. They are not as aware of the differences between groups within the same religion,

which beliefs these groups share, and why these groups are able to arrive at different answers. They make links between what they study and their own lives but are more confident contrasting their own and other people's views. Students have not yet developed sufficient understanding of the different interpretations of authoritative religious teachings or argue from primary sources about which beliefs and values should guide behaviour for decision makers and individuals in ethical situations.

202. In 2001, the GCSE examination results for the full course at grades A\*-C were well above the national average and broadly similar to the average for selective schools. In 2002, the results at grades A\*-C were marginally better than those of the previous year, although a slightly smaller proportion gained the highest grades of A\*/A. These standards have been maintained since students were first entered for the full course in 1999. Standards by the end of Year 11 are above the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus, and some students are attaining far higher standards than these. The most capable students are able to express their views cogently and demonstrate very good knowledge of the basic beliefs and values of the main religions. In Year 11, students study a non-examination course, with limited opportunity for written work. Students in Year 10 have more time for the GCSE short course. Students' work includes information about the ways people make moral decisions about issues such as prejudice and discrimination in gender and family values. For many students, their attainment reflects their high levels of literacy and skills of analysis, and their familiarity with contemporary issues. Students show good awareness of issues raised in the media, and are willing to weigh up a range of views and show considerable maturity when discussing and sharing viewpoints. Their ability to draw on the traditional and evolving insights, perspectives and dilemmas, which are the feature of religions in responding to a changing society, is not fully established. They are less confident in contrasting their own views with the teachings of the main religions and in taking account of particular denominational, philosophical, ideological and scientific interpretations they come across in and beyond school.

203. In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are good and occasionally very good. The teaching makes good use of questions, which involve all students, and establishes clear aims for the lesson. This is not always extended to written tasks. Open tasks for homework are very successful. Students in Year 8 demonstrate impressive understanding of religious concepts. Planning does not identify clearly enough what students with differing needs are to gain from the lesson, and does not identify short or long-term targets, which are shared with students. The marking of work and the monitoring of students' progress is done regularly but the standards expected are not shared sufficiently with students to provide them with a framework for their progress or to guide their learning. In Years 10 and 11, the teaching and learning are mostly very good, ranging from good to excellent. Lessons proceed at a good pace and students benefit from the teachers' mature approach to them. A range of teaching methods is used very effectively, and includes discussion in groups, to which students respond well, with students with special educational needs taking their turn to scribe. Students are well behaved. Relationships between teachers and students at both key stages are good, showing positive mutual respect. Students with special educational needs and students from different ethnic backgrounds make the same progress as their fellow students.

204. Opportunities for developing students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness are very well used. Students use ICT for the presentation of work, but there are no planned regular opportunities for using ICT in lessons or to take advantage of the increasing number of resources about religions on the Internet.

205. Apart from two lessons, one member of staff teaches all the religious education in the school. This is a very demanding workload but is managed satisfactorily and conscientiously. In addition to undertaking a form tutor role and leading acts of collective worship, the introduction of the new GCSE short course has meant staff teaching in breaks or in assembly time. Since the last inspection, there has been a change to the Agreed Syllabus, requiring a change of approach by the department to the teaching about religions. As yet, the units to be taught in Years 7 to 9 are incomplete, and some units lack titles and clearly identified timescales. This makes medium and short-term planning difficult when deciding where a unit fits in, how it builds on prior learning, and how it achieves the progress required by the Agreed Syllabus. The subject's accommodation is good and allows for a good collection of resources and stimulating displays which promote good learning and include good examples of students' work. One student is withdrawn for religious reasons and is supervised in the library.

## BUSINESS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in vocational courses is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- The GCSE course is a well subscribed course and extends the opportunities available for students.
- Teachers are developing strategies to overcome behaviour problems.
- A business partnership is being developed with local firms.

### Areas for improvement

- Extend the use of value-added indicators to assist in the setting of targets for students.
- Produce a development plan to guide the work of the department and to raise standards.
- Use fieldwork and visits from people in business more extensively to support teaching and learning.

206. Standards have not yet been measured by external examinations as the first cohort of students is now in Year 11. An analysis of students' work and discussion in class indicate that students' attainment is broadly average, lower than might be expected for students in this school. The more capable students understand product differentiation and are able to describe the product life cycle using appropriate terminology whereas the less capable have difficulties with both of these concepts. Although their work shows intellectual effort, the volume is less than expected from students of their ability. Individual pieces of work are well presented but the file material is generally disorganised and will not help students in revising for examinations.

207. Teaching in both Years 10 and 11 is variable, ranging from unsatisfactory to good, but is satisfactory overall. Lessons are appropriately planned for the most part but in some instances the range of teaching approaches is too narrow, with an over emphasis on input from the teacher leading to an unsatisfactory response from the students. In most lessons, relationships between teachers and students are good, but the learning in some lessons, however, is affected by the students' disruptive behaviour. Teachers are developing strategies and widening their teaching approaches to overcome these difficulties. Where teaching and learning are effective, students learn quickly and grasp concepts well. The best lessons are characterised by lively discussion led by the teacher and positive relationships. In one lesson, students in Year 10 worked well in groups to draw up a Deed of Partnership. Lessons tend to feature tasks using books or worksheets rather than real life experiences of business through fieldwork or visits from people in business. However, one teacher is developing a business partnership with local firms and is also planning to introduce a form of 'Young Enterprise' activity for students in Years 10 and 11. All work is marked accurately although most has insufficient guidance from teachers to help students understand what they need to do to improve.

208. Business education at Key Stage 4 is a new subject area and its introduction has coincided with considerable changes in the sixth form curriculum and a change of staffing. All of this has had to be managed by a very small department with heavy teaching and assessment loads. However, there is currently no improvement plan for the department to show how it will manage its priorities and the use of resources is not being planned systematically. Not enough use is being made of value added indicators to assist in the process of setting challenging targets to raise standards further.

## DRAMA

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

### Strengths

- Teachers' good subject knowledge helps students to make good progress.
- Students understand a range of dramatic terms and can demonstrate a wide range of dramatic techniques.
- Extra-curricular drama is particularly strong.

### Areas for improvement

- Extend the use of assessment and homework in Years 7 to 9.

- Ensure that less capable students in Years 7 to 9 make more effective use of space and project their voices in drama lessons.
- The accommodation for drama lessons does not fully support teaching and learning in the subject.

209. Drama is taught to all students in Years 7, 8 and 9 and was introduced as an option in Years 10 and 11 in 2001. The first GCSE cohort will be examined in drama in 2003. Inspection evidence indicates that by the end of Year 9 and by the end of Year 11, students' attainment is above the standard expected nationally.

