

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **THOMAS TALLIS SCHOOL**

Kidbrooke Park

LEA area: L B Greenwich

Unique reference number: 100190

Headteacher: Rob Thomas

Reporting inspector: Michael Buckley  
30517

Dates of inspection: 23<sup>rd</sup> - 27<sup>th</sup> September 2002

Inspection number: 249806

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 19
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Kidbrooke Park Road London
Postcode:	SE3 9PX
Telephone number:	020 8856 0115
Fax number:	020 8319 4715
E-mail address:	<u><a href="mailto:admin@thomastallis.greenwich.sch.uk">admin@thomastallis.greenwich.sch.uk</a></u>
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Margery Nzerem
Date of previous inspection:	28 <sup>th</sup> April 1997

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
30517	Michael Buckley	Registered inspector		The school's results and achievements; How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
9561	Husain Akhtar	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?
10160	Roger Bagguley	Team inspector	Science	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
5733	Terry Dillon	Team inspector	History	
32080	Brian Dutton	Team inspector	Psychology Sociology	
27296	Akram Khan	Team inspector	Mathematics	
1779	David Leonard	Team inspector	Biology Chemistry	
1782	Andrew Lyons	Team inspector	Design and technology Business studies	
8052	Kenneth McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
8360	Frederick Peacock	Team inspector	Music	
10053	Janet Simms	Team inspector	Art Art and design (Voc)	
2200	Jim Stirrup	Team inspector	Drama	
15372	Patricia Walker	Team inspector	English	
4829	Ian Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Thomas Tallis is a larger-than-average mixed comprehensive school, with 1,469 students in Years 7 to 13 and 1,137 in Years 7 to 11. The school is popular and numbers are rising. About 62 per cent of pupils are white British and the proportion of minority ethnic students pupils is comparatively low for Inner London, although it is high compared with national figures. Altogether, 197 students are learning English as additional language but only four are at early stages of language acquisition. This figure, too, is high nationally but low for Inner London. Overall, 363 students are known to be eligible for free school meals (34 per cent) and this is above the national average. Five hundred and fifty students (37 per cent) have special educational needs and 90 (6.1 per cent) have statements defining the additional support they need. Both figures are high by national standards and the proportion of students in Year 7 who have statements is up to nearly eight per cent. The great majority of the students with special educational needs have moderate learning difficulties. The school has two special units, both with 25 places, one for Hearing Impairment and one for Speech and Language Delay. The school also has a Learning Support Unit and a number of specialist staff, including learning mentors, community mentors, behaviour mentors and counsellors. The general attainment of students when they enter the school is well below the national average. The school has achieved Beacon School status and it is a specialist Arts College in partnership with a neighbouring secondary school. It contributes to and benefits from the local Education Action Zone and the Excellence in Cities initiative. Lack of enough suitable accommodation is becoming an increasingly serious problem.

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

This is a very effective school where standards of teaching, learning, leadership and management are very high. Students' attainment in the GCSE examinations is above the national average and is improving. The school provides good value for money.

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

- Students make very good progress through Years 10 and 11, so that standards of attainment in the GCSE examinations are steadily rising, with particularly high standards in GCSE English literature, as well as in English language.
- The school is successfully raising standards in literacy and numeracy in Year 9.
- It provides very good teaching.
- All students have very good access to appropriate educational opportunities.
- The school benefits from very good leadership and management.

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

- Levels of attendance.
- The quality of the accommodation.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school has made good improvements since it was last inspected in April 1997. Almost all the issues identified then have been very successfully tackled. Standards of attainment and the quality of teaching have improved and the curriculum is constantly being made more flexible and accessible for all students. Although the school has worked hard with the local authority to improve the accommodation, this still remains a serious problem. It is the main reason why a daily act of collective worship is not held.

## STANDARDS

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

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

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

The table shows that attainment in the 2001 GCSE examinations was above the national average and was very high compared with that of schools in similar socio-economic settings. Students' performance is improving over time and the 2001 results are very high compared with those of schools attaining similar results in the Year 9 tests in 1999. This indicates very good added value. The strongest subjects were art, drama and English and the weakest was German. Results for the A and AS-level examinations were close to the national averages in 2001. The strongest subjects were art, drama and sociology and the weakest were French and biology. Direct comparisons with previous years cannot be made owing to changes in the examination criteria, but results were above the national averages in 1999 and 2000. The attainment of most students when they enter the school in Year 7 is well below the national average and, in 2001, the results of the Year 9 tests were also well below the national average. However, there have been some marked improvements in English, mathematics and science in 2002. During the inspection, standards were close to those expected nationally in Years 7 to 9 and above the expected levels in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. Particular strengths are in art, drama, business studies and sociology. Standards in information and communication technology have recently begun to improve dramatically. Students' achievements are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, very good in Years 10 and 11 and good overall in the sixth form. Students with special educational needs make good progress. The school sets itself demanding targets which were met in Years 9 and 11, but not reached in the A and AS-level examinations.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	These are good. Students and their parents say that they like the school. It is a friendly, safe place. Students have good attitudes to work and are generally enthusiastic towards all activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Students behave well. Lessons proceed smoothly. No incidents of any oppressive behaviour were seen and bullying is not an issue. Exclusions are for a short period and are effective
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good. Students respect others' values and beliefs and show consideration towards one another. They show good initiative and take responsibility willingly, for example, through the very successful school council.
Attendance	Most students attend regularly and promptly but a small minority are habitual non-attenders and this brings the school's overall attendance

	figures down to well below the national average.
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Students develop into mature and responsible young people. Attendance has been a problem for at least six years. The school is making strenuous efforts to remedy the situation and there are signs of improvement this year.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is very good across the whole school, with the highest proportion of good or better lessons being in Years 11, 12 and 13. There is outstanding teaching in art and in design and technology and very good teaching in English, drama and music. The only two unsatisfactory lessons were in science and business studies. Teaching in other subjects is at least good. Basic skills, including literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology, are usually taught well and incorporated successfully into lessons. Strengths of teaching include very good planning and clear lesson objectives. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and high expectations. They use questioning and discussion very skilfully and generally make good use of final plenary sessions to consolidate learning. In this way, students gain confidence in expressing their ideas and they learn from one another. Teachers know their students very well and are very successful in adapting their approaches to match the needs and abilities of all their students, including those with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language. As a result, students know how well they are doing and learn very well. They show an active interest in their lessons and concentrate well.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good provision, with an increasingly diversified offer for Years 10 and 11. A broad, balanced and relevant programme. Many efforts made to cater for the needs of all students.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good, well-organised and managed provision. Skilful, well-informed and sensitive support provided in and out of mainstream lessons.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good, although there are very few students who need support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Students are given many opportunities to explore other values and belief systems. The school promotes a strong moral code and its own values are very clear. Creativity is widely encouraged and students are enabled to participate in the democratic process through the very effective school council.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good, comprehensive network of interlocking care and welfare systems. Counselling and mentoring programmes offer very high levels of support. The school is very successful in ensuring that all students have every opportunity to participate and to succeed.