210. By the end of Year 9, students achieve well in relation to their earlier attainment. Students in Year 7 practise dramatic techniques by warm up activities such as 'Follow my Leader' and complex tasks such as 'human letters'. By Year 9, students are able to take part in cross-curricular work with the English department, acting out the Boar's Head scene from Shakespeare's *Henry IV (Part One)* and considering the use of language in the text with clarity and confidence. Students work in groups, perform confidently, watch each other's performances and develop characterisation with assistance from teachers. Less capable students in Key Stage 3 do not speak clearly or use space effectively and need to be reminded to remain in role. Students achieve well in relation to their earlier attainment by the end of Year 11. At this stage, students understand and use a range of dramatic techniques such as 'tableaux', 'freeze framing' and 'hot seating'. Students act as individuals and in groups, explore the dramatic potential of ideas and are able to evaluate their own and others' performances. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Students with English as an additional language make good progress, including a pupil from Malaysia who plays a full part in lessons. Attitudes towards and behaviour in the subject are good at both key stages, although some less capable students in Key Stage 3 do not take the subject seriously at all times.

211. Teaching and learning are good throughout. The rapid pace of some Key Stage 3 lessons enables teachers to put probing questions to students. Teachers place an emphasis on the use of body language to demonstrate that drama involves more than reading and writing plays. This was shown to good effect in a Year 8 lesson where students acted as 'human machines' and in another Year 8 lesson where they learn about the concept of 'parrying' in a staged sword fight based on the Excalibur legend. The teacher's good subject knowledge in a Year 9 lesson on Shakespeare enabled students to develop their understanding of literacy - exploring terms such as 'sack' - and of Shakespeare as a playwright. The slower pace of less effective, but otherwise satisfactory, teaching means that momentum is sometimes lost in lessons. The effective recapitulation of earlier work enables students to make progress in Years 10 and 11. The teaching of concepts such as 'forum theatre' and 'story theatre' helps students to widen their repertoire of acting skills, for example in a narrator-led series of scenes in a Year 11 lesson on story theatre. Skilful questioning by the teacher brought out links between improvised work and their earlier study of a written play. Teaching provides constructive criticism of students' work but does not always bring in students' comments sufficiently. During Key Stage 4, students consider moral issues when improvising a scene of sibling rivalry based on the study of an antisocial girl in Olwen Wymark's *Find Me*. Students consider social issues in an improvised example of story theatre based on 'jock' and 'geek' stereotypes in an American school setting. Students use ICT to word process their work and to research ideas on the Internet and CD-ROMs. Strategies for supporting numeracy have not been developed as yet.

212. Leadership and management in the subject are good. The head of department is newly appointed and plans to introduce a monitoring system to evaluate the teaching and assessment of drama in Key Stage 3. He also plans to develop more effective assessment strategies for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, including the use of revised schemes of work. Learning resources are satisfactory, with a limited range of sets of plays and individual plays, props, costumes etc. Accommodation is satisfactory but the space allocated for drama is not free from outside interruption and lacks an adjacent drama cupboard, blackout facilities, opportunities to display work in progress and examples of drama specific terminology. Staffing for drama is satisfactory at present, and there are effective cross-curricular links with the English department.

213. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. Extra-curricular drama continues to be a strength of the department. Students take part in regular senior school productions and house plays. Junior school productions are sometimes held. A wider range of teaching strategies is now used to motivate students. Assessment requires a stronger focus at both Key Stage 3 and Key

Stage 4 and the department continues to require a move towards agreed systems of assessing drama at Key Stage 3 and agreed schemes of work at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The assessment of students' work is particularly underdeveloped in Years 7 to 9 at present.

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

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

### ***GCE AS level courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	32	91	71	53	30	3.1	2.2
Chemistry	27	100	87	81	40	4.0	2.8
Biology	38	100	84	66	34	3.7	2.6
Physics	29	100	86	79	39	4.2	2.8
Design and technology	8	88	86	38	32	2.5	2.5
Graphical products	3	100	86	100	32	4.3	2.5
Business studies	34	91	89	44	31	3.1	2.6
Computer studies	15	100	81	100	22	4.5	2.2
Sport studies	15	100	88	40	25	3.0	2.4
Art and design	13	100	86	77	43	4.3	2.9
Music	3	100	95	100	43	5.0	3.1
Theatre studies	8	100	95	63	40	3.8	3.0
Classical civilisation	3	100	95	67	50	3.7	3.3
Geography	32	97	82	53	27	3.4	2.9
History	30	100	94	73	41	4.0	3.0
Government and politics	4	100	85	100	32	4.3	2.5
English language	9	100	93	67	35	2.9	2.8
English literature	14	100	95	71	39	3.9	3.0
French	26	96	89	38	40	3.0	2.9
German	13	92	90	15	39	2.2	2.9
Spanish	15	100	89	40	38	2.8	2.8
General studies	25	100	91	48	38	3.6	2.3

### **GCE A level and AVCE courses**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	30	90	87	43	43	5.9	5.8
Chemistry	13	100	90	69	43	7.5	5.9
Biology	12	92	88	25	34	4.5	5.3
Physics	24	100	88	54	40	6.9	5.7
Design and technology	6	67	91	0	30	2.7	5.4
Business Studies	34	100	92	41	32	6.4	5.5
Computer studies	10	100	86	60	23	6.4	4.6
Sport studies	11	100	92	0	25	3.6	5.1
Art and design	11	100	96	73	46	7.8	6.6
Music	4	100	93	25	35	6.5	5.7
Theatre studies	2	100	93	100	31	10.0	5.5
Geography	12	100	92	67	38	7.5	5.7
History	16	94	88	69	35	7.0	5.5
Government and politics	3	67	87	0	34	4.0	5.3
English Literature	24	100	95	46	37	6.8	5.9
French	10	100	89	50	38	7.4	5.6
German	11	100	91	45	40	6.2	5.8
Spanish	7	100	89	43	39	6.6	5.7
General studies	25	96	85	32	30	5.4	4.9

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

214. The focus was on A-level mathematics, biology and physics, but chemistry was also sampled. The inspection covered A-level mathematics and further mathematics courses, consisting of pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics modules.

#### Mathematics

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

##### Strengths

- Courses are well planned, building on students' experience and using their knowledge of pure mathematics to underpin their learning in the applications.
- Teaching is good overall: the very good relations between teachers and students ensure that students are motivated to work hard and enjoy many aspects of mathematics.
- The use of excellent resources, including an interactive whiteboard and an extensive bank of A-level questions and worked solutions accessible on the school's intranet, helps learning very well.

##### Areas for improvement

- Although many students achieve high standards at A-level, overall they do less well in mathematics than in their other subjects.
- Insufficient opportunities are provided in lessons for students to discuss mathematics among themselves and to relate mathematics to other fields of study and society in general.

215. The school's performance in A-level and AS-level examinations is in line with that found nationally. There has been significant fluctuation in standards in recent years. Overall, students perform less well in their A-level mathematics examinations than in their other subjects. In 2001, the results closely reflected national standards with 43 per cent of the students achieving the highest grades of A or B and almost all gaining a pass grade. When compared with selective schools, the school's performance was below average. The cohort in 2002 was smaller than that of previous years as some less capable students discontinued the study of mathematics at the end of Year 12 in favour of other subjects. There was an improvement in the A-level results in 2002. All students gained an A-level pass grade, with four-fifths attaining grades A or B. The four students studying further mathematics all achieved a grade A.

216. Standards of students' work at A-level are generally well above course expectations, particularly in pure mathematics and statistics. Current standards are better than the school's examination results in 2001, reflecting more closely the school's performance in the 2002 examinations. Students have generally attained high marks in the modules in which they have already been examined; they have maintained files of their work, from which they have revised efficiently. In contrast, students who lack a systematic approach to the organisation of their work have revised less successfully and are in need of further guidance in this respect.

217. Learning is rapid from the beginning of Year 12 as students have a well rooted mastery of GCSE mathematics, upon which teaching builds; for example, in a Year 12 statistics lesson, in which new techniques and concepts were being introduced to analyse conditional probability problems. The challenging teaching continues to draw upon the students' extending repertoire throughout the A-level course. Overall, they are making satisfactory progress and achieving as expected. Further mathematics students in Year 13 enjoyed developing their understanding of the solution of second order differential equations because they appreciated how much they had already learned and understood about calculus and algebraic manipulation in the previous year.

218. Students follow their teachers' careful use of correct methodology, mathematical terminology and notation. Teachers have established very good relationships with the students and use very good questioning skills to develop students' thinking and understanding. In one lesson, a teacher helped students to form a hypothesis for expressing the variance of a binomial distribution and skilfully led the group to analyse one of the suggestions they made. Learning significantly from this experience, it



enabled students to tackle further questions independently. Generally, students have insufficient opportunity to discuss aspects of their study among themselves and to consider mathematics in the broader context of life. For example, in a mechanics lesson all students would have benefited from a general discussion rather than individual advice from the teacher. Homework examples are chosen well by teachers to ensure consolidation of knowledge together with challenging questions. Students' work is marked regularly, testing is an integral part of the provision and students are aware of the standard of their work in relation to A-level requirements.

219. The teaching is managed well. The scheme of work rigorously reflects the requirements of the examination syllabuses. Students' learning is enhanced by excellent facilities, including an interactive whiteboard, full access to computers and an extensive bank of questions and model solutions accessible by the Intranet. The monitoring of students' performance is thorough; teachers appropriately give good support. Students are particularly articulate and positive about their mathematics courses; they feel that the teaching is rigorous and stimulating. They had enjoyed a talk given by a university lecturer about imaginary numbers and are confident that they will be successful in reaching the high grades they need to enter the university courses of their choice.

## Sciences

220. The focus of the inspection was biology and physics. In addition, chemistry was sampled. In chemistry, the A-level results in 2001 were well above the average for all schools and also for selective schools. The 2002 results were similar, with two-thirds of students gaining grade A or B, and all achieving a pass. Two lessons were observed during the inspection and both were good. In one lesson, good foundations were being laid for successful study at AS level through thorough revision of earlier work in organic chemistry. In the other, Year 13 students worked hard when applying a mathematical formula, ably supported by knowledgeable teaching. Learning was good in both lessons.

## Biology

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

### Strengths

- The improved A-level results in 2002 indicate that standards are rising.
- Students' positive attitudes and the relationships with their teachers support learning.

### Areas for improvement

- A closer match between the challenge of the work and each student's target grade.
- Increased use of ICT to support teaching and learning.

221. In 2001, the results for A-level biology were in line with the national average for grades A-E, but below average for grades A and B. The results were below the average for selective schools on both measures, and below the school's prediction based on the students' GCSE performance. Over recent years, students' performance in biology has fallen below the school's expectations based upon GCSE grades and performance in their other subjects. The A-level results in 2002 were much better. Just over twice the proportion of students achieved grade A or B, and all students gained grades A-E. Overall, the results were in line with the school's prediction and very close to performance in students' other subjects. During the past year, all students completed their chosen course, both at AS and A2 levels. The usual picture is for students to complete the two-year course.

222. Work in lessons and in students' files indicates that students are generally achieving satisfactorily. Current Year 13 students are not starting from such a strong performance in AS level examinations as did students in the previous year, and are on course to attain average results compared to all schools, similar to the position reached in 2001. Students in Year 12 were only a few weeks into their AS course at the time of the inspection and were being effectively helped by their teachers to adjust to the course requirements, and were starting to progress satisfactorily in the application of some key laboratory techniques. Within this generally sound picture, however, there is some variation. Not enough is done consistently to challenge the more capable students, and sometimes too much is expected of students not capable of achieving the highest grades. Differences in achievement between other groups of

students did not stand out, however. For example, students from minority ethnic groups played a full part in lessons, contributed well to discussion, and made satisfactory progress, as did the small number of girls in Year 12.

223. Biology in the sixth form received no mention in the previous inspection report, but in relation to the A-level results up to 2001, improvement has been unsatisfactory. The improvement in 2002 for Year 13 students points to satisfactory improvement, coinciding with the appointment of the present head of department.

224. The sample of teaching observed, together with analysis of students' files, indicates that teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Strengths in teaching outweigh weaknesses in relation to their impact on learning. Among the strengths is the helpful feedback students receive on their homework assignments. Questions are well used at the start of lessons to reinforce earlier work. Very good relationships with students ensure that time is used productively and encourage students to ask questions about areas of difficulty. Technician support is effective in helping to make best use of time for practical work. Good knowledge of the subject ensures that teaching explanations are clear and accurate. Aspects of teaching which reduce the rate at which students could learn include the lack of adequate explanation of the purpose of the lesson in terms of the knowledge, skills and understanding all students are expected to have gained by the end. Most importantly, not enough is done to plan lessons, homework and research assignments so that all students are appropriately challenged and helped to progress at their best individual pace. All students are expected to do much the same work, irrespective of their starting points at GCSE or AS level, although occasionally provision is made for an especially talented student, as with a work experience placement. Students' files are not monitored to ensure that they all are building useful and well organised collections of notes and other resources which will help them with revision. The lack of access to ICT resources in the laboratories also affects students' learning, although plans are in hand to address this.

225. The head of department has been in post for just one year. Improvement has been hampered by the absence of a strategic plan in which the developments needed to raise standards would be highlighted, with indicative budget requirements and success criteria related to better standards. The department also lacks a sufficiently well developed culture of monitoring and evaluation. Too much trust has been placed in infrequent observation of lessons and not enough in regular analysis of students' work and progress. While all the laboratories are of suitable size for the size of groups, one is rather cluttered and another is unsatisfactorily laid out.

## Physics

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

### Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge and their commitment to success.
- The quality of the demonstrations by teachers, and of their explanations of physical concepts.
- The positive relationships between staff and students.

### Areas for improvement

- Implementing strategies to develop problem-solving and thinking skills, and an awareness of the importance of physics in everyday life.
- The procedures for setting students' individual targets, and for monitoring progress towards them.
- Tighten the departmental development plan to provide a clearer framework for improving the work of the department.