A major strength of the curriculum is that it is constantly adapted to make it more accessible to all students and alternative courses are being added for Years 10 and 11. The local community makes a strong contribution. The school has been premature in disapplying students from modern foreign languages and needs to regularise these arrangements. There is an outstanding range of alternative support systems that provide backing to students who would otherwise become disaffected or who need specialist help. Relationships with parents are positive and fruitful.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good leadership and management. Very clear and effective educational direction is raising standards and very successfully promoting educational inclusion. Very strong commitment to the school's success shared by all staff.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are a strong, well-informed, challenging and supportive group. They have played an important part in the school's development over the last few years.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school's planning is securely based on its educational goals. Arrangements for monitoring progress are rigorous.
The strategic use of resources	Very good use made of the various different grants that the school has attracted. Principles of 'best value' are carefully observed.

Overall, there is a good match between the number and the qualifications of staff and the demands of the curriculum, although there has been an unusually high turnover in the normally stable staff during the past 18 months. Resources are generally good. Unsatisfactory and sometimes poor accommodation is presenting continuing difficulties and is limiting the scope of what the school can achieve.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school has high expectations.</li> <li>• It helps their children to become mature and responsible.</li> <li>• They feel comfortable approaching the school with questions or problems.</li> <li>• The school has a very warm and welcoming atmosphere and behaviour is good.</li> <li>• Teachers know the students well and relationships are very positive.</li> <li>• Students feel safe in the school and bullying is rare.</li> <li>• Students have a pride in the school.</li> <li>• The school council is effective.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The regularity and relevance of homework.</li> <li>• The quality of the information about their children's progress.</li> <li>• Some parents feel that the school does not work closely enough with them.</li> <li>• A recent high turnover of teachers, particularly in science.</li> <li>• There are not enough extra-curricular activities.</li> </ul>

Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by parents. They judge that relationships with parents are positive and that the school makes good efforts to work closely with them and to keep them informed. There has been a high turnover of teachers in science that affected standards in some groups last year but the school has now remedied the situation. The range and quality of extra-curricular

activities are at least as good as would be found in most comparable schools. Inspectors agree that practice in planning and setting homework is inconsistent.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form of 332 students has grown from last year's figure of 254, owing to its growing popularity and to the LEA's reorganisation of its Post-16 provision. This makes it larger than the national average and it is likely to grow still further. Entry requirements are in line with those normally seen, but the school makes every effort to be flexible and to offer as many students as possible the opportunity to succeed. A comparatively high proportion of students are from minority ethnic groupings, mainly Black African. The school provides a good range of subjects and a growing number of vocational courses. About three-quarters of the students from Year 11 continue into the sixth form and a similar proportion stays on into Year 13. This is a good retention rate. Results in the vocational courses and the AS and A-level examinations are close to the national average and approximately 60 per cent of students go on to higher education.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

The sixth form is successful and cost-effective. The quality of teaching and learning is very high and students' achievements are good. Standards are outstanding in art and very high in drama, business studies and sociology. The school is successfully maintaining good academic standards, although the nature of the intake into the sixth form is changing and numbers are rising. Courses are very successfully matched to students' needs and local circumstances and there is a very strong emphasis on equality of opportunity. There are good opportunities for personal development and for students to broaden their interests. The main strengths and areas that could be improved in the sixth form are:

**Strengths**

- Students make good progress with regard to their prior attainment.
- The school is consistently raising attainment in A and AS-level examinations, particularly in art, English, drama and geography.
- The school provides very good teaching and staff have a very strong commitment to the success of their students.
- Students have very good attitudes to their work.

**What could be improved**

- The quality of organisation and accommodation for the GNVQ art and design courses.
- The procedures for assessing students' projected grades and calculating their actual attainment against their potential and the value added.
- The sixth form curriculum does not include the required element of religious education.
- The range and quality of books and resources in the sixth form library.

*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	The A-level results in 2001 were close to the national average. The provisional results for 2002 indicate an improvement, with more students achieving the higher grades. Standards of work seen are average and students' achievement and learning are good owing to good and thorough teaching, regular assessments and the positive approach they adopt.
Biology	A-level results were well below the national average in 2001. The school's results in biology are lower than in other A-level subjects. Standards seen in lessons and in written work are in line with the average nationally, reflecting the improvement in the most recent A-level results. Students achieve well in their lessons, and often very well. Teaching and learning are good and sometimes very good.
Chemistry	A-level results were close to the national average in 2001 and, in 2002, they were much higher. The AS-level results for Year 12 students were high in 2001 but lower in 2002. Standards in lessons and written work are above average and students make good progress through the sixth form. Teaching and learning are good overall and this leads to success for students in their examinations.
Design and technology	In 2001, the A-level results were below the national average but the results are much better in 2002. However, standards of achievement are good and teaching is never less than good.
Business studies	The vocational A-level results have been very high compared with the national figures for the last three years. Compared with their attainment at entry, students do very well in this subject. Work seen shows continuing high quality and the teaching is mainly good.
Computing	In 2001, AS-level results were below the national average but the most recent results show a good improvement. All students passed the examination and the percentage achieving the higher grades doubled. Most Year 12 students on the AS course this year are making appropriate progress and working at least in line with expectations. Teaching in Year 12 is generally good and, in Year 13, it is often very good.
Art	A-level results are amongst the highest nation-wide. Over 90 per cent of the relatively large numbers entering the subject achieved A grades in 2002 and all the rest obtained B grades. This performance is excellent and results are similarly high for Year 12 students entering AS-level courses. The work seen matches these standards. The very good, often excellent quality of teaching is the principal factor in students' exceptional achievements.
Art and design	Students' attainment in recent Advanced VCE examinations has been below average and the GNVQ Intermediate results have been about average. No Foundation-level results are available. Attainment on the Year 12 Foundation course is below average but the students are achieving well against their previous attainment. Standards on the current Year 12 Intermediate course are close to those expected. The new Year 12 AVCE students are keen and their work reflects the standards expected for an A-level course. Standards amongst the Year 13 group fall short of the expectations for this stage of their course owing to unsatisfactory progress last year but students are now beginning to achieve well. Teaching on the vocational courses is good.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Music	A-level results in 2001 were above the national average and the students in the current Year 12 are making good progress. Attainment in Year 13 is above average and teaching is very good.
Drama and theatre studies	Attainment in the 2001 A-level examination was well above the national average and results in this year's examination are close to the national average. Five lessons were observed and the standards observed are good. The quality of teaching is very good overall.
History	In 2001, the A-level results were close to the national average and this year they show a marked improvement. Students' performance at AS-level mirrors these standards and results in 2002 are likely to be above the national average, as over half the candidates gained grades A or B. This reflects good progress through the year. Work seen was above average and students learn well. The quality of teaching is good and, in a significant minority of lessons, very good.
Sociology	For the past two years, examination results for the AS and A-level courses have been significantly above the national average. An upward trend in results has been maintained despite a steady increase in student numbers. The standard of students' written work is high and teaching is good overall.
Psychology	Psychology was only introduced in the sixth form in September 2002 and so it is too early to form any firm conclusions about the standards of attainment. Only one lesson could be seen. The quality of teaching was very good and the students showed an enthusiastic interest in the subject. At this early stage of the course, they have made a good start in developing the appropriate study skills and understanding of psychological theories.
English	In 2001, results of the A-level examinations were close to the national average; they have been higher in previous years. Attainment in AS-levels in 2001 was much higher than the national average and all students passed. The high standards identified in the previous inspection report have been maintained. The quality of teaching is very good.
French	The results of the A-level examinations in 2001 were significantly below the national average but there has been an improvement in 2002. The trend over four years has been broadly in line with the national average for all schools. In work seen, standards in Year 13 are close to the expected levels. In the 2002 AS-level examinations, half of the students obtained high grades but most of the others were ungraded. In the lessons observed, standards were close to the expected levels and teaching was good and sometimes very good.

In physics, examination results at A-level were above average in 2001 and similar to this in 2002. AS-level results in 2001 were below average in 2001 but showed some improvement in 2002. Two lessons were observed. Teaching and learning were good in one and satisfactory in the other. In addition, the school offers AS-level courses in the history of art, where two lessons were sampled, and in photography and film studies, where no lessons were seen. Lessons seen on the history of art show that students are interested and engaged with their current studies about classical architecture and the quality of teaching is good. Many useful trips are undertaken to a wide variety of classical European sites.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Admission and induction arrangements are effective; transition to the sixth form is smooth and students settle in quickly. Tutorials are regular and helpful. Students have good access to counsellors and external welfare agencies. Personal development is well supported by good relationships, by the curriculum and by the work of the students' committee.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Well managed. Very good planning and good curricular development. Good liaison with the teaching faculties and good management of the tutorial system. The management and resourcing of the vocational courses in art and design need to be reviewed.

## 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>• They enjoy being in the sixth form.</li> <li>• Teachers are accessible and helpful.</li> <li>• They are helped to study independently.</li> <li>• They are well taught and challenged.</li> <li>• They are given clear and helpful written information.</li> <li>• The choice of courses matches their talents and aspirations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The extent of advice about future options.</li> <li>• The range of additional enrichment activities.</li> </ul>

In discussion, students talk very favourably about the care, support and guidance given by staff, particularly the careers' advisers. This view is borne out by the inspection evidence. Inspectors judge that, although the range and quality of resources in the sixth form library are unsatisfactory, the information and support provided are generally very good. Extra-curricular activities are satisfactory.

## COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

#### **Students make very good progress through Years 10 and 11**

1. In 2001, the percentage of students gaining five or more A\* to C grades in the GCSE examinations was close to the national average and this had also been the case over the previous three years. The percentage gaining five or more A\* to G grades was above the national average and has been so for the previous three years. The average point score was above the national average and had been for the preceding three years. When results are compared with those of other schools whose students achieved similar standards in the Year 9 tests in 1999, the overall achievement of students at Thomas Tallis is very high and the percentage achieving A\* to C grades is above average. This indicates that students make outstanding progress through Years 10 and 11, compared with their previous test results in Year 9. The overall point score was also very high when compared with the average for other schools in similar socio-economic circumstances. Over the past four years, the upward trend in results has been above that seen nationally.
2. Compared with national figures, significantly good results were obtained in art, drama, English literature, as well as English language and information and communication technology. In this last subject, over 40 of the 52 candidates obtained A\* to C grades. Students performed less well in mathematics, science, design and technology and modern foreign languages than they did in other subjects. By the end of Year 11, almost all pupils with statements of special educational needs obtain five or more A\* to G grades in GCSE examinations. The provisional results for 2002 are slightly lower than last year's but there are as yet no confirmed national figures for comparison.
3. Evidence from the small sample of lessons seen during the short inspection indicates that the quality of learning in Years 7 to 9 is good and standards are close to those expected nationally. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11 and standards in most lessons are above what is expected nationally.

#### **The school is successfully raising standards in literacy and numeracy in Year 9**

4. For the past three years, the school has been in the pilot scheme for the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies into Years 7, 8 and 9. Staff received a great deal of professional development and support and a cross-curricular approach was used from the outset. In this way, other faculties were involved, not just those for English and mathematics. The old schemes of work were re-written to incorporate the aims of the Strategies and the majority of departmental staff participated in the new planning.
5. In literacy, 'catch-up' programmes have been offered to students in Year 7 and additional booster sessions to those in Year 9 who are at the threshold of reaching the nationally-expected levels. These sessions have been well attended. These initiatives have been thoroughly monitored and, although the results are still inconclusive, the school has developed some effective strategies to reinforce learning in this area. For example, students' planners contain special pages devoted to providing support for literacy skills, ensuring that literacy retains a high profile. Despite the cross-curricular introduction, the application of literacy skills in other subjects is patchy, ranging from very good in history to unsatisfactory in religious education. Although the use of literacy is just satisfactory, the standards of attainment seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9 were in line with those expected nationally. This indicates a clear improvement since the last inspection and some improvement since the last academic year.
6. Students make good use of their numeracy skills in a number of subjects. Led by the mathematics team, the school makes good provision for numeracy across the curriculum. Many mathematics lessons begin with practice in numeracy skills; this provides a good stimulus to learning, ensures that the students are quickly involved in the lesson, provides an opportunity for

competition in the speed of answering and develops basic skills well. On other occasions, numeracy practice takes place at the end of lessons. The introduction of games encourages students to think about number and the department has creative ideas for introducing and confirming basic number skills. The mathematics department is building on work completed during the numeracy hour in primary schools, and students are becoming more interested and more confident in handling number problems. Logical thinking is also introduced as students complete gaps in number patterns, find anagrams, discover patterns in triangular shapes, and complete grids of questions. Across all groups, attainment in numeracy is improving and students are confident in their use of data-handling skills.

### **Teaching is very good across the school**

7. The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in 98 per cent of all the lessons seen during the inspection and it was good or better in over 80 per cent of lessons. Teaching was very good or excellent in about one lesson in every three. Overall, the quality of teaching was very good across the whole school, with the highest proportion of good or better lessons being in Years 11, 12 and 13. There was outstanding teaching in art and design and technology and very good teaching in English, drama and music. The only two unsatisfactory lessons were in science and business studies.
8. Strengths of teaching include very good planning, with clear objectives for each lesson. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and know how to teach them, and they make particularly good use of question-and-answer techniques and discussions involving the whole class. Students learn very well through well-managed group activities and they acquire knowledge and learn basic skills very effectively. Teachers generally have very high expectations of students' efforts and of the standards they reach. In many lessons, teachers modify their approaches very skilfully to suit the differing needs of their students and give students very good support through the variety of methods used. They persist in their questioning to ascertain how well students understand the subjects and to help students clarify concepts in their own minds. In this way, students are also helped to recognise how well they are doing and most have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve.
9. Teachers use time and resources very effectively in all age groups and support staff are very well informed and managed so that they make very good contributions to students' learning. This enables students of all abilities to sustain their interest and concentration. As a result, they make good progress overall and generally very good progress in Years 10 and 11. Students with special educational needs make good progress throughout the school. Most have targets that are related to either reading and writing skills or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The emphasis on reading development at an early stage helps pupils to learn effectively in all their subjects. Teachers within the learning support faculty have very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects, giving confidence to their students. Their planning and preparation are very good, with detailed records and regular monitoring of the progress made by individual students.
10. A significant proportion of parents are concerned that homework is not always used effectively. Practice in this area is patchy and students are often not given enough work. Marking is another area where practice is inconsistent across the school. Work in some groups is generally well marked but, in others, teachers' comments are often too brief and clear targets for progress are not always set.