226. The results in the A-level examinations in 2001 were well above average and broadly in line with those of other selective schools. All students gained a pass grade and more than half of them gained the highest grades of A or B. The A-level results in 2002 show similar levels of attainment. A-level results have varied from year to year but the overall trend is slightly upwards and numbers taking the course are increasing. In the AS examination in 2001, the results were well above average, with all gaining grades A-E and nearly four-fifths attaining the highest grades of A and B. In 2002, all students passed, and although the number gaining grade A fell, over half gained the highest grades of A or B.

227. Standards of work of the current Year 13 students are variable. Overall, they are above course expectations and students are achieving well. Some coursework is excellent, where students show skills of a high order in measurement, presentation of results and graphical work. They can interpret their results well, and their written work shows a good grasp of how they could improve upon them. However, in their folders containing class work and homework, tasks are largely routine. Whilst students show a good ability to answer standard questions, there is little to indicate that they can think beyond the immediate problem in hand or solve problems of a kind they are unlikely to have met before. In the classroom, a group of Year 13 students showed a very good level of understanding of an experiment to measure the velocity of an airgun pellet using the concepts of energy and momentum, but did not have the perception to suggest really effective methods for improving the strategy to obtain more accurate results.

228. The course taken by students is based on the use of ICT and this aspect is well developed. Literacy skills are good, and teachers are at pains to ensure that students are sufficiently fluent in mathematics to solve problems they may meet in their physics course, sometimes making good use of starter activities to develop these numeracy skills further. Whilst some students take great care in the production of written work, others take insufficient pride in their work and fail to take the opportunity to undertake research to increase their understanding of the subject and its applications.

229. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, manage students well and make good use of the resources available to them. Class demonstrations, and teachers' explanations of them, are very good. However, teachers do not take sufficient opportunity to plan into their lessons the development of an awareness of issues relating to citizenship, or to foster a spirit of curiosity. For example, in a lesson on electrical resistance and conductance, the opportunity was not taken to show how the ideas relate to everyday lives, and why they are important to us all. In another lesson, on the same topic, the teacher asked questions to establish that sufficient had been understood to move the class on to the next part of the lesson, but did not challenge his students at a sufficiently high level, commensurate with their high predicted grades. As a result, productivity and the level of intellectual effort invested by students, whilst satisfactory, were still less than they could have been.

230. Management of the department is satisfactory. The head of department, who is very new to the post, has inherited a set of procedures that undoubtedly enable his students to gain good examination results, although improvement has been slow since the last inspection. The department is well resourced, with staff who are very well qualified and experienced. Further work is necessary to ensure that the detailed implementation of the curriculum laid down by the awarding body is adapted to support students in developing a deeper understanding of the concepts of physics, the ability to use physical ideas to solve problems, and an awareness of the importance of physics in all our lives. The departmental development plan does not provide a strong enough framework for the department to move forward in terms of developing teaching and learning strategies and the more effective monitoring of students' progress, so that examination results can be improved still further.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

231. The focus was on A-level design and technology.

### **Design and technology**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Teachers' good subject expertise enables them to motivate students well.
- Students have excellent attitudes to the subject.
- Students are confident in the use and application of ICT to support their learning.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Provide greater challenges to raise the attainment of the most capable students.

232. In 2001, the A-level results were well below the national average and well below those of selective schools. The results in 2002 showed a significant improvement, especially at the highest grades. All students gained a pass grade and nearly all attained grade A or B. The numbers taking the course were relatively small.

233. Students' work in lessons, in their portfolios and in discussions with them, confirm that standards are above average overall and that they are achieving well. This indicates a considerable improvement over the examination results in 2001 and reflects more closely the results in 2002. In general, students do well on those parts of the course that are concerned with their own ability to use their skills of research and analysis. They confidently use a broad range of ICT systems for imagery, research and development and three-dimensional computer-aided design. Most students are able to explain their designs with growing confidence and to relate these to the real world of work.

234. All students show a high level of interest and enthusiasm for the subject. When they are working individually on computers in lessons, they help each other well, and discussions, always relevant to the work, are common, contributing to the good learning. Students show imagination and flair, for example, in the design and manufacture of a log splitter and a floor standing lighting unit. Other good examples at AS level include a fishing trolley and a bicycle stand.

235. The quality of teaching is consistently good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and transmit their enthusiasm for the subject to their students. They are good at anticipating aspects of work that are likely to be misunderstood and they make good use of individual tutorial sessions to monitor students' understanding. When students are working individually, teachers make good use of their time, discussing work with students and suggesting further possibilities. However, the teaching does not always challenge the most capable students sufficiently, for example through the use of more probing and searching questions and providing opportunities for them to develop higher level skills of critical evaluation.

236. In most respects, the subject is well led and managed. A system of recording individual students' progress tracks their progress. However, students' annual reports do not identify clearly enough in subject specific terms the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve.

## **BUSINESS**

237. The focus was on A-level business studies.

### **Business studies**

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

#### Strengths

- The A-level results have been well above average.
- Teaching is effective and enables students to make good progress.
- Students learn well and are highly motivated.

#### Areas for improvement

- Produce a development plan to guide the work of the department and to raise standards.
- Extend the use of value-added indicators and other data to assist in the process of target setting.
- Extend the use of fieldwork and visits from people in business.

238. The A-level results in 2001 were well above the national average, with a higher proportion than average attaining the highest grades of A or B. In 2002, there was an increase in the proportion gaining the highest grades. The results in 2001 were broadly in line with the national average for selective schools. From their work, students' attainment by the end of Year 13 is above average, slightly lower than the school's performance in the A-level examinations. Students make good progress and achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry to the sixth form. They have a good command of the terminology and are able to discuss and analyse business problems effectively. Most Year 13 students

are able to understand the content of balance sheets and the reasons why businesses would choose to use different types of funds. The less capable students are not yet able to construct a balance sheet without support from the teacher. The most capable students are able to write fluently and concisely about the impact of interest rates on the economy.

239. Students in Year 12 are able to understand potential cash flow problems faced by businesses. They learn effectively and quickly in most lessons because they are capable of responding to the intellectual demands of the courses and the teaching is well organised. In the best lessons, students collaborate well with the teacher to develop and understand new concepts. They analyse ideas and share them with their class in a purposeful and positive manner. They are positive about their studies and show respect for their teachers and their peers. They work hard and are responsive to the demands made on them. In some cases, their file material is not well organised, which will make revision later in the year more difficult.

240. Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and prepared and teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and the examination questions. The teaching approach is characterised by discussion, which is often led by the teacher, aided by some perceptive questioning of students as appropriate. Video material is used occasionally and was used effectively in one lesson during the inspection. Good use is made of homework. Teachers value the ideas of all students: they have high expectations and encourage learning. There is insufficient use of first-hand experience from links with local businesses, fieldwork, role plays and simulation to stimulate learning and motivate the students. Not enough use is made of ICT to support learning.