### **All students have very good access to appropriate educational opportunities**

11. The school is very successful in ensuring that all its students, regardless of their needs, abilities or backgrounds, have the best possible opportunities to obtain relevant educational experiences of high quality. Its very strong emphasis on 'educational inclusion' is demonstrated by several key policy documents, such as 'Our beliefs on Equality', the school statement on Equal Opportunities drawn up by the students and the brief but useful code of practice to support equality of opportunity. The school has a Sex Equality policy and a Race Equality policy and review groups meet regularly. Students are given many opportunities to contribute to these policies through the

school council and the form tutor system. The school uses its 'Beacon School' funding and status to support a wide range of activities focused on improving access to the curriculum for all, both at Thomas Tallis and in its partner schools.

12. Concern for the education and welfare of students begins before they enter the school. Staff visit most of the many primary schools that supply its students and talk to pupils in Year 6, their parents and their teachers. Information gathered in this way, together with other information sent by the primary schools, helps to place students into the most suitable groupings when they enter Year 7. There are good opportunities for students and parents to see the school working before they join and to meet the staff at open evenings. These occasions are well attended and much appreciated by parents. Students also have a 'taster' day at the school, when they meet teachers and other students and visit lessons. Further opportunities are offered through summer schools in arts, literacy and numeracy, designed to ease the transition between primary and secondary schools.
13. In their first weeks, students in Year 7 spend some of their time in small tutor groups, where their personal and social development is assessed with the help of the school's trained and experienced counsellors. These assessments, together with the earlier information, the results of academic assessments and the standard tests in Year 6, all go towards forming a detailed picture of individual students' personal, social and academic needs. This helps their tutors to begin planning the most appropriate courses for students to follow. Even at this early stage, opportunities are provided for students to participate in groups focused on behavioural targets they have identified for themselves, if it is thought that they would benefit from such additional group work.
14. Excellent formal and informal communications between pastoral and academic systems provide a very wide network of early contacts with individual students, and named staff are responsible for the numerous options that form part of the pastoral support programme. Throughout the school, the pastoral support programme is based on the work of form tutors and heads of year, who follow their cohort of students through from Year 7 to Year 11. Students normally remain in the same tutor groups throughout. Individual needs are carefully and continuously assessed and programmes are modified accordingly, where possible. For example, a co-ordinator is appointed in each year group to identify students who are potentially gifted or talented and to provide additional activities that will stretch the students further and each faculty has a named member of staff who is responsible for monitoring students with special educational needs. The progress of all students is reviewed at least once a term by form tutors and heads of year. Attainment and progress are monitored by gender and ethnicity and effective interventions made when necessary.
15. Students who need additional help are also identified and the school provides a very wide range of alternatives for them. These include a 'Basic Skills' option for students in Years 8 and 9, instead of a second modern foreign language, and homework and coursework clubs. Additional programmes include reading projects, such as 'reading buddies', where older students work with those in earlier years, the 'reading is fundamental' scheme and the 'breakfast bar reading club', both of which are designed to make reading more accessible. A visiting 'Book Bus' provides a range of fiction and non-fiction and presents the material in a way that encourages young people to take up reading for pleasure. Young, black African-Caribbean males from the local community act as powerful rôle-models by reading with students and discussing the books. A range of initiatives to promote numeracy includes target groups in Years 7 and 8, special sessions when students are withdrawn from their normal lessons, and 'Bananas Week'.
16. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum is further modified and extended by the addition of an option block for those pupils who might find ten GCSEs too demanding and 'achievement groups' for students who are underachieving. These groups are led by teacher volunteers and meet at the most mutually convenient times. Students receive advice, support and help with personal organisation, planning and study skills. An 'alternative accreditation' group identified at the end of Year 9 follows an alternative course in Years 10 and 11 and a growing variety of options offered to students includes an alternative accreditation route, vocational routes and an in-house, work-

related option. The 'Domework Project' is aimed at students in Year 11 and prepares them for the world of work by offering assertiveness training, training in interviews and making job applications.

17. Students with behavioural difficulties are offered a great deal of very effective support. If the normal interventions of pastoral and academic staff are not sufficiently helpful, students may join a group run by one of the school's counsellors, focusing on identified common issues and working on them over sometimes several terms. These groups have a good success rate. The 'Coca Cola Valued Youth Award' scheme selects disaffected students who are at risk of dropping out of school and places them as 'tutors' to pupils in a local primary school. The 'tutors' are trained and work for half a day a week in the primary school. They are expected to make up any schoolwork they miss as a result. Local primary school headteachers value this programme and say that it benefits their pupils, as well as the students from Thomas Tallis. Another scheme places students who have been excluded for a fixed term with a local youth worker who offers them a programme of personal and social education at a venue outside the school's campus.
18. The school has a learning support unit that works with students who are thought to be at risk of exclusion or who are becoming increasingly disaffected. Some students attend the unit full-time while others attend on a part-time basis. All students follow carefully selected programmes of work that are designed to re-integrate them into the main school as soon as possible. Typically, these programmes include a range of activities provided by external organisations, such as adventurous outdoor activities and horse-riding. Students' progress is monitored and reviewed each fortnight by staff in the unit and heads of year and fresh targets are set, if required. The unit has a good success rate. Other programmes available for disaffected students include a community mentoring project, academic and behavioural mentoring and individual counselling. The school's counselling service provides individual and group counselling for students, staff and parents. It trains counsellors on placement from professional training courses and trains teachers in some of the approaches adopted with groups of young people. At any given time, its thirteen volunteer counsellors and two paid professional staff may be working with about 50 individual students, as well as groups, and significant numbers of staff and parents. It is a very well-run, successful and dynamic part of the school's additional provision.
19. The learning support faculty makes very good provision for students with special educational needs. What makes learning support particularly successful across the school is the fact that specialist staff assume personal responsibility for helping these students to achieve their potential, whatever their starting point or learning difficulties. The special educational needs co-ordinator ensures that students' individual educational plans provide relevant and focused targets and that these are shared properly with subject teachers. The annual reviews of statements of special educational needs are carried out effectively and efficiently. Statutory requirements for students' assessment are met fully. The English as an additional language department successfully supports the very few students who are at the early stages of learning English, withdrawing them from lessons for additional tuition.
20. In addition, the school supports two specialist units: one is for students with hearing impairment and the other is for those who have speech and language delay. The school's strong commitment to total inclusion is very evident in the outstanding way these students are assimilated into its everyday life and work. The quality and range of provision for students with hearing impairment are very good and they achieve well overall. The very good support offered and the school's emphasis on providing stimulating activities that are suitably graded for age and maturity are very effective. The provision for these students and for those with speech and language delay ensures that all of them attend the majority of mainstream classes and they make good progress in the use of language. They are given the opportunity, both in mixed classes and when they are taught separately, to participate fully and to make choices. Consequently, they show a high degree of involvement in their learning, work increasingly well together and share in the celebrations when they do well.
21. As a result of all this provision, almost all students have positive and mature attitudes towards their work. Their attitudes and behaviour are closely related to the quality of teaching and the expectations of teachers. Students are well motivated and keen to succeed. They feel confident

about asking their teachers for clarification when it is needed and this helps them to learn well and to make good progress. Students' positive attitudes to their work and towards each other help to create a stable atmosphere within which the majority of them make good progress.

### **The school benefits from very good leadership and management**

22. The leadership of the school has been very strong and remains so. The senior managers have set out a very clear educational direction that underpins all its activities. For example, the drive to raise standards of attainment has focused on improving teaching through professional development, the creation and use of advanced skills teachers and the re-accreditation by Investors in People. The ever-increasing range of initiatives to create greater access to learning for all students has created an organisation that is outstanding for the open, welcoming and secure environment it provides, the quality of relationships at all levels, the equality of opportunity offered and the very high quality of support for students' personal and social development, as well as for their academic success. The school's management has worked hard and successfully to acquire additional funding to support this work from its status as a Beacon School and an Arts College, from the Excellence in Cities initiatives and the local Education Action Zone, amongst many other sources. They have been extremely successful in realising the aims and values that are set out clearly in the development plan and in the prospectus. The newly-appointed headteacher has taken up where his predecessor and the acting headteacher left off and there is every sign that, with the strong support of senior staff and governors, he will consolidate the school's successes and continue to move it forward.
23. The school has an open management structure with widespread delegation of responsibilities. The senior executive group is composed of the headteacher, the two deputies and, when the occasion demands, the bursar. Each member of this group has significant school-wide responsibilities for management and development. The group meets twice a week and minutes are posted on the staff notice board. The senior management team comprises these four individuals and the six assistant headteachers, who are mostly heads of faculty or heads of year. All of these staff carry substantial teaching responsibilities that exceed those normally expected of senior post-holders in a large secondary school. Despite this, the system works effectively because of the very good systems of formal and informal communication that have been established and because of the energy and dedication of the people concerned. The senior staff conference is another regular grouping that extends the opportunities for reviewing and shaping the school's progress to a wider forum. This helps to create and sustain the participative management that ensures that all those involved 'own' the school's policies. Staff are proud of their school and strongly committed to its success. Heads of faculty and heads of year carry out their duties conscientiously and well.
24. The school development plan is a long and very detailed document but all the targets it identifies stem from four simple, clear statements of intent founded on strong educational beliefs. Named persons have responsibility for carrying forward the various objectives and realistic deadlines and costings are set out. Progress towards the targets is frequently reviewed by senior management and by the governors and targets are revised as necessary. The governing body meets twice a term. Governors, are very well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses through regular visits and telephone calls and through the informative reports produced by the headteacher and regular presentations by senior staff. They act in a supportive but challenging way, carrying out their responsibilities well through four main committees that meet at least five times a year. Financial management and planning are of a very high standard and securely based on educational goals. The numerous special funds that the school has attracted are scrupulously administered and used very effectively.
25. Arrangements for monitoring teaching are good and have made a significant contribution to the improvement in teaching standards since the last inspection. The school has enough well-qualified staff. They are deployed satisfactorily to meet the needs of the National Curriculum and support the learning of students. The match of staffing levels, qualifications and experience to the subjects taught is satisfactory across the school. The staffing had been very stable until 18 months ago but there has recently been a significant turnover of teachers that has adversely

affected teaching and learning in some subjects, particularly science. Staffing arrangements for supporting students with special educational needs are good overall. Timetabling arrangements are suitably flexible so that education support staff are able to respond, as far as possible, to needs as they arise. Staff development is seen as a high priority. In-service training is well managed and is linked closely to performance management. There are clear, well-documented and highly effective induction programmes for the nine newly-qualified teachers. They are offered very good support by their mentors, by their colleagues within their departments and by the local authority.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **Levels of attendance**

26. Overall, unsatisfactory levels of attendance have persisted in the school since before the last inspection. Improving this state of affairs has been the subject of a continuing crusade over several years but attendance has remained below the expected level. In 2001, attendance was well below the national average, at 89 per cent, and unauthorised absences have remained above the national average, at just under two per cent, for the last three years. Although most students attend regularly and punctually, the main difficulties are caused by a comparatively small group of students who are frequent non-attenders. There is some evidence that daily telephone calls to a small number of targeted students and late detentions have led to an improvement in punctuality and the provisional figure for the current year is certainly higher than in previous years. Attendance in the sixth form is below the national average. The school, with the support of parents, needs to continue its efforts to improve attendance.

### **The quality of the accommodation**

27. The school was built in 1971 for 850 students but it now has to accommodate over 600 more. As a consequence, there is overcrowding in most teaching areas, with some small classes or groups having to meet in corridors. The buildings have structural faults, such as flat roofs that let in rain and generally narrow corridors. Maintenance of the buildings has been problematic and expensive. Specialist accommodation in some areas, such as the vocational art and design rooms, is poor. The layout of the buildings and the large campus make supervision difficult out of lesson times and there is no satisfactory provision for wheelchair users indoors or out.
28. The teaching and non-teaching staff, particularly the site manager and his staff, work very hard to overcome the worst effects of these problems so that students are generally able to learn very well and relationships are very good. Nevertheless, the accommodation is unsatisfactory overall and it limits educational opportunities and the number of different courses that can be provided, particularly in the sixth form. It also makes it very difficult to hold a daily act of collective worship. The school needs to continue working with the local authority and other stake-holders to find resources for a major refurbishment or a rebuild.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

In order to improve the very good quality of education already offered and raise standards of attainment still further, the school's senior management, governors and staff need to:

### ***For the school as a whole, including features specific to the main school***

Continue to seek ways of:

- Raising levels of attendance; (para 26)
- Improving the quality of the accommodation; (paras 27 and 28)

### ***Sixth form***

- Develop a more rational and effective organisational framework for the GNVQ art and design courses and upgrade the accommodation and equipment available for them. (paras 27, 62, 110, 111)
- Develop and implement procedures for predicting students' grades more precisely and calculating their actual attainment against their potential. (paras 33 and 51)
- Improve the range and quality of books and resources in the sixth form library. (paras 64 and 132)
- Ensure that the sixth form curriculum includes the required elements of religious education. (para 42)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 to 11	46
	Sixth form	73
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		68

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	2	14	17	12	1	0	0
Percentage	4	31	37	26	2	0	0

#### Sixth form

Number	5	22	39	6	1	0	0
Percentage	7	30	53	9	1	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 to 11 as each lesson represents more than two percentage points.

### Information about the school's pupils

#### Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1,137	332
Number of full-time pupils or students known to be eligible for free school meals	363	41

#### Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	85	5
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	503	47

#### English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	197

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	21
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	37

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

%
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#### Unauthorised absence

%
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School data	9.1
National comparative data	8.1

School data	2.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	108	102	210

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	57	61	65
	Girls	56	46	49
	Total	113	107	114
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	54 (60)	51 (48)	54 (36)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	20 (18)	30 (18)	22 (10)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	58	54	57
	Girls	51	44	46
	Total	109	98	103
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	52 (55)	47 (66)	49 (51)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	21 (27)	22 (15)	23 (22)
	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	112	96	208

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	44	102	104
	Girls	56	95	96
	Total	100	197	200
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	48 (44)	95 (95)	97 (98)
	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	44.1
	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	N/A
	National		N/A

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	31	31	62

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	16.0	14.0	15.0	4.0	5.6	5.3
National	16.9	17.7	17.4			

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	025	84
	National		N/A

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	918	99	1
White – Irish	4	0	0
White – any other White background	36	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	12	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	88	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	33	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	9	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	34	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	37	5	0
Black or Black British – African	78	9	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	40	6	0
Chinese	39	0	0
Any other ethnic group	51	3	0
No ethnic group recorded	100	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)	92.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.0