241. Leadership of the department is satisfactory. Some of the weaknesses in provision identified in the main school apply to the work in the sixth form also. There is currently no improvement plan to guide the work of the department. Not enough use is made of value-added indicators and other data to assist in monitoring the effectiveness of the teaching and in the process of setting targets for students.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

242. The focus was on A-level information and communication technology.

### **Information and communication technology**

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **good**.

#### **Strengths**

- Standards in ICT are well above average.
- The teaching is very good overall and enables students to learn well.
- Students are enthusiastic and work well on their own and with others.
- Leadership is good and the planning for teaching ICT in the sixth form is very good.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- The most capable students are not always challenged sufficiently.

243. The A-level results in computer studies were well above the national average in 2001 and were above the average for selective schools. These standards have been maintained since the introduction of the new AS/A-level course in ICT in September 2000. The examination performance of the first A-level cohort in 2002 compared well with the 2001 results, with a higher proportion gaining grades A and B than in the previous year. In the AS examinations in 2001, every student gained the highest grades of A or B. There was a considerable increase in the number of students sitting the AS examination in 2002 and although all students gained pass grades, the proportion gaining the highest grades of A and B dropped slightly.

244. Scrutiny of students' coursework and their work in lessons indicates that they are making good progress from GCSE to AS level work and they are achieving well, although there are some variations between different parts of the course. By the end of Year 13, students are attaining standards that are well above average. In general, students do best in those parts of the course that are concerned with

their own ability to use software. They confidently create complex data systems using linked spreadsheets with macros and data entry screens, and are designing and starting to create relational databases. Work by students in Year 13, involving the creation and analysis of graphical images, was particularly good. Most students show a secure understanding of the key features of vector and bit map graphical products and some are able to offer strikingly eloquent explanations of the strengths and weaknesses of each and the reasons for these.

245. Nearly all students show interest and enthusiasm for the subject. When they are working individually on computers in lessons, they are good at helping each other and productive work-focused discussions that aid the learning process occur frequently. Many students are able to do some of their work on computers at home, and they are allowed to use email to transfer work between home and school. Students who do not have such facilities at home use the excellent resources available within the ICT department at break time, lunchtime and, if convenient for staff, after school. No student reported any difficulty in gaining access to the resources they need.

246. Teaching is very good overall and is never less than satisfactory. Teachers have a very good command of the subject, including some first-hand experience of using ICT in organisations other than school. They transmit their enthusiasm for the subject to their students. They are good at anticipating aspects which are likely to be misunderstood and they make good use of questioning to check on students' understanding. A good example of this was an introductory lesson to Year 13 on the human-computer interface (HCI). The lesson started with a very stimulating introduction, using a PowerPoint presentation displayed on a large screen, about how easily humans can be misled by, for example, optical illusions. The teacher very smoothly made the transition into the fundamental concepts related to HCI and used skilful questioning to ensure that there was no confusion or misunderstanding. When students are working individually, teachers generally make good use of their time, discussing work with students, but on a few occasions teachers missed opportunities to stretch the most capable students by posing challenging questions or showing them further possibilities. There were also a few occasions when teachers were influenced by the keenness of the more enthusiastic students and failed to check that the quieter students fully understood the work. Homework is set and marked regularly, using mark-schemes based on the requirements of the examination board. Coursework projects are routinely monitored and include some helpful written comments to help students improve their work.

247. Good leadership and management ensure effective provision. The work of the department is well organised and schemes of work provide good guidance for teaching the AS and A-level parts of the course specification. The accommodation currently allows the sixth-form classes to be taught effectively.

248. Students who do not choose ICT as one of their AS courses may opt to follow a Key Skills course in ICT, which is taught as a discrete subject for two periods each week. The number choosing the Key Skills course is low, despite the attempts to target students who achieved a grade C or lower in ICT in the GCSE examinations. Most sixth-form students do not therefore continue to develop their ICT skills formally except where ICT is required as part of the work in their other subjects.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

249. The focus was on A-level sports studies.

### **Sports studies**

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

#### **Strengths**

- The teaching of AS and A-level sports studies is good and expectations are high.
- Teachers' expert knowledge motivates the students: as a result, students have very good attitudes to their work, are hard working and fully committed.
- Leadership and management are good.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Ensure students are aware of the progress they are making and what they need to do to improve their work.
- The accommodation does not enable teachers and students to have easy access to central learning resources.

250. Courses in AS and A-level sports studies have been introduced since the last inspection. The A-level examination results in 2001 were well below the national average and well below the average for selective schools. Although all students gained grades A-E, no student gained the highest grades of A and B. The examination results in 2002 were a significant improvement on the results of the preceding year, with more than half attaining the highest grades of A or B. The results in the AS level examination in 2001 were better than the national average but were not quite as good in 2002.

251. Students in Year 13 achieve well and attain above average standards, in line with the school's most recent examination performance. They demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of politics in sport. In class discussions, students express themselves fluently using advanced technical vocabulary. Two more capable students spoke confidently on apartheid, racial segregation and world bans in sport and were able to analyse and evaluate critically these prejudices in sport. In Year 12, standards of work are variable. Other than one member of the group, students have not studied physical education at GCSE level and have not had the opportunity to study the subject in depth or to experience the theoretical aspects. As a result, there are gaps in students' knowledge, especially in the analysis of performance and in the principles of training.

252. The teaching is good. Teachers are knowledgeable and confident in teaching all aspects of the course and motivate the students to work well. Students are keen to learn and respond positively to the challenges before them. The course and the lessons are well planned with a balance of questions, discussion, video footage and theoretical tasks, which challenge and extend students' knowledge and understanding. Good working relationships are evident. Students are well managed and organised and make a positive contribution to lessons. Homework is regularly set to increase students' understanding and to develop their capacity to undertake independent research through reading, extended writing and the use of ICT. Students have insufficient opportunity to apply theoretical content through their practical work, especially at the beginning of the course. Teachers make detailed records of marks and grades and provide accurate assessments of students' attainment and progress. However, students do not always know how well they are doing or how to improve their work.

253. Students' attitudes to their work are very good. They are enthusiastic about the course, committed and willing to work hard. The majority of the students respond well to the demands made of them and are confident and willing to make a positive contribution to class discussion.

254. The department is well led and managed. Student files are well managed and organised as a result of the teachers' high expectations. The work reflects good coverage of the syllabus and tasks are planned to develop key skills. The course is well structured and supported by a range of resources. However, resources for ICT both within the department and in the library are under-developed. Sports studies is not taught in a designated room, which affects access to central learning resources. Students in the sixth form benefit from a very good physical education programme, which offers a range of opportunities for them to participate in a physical activity and to improve their performance. Extra-curricular provision in competitive sport is very good and a number of students represent their school in teams and are selected to play locally and represent the county.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

255. The school makes no provision for subjects in this curricular area.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

256. The focus was on A-level art, but theatre studies and music were also sampled. The provision for music in the sixth form is very good. Standards achieved at AS and A-level are above average. Students are accomplished musicians with very high instrumental skills displaying considerable enthusiasm for their studies. Teaching is very good, and learning is enhanced by teachers' very good demonstrations

and subject knowledge. Students show a clear understanding of music, expressing ideas and opinions from a wide range of sources. Two lessons were sampled in theatre studies. In 2001, the examination results were significantly above the national average but the small numbers entered made meaningful comparisons with the national figures difficult. The results in 2002, when compared with 2001, show that they were similar at grades A-E but not as good at grades A and B. Students are working at levels above their previous knowledge of drama and standards are above course expectations. Teaching is well organised and students respond well to the teacher's subject knowledge by demonstrating their understanding of the theories of Brecht and Stanislavsky.