Financial year	2001/2002
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#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	35
Total aggregate hours worked per week	853.87

	£
Total income	5,639,539
Total expenditure	5,735,354
Expenditure per pupil	4,355

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	68.9
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**Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	26.1
Key Stage 4	22.9

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

Balance brought forward from previous year	459,591
Balance carried forward to next year	363,776

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

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	37.5
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	47.4
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1.4
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	6.0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	2.0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,137
Number of questionnaires returned	276

**24 per cent return**

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	47	42	7	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	36	43	6	1	11
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	48	8	1	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	43	14	3	13
The teaching is good.	34	48	5	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	31	36	13	4	11
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	38	4	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	30	2	0	4
The school works closely with parents.	30	42	13	4	8
The school is well led and managed.	36	45	3	4	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	33	45	5	0	12
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	29	37	11	2	17

## **PART D: THE SIXTH FORM**

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

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

29. On entry to the sixth form, standards of attainment are close to those expected nationally, although the school goes to great pains to be flexible in order to include as many students as possible and give them full opportunities to succeed. Students make good progress and they achieve well overall.
30. Overall, in 2001, the average A and AS-level point score and the average point score for combined A and AS-level and advanced vocational courses were both close to the respective national averages for maintained schools and for all Post 16 providers. The school's results at A and AS-levels were also the best in the borough-maintained schools last year. In 1999 and 2000, the average point scores for boys and girls and overall were above the national averages. However, the overall point scores and percentages at grades A\* to G have declined slightly over the last three years and the school's own challenging targets have not been reached. Last year, there were 36 entries for GCSE or GNVQ examinations. Twenty of these were in mathematics and 19 of these students obtained a grade G or better. Fifteen of the other 16 entries achieved a grade G or better. These results contained much higher proportions of five or more A\* to C and A\* to G grades than were seen in sixth forms nationally.
31. Over the past few years, results in A-level art have been outstanding and among the very best in the country and they have been very high in the vocational business studies examinations. Attainment in 2001 was above the national average in music and, for the past two years, examination results for the sociology A-level and AS courses have been significantly above the national average. Results were close to the national averages for English, mathematics, chemistry, history and drama, although they have been higher in previous years in English and drama. In computing, results were below the national average, although the most recent results show a good improvement. All students passed the examination and the percentage achieving the higher grades doubled compared with the previous year. Attainment in the vocational art and design examinations was below the national average and, in French, results were well below the national average, although the unconfirmed results for 2002 show some improvement. In biology, A-level results were well below the national average in 2001 and students did less well than in any other A-level subjects but there is an improvement this year.
32. The inspection took place very near to the beginning of the school year, when many students in Year 12 were still finding their feet in the sixth form and those in Year 13 were still adapting to the different levels of expectation demanded by their courses. Nevertheless, students' standards of work are generally above those expected for the stage reached in their courses, particularly in Year 13. Exceptional standards are being reached in art and very high standards are achieved in business studies and sociology. Work in chemistry, music, drama, history and English is all above the expected levels, while standards in mathematics, biology, design and technology, information and communication technology, intermediate art and design and French are all in line with those expected. The only areas where standards are unsatisfactory are in the Foundation and the Advanced vocational art and design courses. Students achieve very well in art, English and sociology and their achievements are good in every other course except French, where they are satisfactory, and the Advanced art and design course, where they are unsatisfactory. The basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are generally being well learned and practised, but more opportunities are needed on the vocational art and design courses. Technical language presents some difficulties in mathematics and biology and theoretical concepts are not always readily grasped in music and drama.
33. Students' overall good progress indicates that good value is being added in the sixth form, although the school has no system for evaluating this accurately. The school's figures indicate

that about three out of every four 15-year-olds stay on to enter the sixth form and a similar proportion remain to enter Year 13. This is a good retention rate. Although there is some dropping out in the first term, this is not significant and is frequently caused by newly-joined students deciding to return to their former schools. Over 50 per cent of 18-year-olds go directly on to higher education and more do so after a gap year. The proportion going on to further education has risen.

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

34. Students in the sixth form are happy. They enjoy very good relationships with teachers and with each other. These help them to proceed smoothly in lessons and cope well with their courses. Students' attitudes to work in lessons are generally very good. For instance, in a Year 12 mathematics lesson, students' high level of interest and sustained concentration helped them to learn well about medians for values. A small number of students leave before completing their courses but this occurs mainly in the early stages of the vocational courses and mostly for personal reasons. Students are well-organised and complete work within the time limits given. Attendance is satisfactory and unauthorised absence is low. Students behave very well and exclusions are not a feature of the sixth form.
35. Students express themselves well when discussing their work and their plans for the future and they are keen to talk about their interests. During their time in the sixth form, all groups of students mature and grow in confidence in response to the supportive atmosphere in the school. All students have regular opportunities for meeting their tutors to review their progress and set targets for future work. They undertake these reviews seriously. The personal and social education and formal and informal contacts with tutors help students to make informed choices about personal issues. Counsellors and representatives from external welfare organisations also support students' welfare. Students use these opportunities very well.
36. The students are encouraged to develop good organisational skills and the ability to take responsibility for their own learning in most subjects, such as art, mathematics and history. The work of the sixth form committee and the personal and social education programme provide opportunities for the development of the students' social and decision-making skills. Students work very well with others. They can work independently and use research materials, including the Internet. Their key skills are generally well developed.

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

37. Teaching in the sixth form is very good. All but one of the 73 lessons seen was satisfactory or better; 90 per cent of lessons were good or better and 37 per cent were very good or better. The teaching in five lessons was deemed to be excellent. These were in art, design and technology and drama. The highest proportion of very good or excellent lessons was in art, English, drama and music. There was a slightly higher proportion of very good or excellent lessons in Year 13 than in Year 12.
38. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. They use these attributes very well to provide stimulating and challenging questioning as well as lucid explanations. They are particularly skilful in bringing their own experience and skills to bear, using them to provide vivid illustrations of concepts or patterns. This is seen not only in the more practical aspects of art, music and drama, but also in the sciences, mathematics and design and technology. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and bring excitement and vitality to the classroom. The very good relationships that characterise almost all groups enable teachers to present increasingly challenging ideas with intellectual rigour but also with a degree of wit and humour that maintains the involvement of the students. Teachers know their students very well and work hard and successfully to adapt their approaches to their varying needs. Consequently, students concentrate very well through often long sessions. Students feel confident in providing responses and hypotheses because they know that their contributions are valued and they

appreciate the fact that they are generally treated as adults who are expected to manage their own learning.

39. In the most successful subjects, teachers have very high expectations and very good understanding of how to teach their subjects at higher levels. Techniques of questioning and discussion are used very well to promote and assess students' understanding. Students appreciate their teachers' willingness to help them and they learn well from each other when working in small groups. The basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology are generally well taught, although opportunities to develop them are sometimes missed on the vocational art and design courses. In some subjects, such as mathematics or biology, students do not always pick up technical language easily. Lessons are well-planned, organised and managed, learning objectives are clear and a wide range of challenging activities is provided. Teachers of computing make good use of software to present ideas and materials but the use of information and communication technology is variable in other subjects. Very good use is made of support staff so that students with special educational needs make good progress. Teachers' planning is very thorough and clear. Time and resources are used well and lessons are generally conducted at a good, lively pace.
40. Students' work is marked regularly with very supportive and developmental comments. In many subjects, such as mathematics, history and computing, assessment is thorough and teachers carefully monitor the performance of individual students. Examination results are analysed in detail and used to inform planning. Homework is regularly set, assignments are thoroughly marked and students are supplied with detailed feedback on how to improve their grades.

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

41. Overall, curricular provision is good for this expanding sixth form. It offers AS and A-level courses and an increasing range of GNVQ courses, some of which begin in Years 10 and 11. These offer very good opportunities to all students, regardless of their abilities or special needs. All of the GCSE courses are available in the sixth form as AS and A-level studies, with departments offering additional courses such as film studies, the history of art, photography, philosophy, psychology, sociology, business and economics and product design. Students can also seek to improve their GCSE grades. The GNVQ courses offered include advanced business and art and design and intermediate and foundation studies in business, health and social care and art and design. There is very good access to courses and students have very good opportunities to enter higher education, further training or employment. The number of students entering the sixth form from Year 11 at Thomas Tallis exceeds the national average, as does the increasing number of students seeking admission from other schools and colleges. The number of students completing their courses is again above the national figure. Provision for students with special educational needs is very good, although the required accessibility plan has not yet been drawn up.
42. Curriculum planning is good. The time given to each subject is adequate to allow courses to be successfully completed and offers the possibility of flexible arrangements for students to mix and match their courses or to take time out. Students are happy with the range of courses and qualifications on offer and with the planning arrangements. The key skills of communication, information and communication technology and the application of number are developed through independent studies, as well as being taught through most individual subjects. Tutors support students in keeping their own record of achievements. Personal and social education is taught once a fortnight through tutorial periods. The course covers key skills, interview techniques and careers, as well as citizenship, sex and relationships, drugs education and healthy living. The school does not meet the statutory requirement to provide religious education and a daily act of collective worship.
43. Students have good opportunities to take part in the wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities that are offered. They take part in sports activities, support younger students in Years 7 to 11, work in local primary schools and arrange social events. They organise and run fund-raising

activities, visit theatres and galleries, compile their own newspaper and contribute to the school website. The curriculum is further enriched through students' own research and through attendance at student conferences. Students in drama and theatre studies combine to perform extracts from plays and devised pieces of their work. They take part in joint workshops with theatre companies and attend local and national theatre productions. *'Business Enterprise'* projects include a *'Billionaire Business Club'*, *'Eclipse Enterprise'* - the school's branch of a high street bank – as well as staging fashion and talent shows and organising a Saint Valentine's Day disco. Students have good opportunities for foreign travel, including regular attendance at an annual business conference in Paris, trips to see art treasures in Florence, Paris and Vienna and language-based residential and non-residential trips. All of these activities make significant contributions to students' personal and social development.

44. Students are well supported by the guidance for higher education and careers. Experienced members of staff in conjunction with the careers service provide expert guidance for all students, both collectively and as individuals. References are detailed and of a high quality. There is a register of higher-attaining students and a tutor is specially assigned to support and guide those seeking entry into Oxford or Cambridge universities. Whilst all students are very happy with the quality of careers guidance, many still claim that access to key members of staff is difficult. Links with industry and commerce are limited and the number of vocational courses is limited by the unsatisfactory accommodation.

## **Personal development**

45. Overall, provision for students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is good.
46. In a number of subjects, students are encouraged to explore different value systems and the effects they have on individuals and on society. They learn to respect difference and to respect the integrity of other individuals, regardless of their gender, ethnicity or sexuality or of their religious or cultural backgrounds. Teachers make connections between elements of learning and encourage students to relate to a wider frame of reference, asking why and where, as well as what. In English, history, French and art, students reflect on poetry and write and work creatively, and thought-provoking posters and students' work are displayed in a number of areas of the school to stimulate reflective responses.
47. The school has a clear moral code as a basis for behaviour. Equality of opportunity for all students is very effectively promoted and there is a strong sense of a shared community, with common inclusive values. Tutors help students to learn appropriate ways of resolving tensions or potential conflict. Students consider a number of moral issues through their literary studies. For example, one group of drama students has explored social prejudice and moral hypocrisy through working on *'An Inspector Calls'* and another has analysed the inequality portrayed in *'Animal Farm'*. Students and parents feel very strongly that students are helped to become individual learners and to take increasing responsibility for their own actions.
48. There are very good relationships at all levels in the sixth form. Students respect each other's ideas and opinions and they collaborate well. They are involved in democratic processes through the school council and the sixth form committee. The committee is a responsible and respected body with a formal agenda. It is influential in giving direction to the development of the sixth form and has representatives at meetings where decisions are made that affect the whole school. The enrichment programme exposes students to a wealth of different experiences that extend and develop their social awareness.
49. The school is rich in cultural diversity. In history, authentic accounts of the attitudes, values and traditions of diverse cultures are presented, dealing thoroughly with racism and racial equality. Cultural issues are addressed in literature, art and in creative work across the curriculum. Use is also made of opportunities beyond the school to promote cultural awareness, an excellent

example being the very recent trip to Auschwitz. There was a pre-visit seminar held at the Central Synagogue in London and a post-visit seminar will be held at the Imperial War Museum.

50. Assemblies and tutorials are well planned to promote students' personal development. In assemblies during the inspection week, very good use was made of information and communication technology to give a very moving 'PowerPoint' presentation when students were asked to reflect upon newspaper records of one selected day in history. There were many contrasts for them to consider that raised moral, social and cultural issues. Not all faculties plan to build elements of personal development into their lessons, nor do they monitor the effectiveness of such provision, when it is made. As a result, some opportunities to promote students' development are missed.

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

### **Assessment**

51. Arrangements for the assessment of students in the sixth form are satisfactory but they have one weakness. The systems build on those used in the main school, where a great deal of information is gathered about new entrants in Year 7 and used to place them in appropriate groups. Progress is carefully monitored by teachers and termly reports are produced, giving grades in each subject for effort, behaviour, homework and attainment. As students move through the school, these profiles grow in detail and in the aspects of performance they assess, building in the student's capacity to meet deadlines and their personal organisation, as well as their minimum expected grades, their projected grades and their actual scores in cognitive ability tests, in the standard tests in Year 9 and in the GCSE examinations. At the end of Year 11, each student has a record that can demonstrate how well he or she has actually done compared with the school's assessment of how well he or she should have done. This is a valuable tool for measuring the effectiveness of the school's provision.
52. These records form the basis for the advice and guidance offered to all students wishing to enter the sixth form and a similar approach is adopted for applicants from other schools, who are all carefully interviewed. Entrance requirements to the various courses are clear and tutorial staff make every effort to accommodate the needs and wishes of every student so that they are fully stretched but also have the best possible opportunity to succeed.
53. The principles underpinning the assessment systems in the main school are followed in the sixth form, with termly reviews based on close monitoring of individual performances in each subject through course work and the January modules. These reviews are recorded and the records are kept by the student's tutor and centrally by the head of the sixth form. They are discussed at termly meetings when students and their tutors assess their progress and set targets. If there is cause for concern, tutors employ a number of support systems, including 'concern forms', additional study support or the use of mentors from the tutorial team. Whenever possible, higher-attaining students are presented with further challenges through the 'Excellence Challenge' scheme or through master classes.
54. These arrangements work well but are limited in scope. Predictions of likely grades are based on the individual tutors' own professional judgement and there is no centralised system providing a consistent approach to this area of assessment. The school does not have the information that would allow it to make the calculations for sixth form students that it makes through the rest of the school. It does not have the means to measure the actual grades achieved against the minimum expected grades and the projected grades so as to calculate the effectiveness of the sixth form.