## Art

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

### Strengths

- Examination results at AS and A-level are well above the national average.
- The very good teaching ensures that the work is tailored to suit the needs of individual students.
- The very good attitudes and relationships evident between students and with their teachers.
- Students demonstrate a mature approach and high levels of self-confidence in their decision-making for visual and tactile studies.

### Areas for improvement

- Insufficient technical assistance is available to enable teachers to spend more time teaching.

257. Standards are well above average and have improved since the last inspection. The A-level examination results in 2001 were well above the national average and were above the average for selective schools. All students gained grades A-E and nearly three-quarters achieved the highest grades of A or B. The results for 2002 are broadly similar to those in 2001. In the AS examinations in 2001, all students gained A-E grades, with the majority gaining the highest grades. The picture in 2002 is broadly similar, although a lower proportion gained grades A and B. There are no significant differences in attainment with regard to students' ethnicity or background.

258. By the end of Year 13, standards are well above course expectations, reflecting the A-level examination results in 2001 and 2002. Students make very good progress and achieve very well. They confidently give presentations using computers, using a PowerPoint programme and successfully combining digital photography with text, to present their ideas and visual research to the whole group. This helps them to refine their ideas in the light of group discussion and provides an opportunity for assessment by teachers. For example, using this technique, a student ably traced the development of bronze sculpture through from a Spartan warrior figure cast in 540 BC, to Donatello's David, during the Italian Renaissance up to Rodin 1876 in France. He spoke knowledgeably about Jacob Epstein's Rock-drill figure and Henry Moore's reclining figures, and showed clear knowledge of development up to the present day, ending with a local artist, Tom Greenshields, whose sculptures can be seen outdoors in the surrounding area. In Year 12 students have adapted well to a new way of working. The practice of teaching some Year 12 students in mixed groups with Year 13 is working well. Students are able to make meaningful links in their knowledge of the works of other artists, from both European and other cultures and are well able to transfer skills, gained from one medium to another, when experimenting with new ideas in relation to colour, shape, line and texture. They manipulate the elements of drawing, painting and printmaking, in much greater depth and apply them with imagination and sensitivity. In sketchbooks and personal investigations, students demonstrate a very good understanding of media such as oils, inks, charcoal and other two-dimensional ways of working. A very strong feature of sixth form study is the level of interest, knowledge and skills in three-dimensional investigations and completed works. Students work well with a very good range of materials, such as clay, cement blocks, wire and card, to model, carve and construct sculptures. They know the processes involved in casting in bronze and can talk knowledgeably about the historical and cultural developments of art movements and individual artists.

259. The quality of teaching is consistently very good and has a strong impact on students' learning. Students are offered a very good balance of group and individual support. The contextual studies element of the course is taught very well. Teachers make explicit the historical, cultural and political thinking which influenced artists. As a result, students show deep interest and make useful links with topics remembered from other subjects to enrich their knowledge in art and design. Teachers ensure that students have access to a wealth of information and visual resource material. Through their regular monitoring, they know the strengths and weaknesses of their students well. They share this information so that students know what they need to do to improve further.

260. Students are hardworking and they spend much time outside school hours on coursework. As a result, they achieve well above average results and take a justified pride in their work. Students respond well to the individual help they are given. They use lesson times well and organise themselves

appropriately. They show independence of thought and action and maturity in their approach. They value the help they receive from teachers.

261. The leadership and management of the department are of very high quality and the main motivational force in the dept. Useful links have been made with the design and technology department and with the ICT department. Teachers generously exchange ideas and expertise which benefits students by broadening the curriculum they receive. The head of department monitors the work of other teachers in the department and all teachers thoroughly monitor students' progress. There is a busy, pleasant and purposeful ethos in the dept, although the noise from metal stools on the hard floor is an irritation. The very good quality relationships foster mutual trust between teachers and students. Because of the department's inclusive attitude to all students, they feel secure to attempt difficult topics and issues in their work, without fear of embarrassment or ridicule and this leads to some sensitive, genuinely original and worthwhile work. The lack of technician support in the department to help with the preparation of resources and materials is a weakness.

## HUMANITIES

262. The focus was on geography and history but government and politics and psychology were also sampled. In the one lesson seen in government and politics, the teaching was good. Students made good progress, achieving standards that were in line with expectations for the course. Two Year 12 lessons were seen in psychology. The teaching in both lessons was good. Students are making good progress and standards are above average.

### Geography

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

#### Strengths

- Standards in the AS and A-level examinations are well above average.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Relationships between teachers and students are excellent and the partnership between teachers, students and parents creates a close identity of interest.

#### Areas for improvement

- When the opportunity arises, meet the students' request for more practical work.

263. Standards in geography are well above average. The A-level results in 2001 were well above the national average and better than the average for selective schools. All students gained grades A-E and a much higher proportion than average gained the highest grades of A or B. In 2002, there was an improvement in the proportion of students gaining grades A and B. In this subject, students gained almost one grade better than in their other subjects and added good value to their earlier attainment. The results have been well above average in three of the last four years. The AS examination results in 2001 were also above the national averages and showed a slight improvement in 2002. All students gained grades A-E, and around a half attained the highest grades of A or B.

264. Attainment on entry to the course in Year 12 is above average and the normal requirement is a GCSE grade B. A very few students with grade C at GCSE follow a probationary period before full acceptance on to the AS course. Students therefore take the step from GCSE to AS easily. The retention of students from AS level to A2 is good.

265. Observation of lessons and the scrutiny of work confirm that students' attainment is well above average by the end of Year 13. They are making rapid progress and achieve very well. Students use their existing knowledge well to develop their understanding further. They use case studies skilfully to transfer information laterally to solve problems and answer questions. Their skills in working independently develop well and they are able to synthesise material from a variety of sources and make good notes. For example, in a lesson on glaciation they collated information simultaneously from a projection on a screen, two work sheets and two books. They responded skilfully to the teacher's

prompting to build up a very good body of information about the number of known glacial eras and the anatomy of a glacial period.

266. Their use of number is excellent and their knowledge and use of higher level statistical methods are very good. They talk well about the utility of different mapping techniques for various purposes and know their different strengths and weaknesses. Good standards of literacy ensure above average standards of writing: the quality of writing of the most capable students is impressive in its clarity, the wide range of information and statistics mustered and in the quality of argument to support a conclusion.

267. Teaching is very good in almost all lessons and reaches the highest standards in the remainder. Consequently, students learn very well. Teachers are very good geographers who blend their different skills and styles to deliver extremely well organised examination courses. Their good subject knowledge is very well marshalled and presented, and the very good planning ensures a variety of learning activities in the double lessons. Thus, the students' high level of interest and motivation is well maintained and learning is very effective and occurs at a fast pace. The level of challenge is consistently high so that the most capable students in Year 13 are beginning to think at levels beyond the requirements of the examination syllabus.

268. Teachers encourage co-operative learning so that lessons have a quiet buzz of shared learning, talk and discussion. Teachers require students to make presentations to their class, and as a result they speak well, with some using PowerPoint for their demonstrations. Geographical skills are well taught. Very good use is made of basic cross-curricular skills of literacy and ICT. Excellent use is made of their very good numeracy skills, which strongly underpin understanding and progress in geography in Year 13. Note taking is not left to chance, and very good writing frames are used to help students shape their writing and to develop their use of technical vocabulary.

269. The excellent relationships evident between teachers and students assist teaching and learning. Parental support is strong and creates a close identity of interest. Students receive guidance about university choices and have trust in their teachers, whom they praise highly. Good numbers follow courses in geography at university each year. They appreciate the quality of their fieldwork on Arran with other local sixth forms students and would like additional opportunities, recognising that the application of theory to practical situations is a good stimulus to learning.

270. Work in the subject is effectively led and managed. The requirements of the examination board are met well. Teamwork is good and assessment good and accurate. Marking is thorough and accords with departmental policy. Written comments show students how to improve and adjust emphasis. The resources available to support learning are of high quality.

## History

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

### Strengths

- Standards reached in the AS and A-levels examinations are well above average.
- Students have outstanding attitudes, a high commitment to the subject, work hard and concentrate well: these qualities contribute to their growth as people and learners.
- The quality of teaching is very good: lessons are well planned and make high demands on students as they develop their knowledge, understanding and skills.
- Students' work is marked in considerable detail and very carefully monitored: the outcomes are used well to inform the planning of further teaching.
- Leadership and management are very good.

### Areas for improvement

- Greater use of ICT for teaching, learning, research and coursework.

271. Standards are well above average. The results in AS and A-level examinations over the past four years have been well above average for the proportion of students gaining grades A-E and the highest grades of A and B. They are, however, in line with the average when compared with the results for

selective schools. From year to year, the results vary, especially in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades and in 2002 they were closer to the average than in previous years. When considering students' earlier attainment, the subject adds value, especially to those gaining the highest and the more modest grades.

272. Standards of work seen during the inspection are generally comparable with those achieved in the 2001 external examinations, which were well above the national average. Students, including those with special educational needs and with English as an additional language, make good progress. They develop very good levels of knowledge and understanding of the topics they study, the skills needed to enable them to work effectively as historians and to meet the examination objectives. They are well supported in their learning by a good range of resources in the department and the well-equipped school library, as well as through the Internet.

273. Students' levels of literacy, numeracy and ICT are high. Most students read and write fluently. Their essays and assignments show writing for a range of purposes, the effective use of good grammar, sentence construction and an extensive vocabulary. They read widely, make excellent use of the Internet and their research skills are outstanding. Number and other forms of statistical data are used appropriately. Students use ICT effectively, especially in longer assignments and coursework, but there is scope for extending its use further, especially for teaching, learning, research and coursework. In a Year 13 lesson, good use was made of ICT to analyse the A-level statements and to write responses illustrative of a low, middle or high standard response to an examination question.

274. Students have outstandingly good attitudes to the subject and a high commitment to their work. They aspire to be successful in their studies and value the time and attention teachers make available to help them achieve high standards. Detailed marking is highly valued, especially the comments that identify how well they are doing and which aspects of their work need to be improved. They enjoy excellent relationships, both with each other and with their teachers. The high quality of the relationships between teachers and students contribute much to the atmosphere in lessons where well thought-out ideas and scholarly contributions are recognised and valued. The mature approach many students adopt to their work and its organisation and management contributes to their development as learners and as people.

275. The quality of teaching and learning is very good: in no lesson is it less than good. All lessons are well-planned, provide for a high level of contribution from students and build on previous learning, homework and individual or group research. Teachers' infectious love of their subject is clearly transmitted and ensures that students are highly motivated and will respond with well-prepared responses, penetrating questions for both teachers and their peers, and have a high commitment to and thirst for the development of knowledge and understanding. Resources are well chosen to explore and extend learning, and tasks are specifically designed to encourage students to develop enquiry and scholarship. Teachers have high expectations of their students and, during small group or pair work, monitor the work and offer further challenge to all learners.

276. In lessons where teaching is well targeted, the pace is demanding and the challenge relentless in ensuring that progress is very good and standards high. For example, in a very well taught Year 13 lesson that explored British foreign policy after World War I, students contributed to the learning throughout, responded quickly to the high levels of challenge, posed key questions and proposed numerous hypotheses. Throughout, the teacher enabled them to gain a good understanding of the factors and major characters that influenced post-war foreign policy and, as a result, students were able to analyse the issues against a background of other world events, the economic climate and political opportunities of the period. Students achieved great success in understanding the impact of the foreign policy, both at home and abroad. They also had a very clear picture of major events and factors between 1919 and 1939.

277. The department is very well led and managed. The three specialist sixth form teachers work very productively together and have produced clear guidance for lesson planning within the very well structured schemes of work. Marking and assessment are well done: detailed comments inform students of the strengths and weaknesses in their work and provide guidance for improvement, extra reading and research. Attainment and progress are carefully monitored within the department and each half term

across the sixth form. Retention rates are high and students are very satisfied with the support and guidance they are offered.

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

278. The focus was on English, French and German but Spanish was also sampled. In the two Spanish lessons seen, standards were above average, with a marked difference in performance between Year 12 and Year 13 as students' confidence and independence increased. Teaching and learning were good, with very good opportunities provided for group and pair work.

### English

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

#### Strengths

- Teachers' very good subject knowledge.
- The quality of marking and advice to students on what they need to do to improve.
- The effective partnership between teachers and students.
- The choice of courses to match the students' interests and abilities.

#### Areas for improvement

- Broadening the narrow range of learning activities in a minority of lessons.
- More opportunities for curriculum enrichments through visits and visitors.

279. The results in A-level literature in 2001 were well above the national average but below the average for selective schools. Over time, English has been an increasingly popular A-level subject, with numbers doubling between 1998 and 2001, but during that time standards fell by the equivalent of a grade. 2002 was the first entry for two subjects: literature and combined language and literature, and the overall standard improved significantly, with a much higher proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A and B. In the AS examination in literature in 2001, standards were well above the national average and were above average for selective schools. In the language and literature examination they were also well above the national average but above that for selective schools. In 2002, there was an improvement in language and literature but a drop in the higher grades for literature.

280. Standards seen during the inspection are above average overall. All students are capable of perceptive commentaries on theme and meaning, and they show an above average appreciation of irony and the impact of language and imagery. The most capable students produce outstandingly well expressed and illustrated analyses of Shakespeare, Hardy and nineteenth-century poetry. A high level of discussion is maintained in lessons, particularly in Year 13, where students use the language of literary criticism with confidence and show a detailed knowledge of the texts. In their language studies, they are developing an above average ability to analyse style and purpose in a range of fiction and non-fiction and to reproduce appropriate registers. Since these students are coming from an above average base, their achievement is as expected.

281. Teaching is now much better than that seen in the last inspection, and it is good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and the students clearly trust their guidance. Marking is very detailed and analytical, and the students respond well to challenge. Relationships are good, and by Year 13 a productive partnership between teachers and students has been firmly established. In most lessons, a good variety of strategies fully involve students in their learning, although in some of the larger Year 12 classes the seminar approach is relied on too heavily and consequently some students are not actively engaged. Independence is encouraged and demonstrated by Year 13 students in their researches and reports back to the class. English makes a substantial contribution to the key skill of communication for those students who follow AS and A-level courses in English. Overall, improvement has been satisfactory over recent years.

282. The subject is well led and managed. Teachers share a common sense of purpose and work hard to ensure that all students fulfil their potential. Careful analysis of students' strengths and areas of interest has led to the provision of alternative syllabuses to enable them to follow an appropriate course. This has led to an improvement in the grades attained at A-level. Students' attitudes to the subject are positive. They value English for itself and as a useful preparation for future life. They consider the quality

of teaching to be good, although they would welcome more opportunities to enrich their studies through visits and opportunities to meet living authors.

## French

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

### Strengths

- Teachers use French effectively as the normal means of communication within the classroom.
- Relationships are good.
- Students enjoy their French lessons and find them fun.

### Areas for improvement

- Extending the use of ICT to enhance learning.
- Increasing students' use of French to communicate in the classroom.

283. In 2001, the A-level results in French were well above the national average, with all students gaining grades A - E and a half attaining the highest grades of A or B. The results were marginally higher than the average for selective schools. In 2002, there was an increase in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades. The AS examination results were similar to the national average in 2001 but were below the average for selective schools at the highest grades. The school's results at grades A-E and at grades A and B declined somewhat in 2002.

284. The overall quality of students' work by the end of Year 13 is above average and their achievement is satisfactory when account is taken of their earlier attainment. They acquire new vocabulary and grammatical structures steadily, use dictionaries well to help with comprehension and develop good writing and reading skills. Teachers conduct lessons almost entirely in French, with the result that students' listening skills develop well. The pronunciation and intonation of most students are good and, by Year 13, they speak with confidence and assurance on a variety of topics ranging from the environment to racism. In Year 12, they use a range of tenses and structures fluently when discussing why the British should speak a foreign language.

285. Teaching is satisfactory overall, ranging from satisfactory to good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are very competent linguists. Lessons are well prepared and planned, and often include group work, which allows students to develop independence. Teachers know their students well and guide them accordingly. They give very clear advice to students as to what has to be covered and are very supportive, providing targeted marking throughout. Weaknesses relate to lack of pace and challenge as students are not required to use French themselves which means they are not always working to their full potential.

286. Students are attentive and well motivated in lessons. They seek clarification readily if they do not understand something and are active participants in the process of learning. The newly-appointed head of subject leads the department well and is currently putting into place a range of appropriate management strategies to ensure consistency in the teaching. These have yet to be fully implemented.

287. Since the last inspection, the results have improved and the popularity of languages has increased dramatically. There are now very large groups taking French, particularly in Year 12. Insufficient use is made of ICT to support learning.



## German

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

### Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- The teaching is good: teachers have high expectations, insist on constant use of German in lessons and are enthusiastic and friendly.
- Students respond diligently to the high level of challenge in lessons.

### Areas for improvement

- Teaching strategies rarely enable students to use German for spontaneous conversation and creative discussion and they remain too dependent on their notes and reference books.
- The data collected from examination results are not presented in a way that enables the value added by the A-level course to be compared from year to year.

288. The A-level results in 2001 were in line with the national average but were slightly below the average for selective schools. In 2002, there was an improvement in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A or B. In both years, all students gained grades A - E. The results in the AS examination in 2001 were below average, especially at the highest grades. There was a slight improvement in the results at grades A and B in 2002.

289. Students are attaining above average standards by the end of Year 13 and are achieving well. Their strongest areas of achievement are reading, writing and listening. Texts from many different sources are used and the students respond positively to these. When speaking, however, they lack spontaneity, relying too heavily on their prepared notes and reference books. Their response, when asked to respond to an unprepared area of discourse is satisfactory: they are keen to participate, but their contributions are characterised by short answers and a narrow range of vocabulary.

290. Teaching is good. Teachers are innovative in their choice of teaching strategies and ready to develop them in the light of experience, introducing a wide variety of material into lessons. For example, a writing frame was used by a teacher to improve the students' ability to write essays and many different types of learning activities were provided. Marking is carried out thoroughly and accurately. All teachers use German as the only means of communication in lessons. They also require students to use German when addressing their teacher and also on the rare occasions when students speak to each other. The most capable students are encouraged to use complex German sentences to express their thoughts and weaker students are given materials pitched at an appropriate level to ensure that they maintain their interest and progress. All students display good attitudes to their study and exercise good discipline, approaching their lessons positively and organising their work well: this enables them to make good progress. However, the level of students' confidence is not high and teachers do not provide many opportunities for students to overcome their lack of fluency when using German by, for example, becoming involved in meaningful communication in German between one another.

291. The range of experience offered to students in lessons is good. Teachers require students to reflect on a variety of moral issues and provide other thought-provoking texts which encourage deeper reflection, including poetry. Students explore the social and cultural dimensions of language learning through the programme of exchange visits and correspondence with their German peers. Some of this is filed as part of the students' portfolio of work so they can refer to it later. Two of the department's teachers are from German-speaking countries and this promotes respect and friendship for other cultures. Considerable use is made of ICT: the schemes of work include many references to web sites and students use these to further their knowledge and understanding of the German-speaking world. An interactive whiteboard in one of the classrooms is put to good use in lessons.

292. The head of German leads the department well, providing creative ideas and strategies for improving the learning experiences of students, a model of good teaching practice and extra-curricular activities that are appreciated by the students. For example, a club, named 'Kaffee und Kuchen' provides an opportunity for students to meet with their teacher informally and acquire an introduction to German literature and drama. The schemes of work are good. Formal management links with teachers of the

other languages are not yet sufficiently developed. Staff in the German department meet to compare their students' work and exercise books, but they have not yet conducted observations of each others' lessons and their analyses of examination data do not include a comparison of the value added by the A-level and AS level courses from one year to the next. Staff within the department work well with each other and a good base exists for further improvement and development.