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

55. Students are well supported throughout their time at the school. Students and their parents are appropriately informed about the content of courses and the implications of different choices through meetings, publicity materials and interviews. Admission arrangements are clear and students consider that enrolment and induction are efficient and informative and help them to settle in the sixth form quickly. Consequently, students generally embark on courses that are appropriate for their levels of prior attainment and only a small proportion do not complete their courses. Sixth form students are treated like adults. They respect this, form very good relationships and behave well. Tutors make every effort to provide guidance on personal matters but students are also referred to external agencies where appropriate. The school has satisfactory procedures for promoting good attendance and punctuality in the sixth form. Students value the help and support that they receive from their tutors and other teachers. Students' welfare and development are supported through the curriculum. Aspects of health and safety are covered in their personal, social and health education lessons. This is reinforced in assemblies and by visiting specialists. Students' personal development is also helped by work experience. Visits, the work of the sixth form committee and the social activities organised by the students themselves play a significant part in students' personal development. The school has appropriate careers materials and programmes for students but access to them is only satisfactory.

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

56. Parents are supportive towards the school and believe that their children enjoy attending. Those who returned the questionnaires and attended the parents' meetings were happy with the school and what it achieves. Parents at the meeting were happy with the range of the courses offered, feeling that it matched students' needs, and with the standards achieved. Similarly, the students have favourable views about the work of the school.
57. Students are happy and like being in the sixth form. They feel that the range of courses is good, that teachers are accessible and helpful and that they encourage independent study and research. They feel that they are well taught and teachers help them well if they have work difficulties. In the responses to the students' questionnaire, some students expressed concerns about the range of extra-curricular activities, the enrichment courses, and the advice and support they received. In the course of discussions with students, however, a different picture emerges. They talk very favourably about the care, support and guidance given by staff, particularly the careers advisers.

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

### **Leadership and management**

58. The leadership and management of the school as a whole are very good. The sixth form is well led by a senior teacher who is a member of the school's senior management team. She has a clear idea of how the provision should develop and is strongly committed to ensuring that all students have the best possible opportunities to make good progress and to succeed. In this, as in all other ways, the provision in the sixth form fully reflects the aims and values of the school as a whole, ensuring equality of opportunity and access for as many students as possible.
59. The head of the sixth form provides good management for the 16 tutors who work with groups in Years 12 and 13 and has devised and run courses of professional development for them. She successfully ensures that the pastoral systems work very well, that students' personal, social and academic development is closely monitored and that appropriate action is taken, when necessary. Issues relating to attitudes, behaviour and attendance are all well managed by the head of the sixth form and the tutorial staff. Although the academic teaching staff are managed by their faculties, the head of the sixth form is fully aware of the quality and range of their work and liaises very closely with the heads of faculty to ensure that high standards are maintained in the classroom.

60. Developmental planning for the curriculum is undertaken in partnership with the school's senior management and the heads of faculty. In recent years, this has successfully reflected the school's intention to become an inclusive institution, broadening its academic base with more vocational courses and courses that offer alternative accreditation. Although the school would like to provide a wider range of GNVQ courses, its scope is limited by the unsatisfactory accommodation. The school's management is embarking on a radical analysis and review of its Post-16 curriculum. Forward planning is now bound up with the local authority's restructuring of all Post-16 provision in the borough and the school is sensibly considering possibilities of liaising with other providers to widen the range of what can be offered.
61. The borough-wide restructuring and a slightly different pricing system have also affected the accuracy with which costs can be calculated in this current year. Nevertheless, the head of the sixth form, together with the deputy head responsible and the bursar, have made detailed estimates that show clearly that the sixth form is economically viable this year. In previous years, financial management has been of a very high standard and planning has been driven by the school's educational aims for the sixth form.

## **Resources**

62. Staffing in the sixth form is good. There are enough suitably qualified staff to teach the subjects offered and to provide the academic, personal and pastoral support needed. Accommodation is unsatisfactory overall, limiting the quality and range of what can be offered. Accommodation for the vocational art courses is poor.
63. The supply and quality of learning resources, including specialist equipment, are satisfactory. Resources are at least adequate in all of the AS and A2 subjects inspected. In English, history and business studies, teachers produce some very good resources that enable students to make good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the subjects. In English, particularly, resources are skilfully devised to give great encouragement to reading widely.
64. Resources are unsatisfactory for GNVQ studies. The ratio of pupils to computers in the whole school is below the national average. Nevertheless, students report that open-access arrangements to computers are mainly satisfactory. The arrangements enable them to carry out independent learning and to present their coursework well. They also assist greatly with research into career opportunities and searching for information about colleges and universities. Computers and software need bringing up to date in mathematics and design and technology, where specialist software is needed to assist the design process. The range and number of books in the sixth form library are insufficient for a large sixth form and this, along with the small number of computers in this area, means that students have to work elsewhere to further their studies.

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

In the inspection, fifteen 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 (results for Year 13 students)***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	4	75	n/a	0	n/a	1.0	n/a
Physics	2	100	n/a	0	n/a	1.5	n/a
Economics and business	5	100	n/a	0	n/a	2.6	n/a
Information and communication technology	1	0	n/a	0	n/a	0.0	n/a
Music	2	100	n/a	0	n/a	1.5	n/a
English	2	100	n/a	0	n/a	2.0	n/a
General studies	3	66	n/a	0	n/a	1.3	n/a

### ***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	6	100	87.2	16.7	41.9	5.0	5.7
Chemistry	6	100	90.3	16.7	42.8	5.7	5.9
Biology	5	80.0	88.2	0	34.1	2.8	5.3
Physics	6	100	88.1	50.0	40.5	6.7	5.7
Design and technology	7	85.7	91.0	0	32.7	4.0	5.5
Economics and business	4	100	88.8	0	38.3	5.5	5.6
Art and design	16	100	96.6	93.7	45.7	9.1	6.5
Drama and theatre studies	17	100	99.2	58.8	38.1	8.0	6.6
Geography	9	100	92.5	44.4	37.7	7.1	5.8
History	13	92.9	88.7	21.4	35.6	5.1	5.5
Sociology	9	100	86.8	55.6	35.8	7.3	5.4
English	39	100	95.5	28.2	36.8	5.8	5.9
French	7	57.1	89.3	0	38.5	2.0	5.6
German	1	100	91.6	100	40.7	8.0	5.9
Italian	2	50.0	96.3	0	60.3	1.0	7.2

**GCE AS level courses (results for Year 12 students)**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	19	57.9	70.6	21.1	29.9	1.6	2.2
Chemistry	7	100	86.9	71.5	40.1	3.9	2.8
Biology	7	100	84.2	28.6	33.8	2.6	2.6
Physics	9	66.6	85.6	22.2	39.1	1.8	2.8
Product Design	12	100	86.1	25.0	31.7	2.7	2.5
Economics and business	11	63.6	86.7	18.2	41.7	1.6	2.9
Drama and theatre studies	24	100	94.6	37.5	40.0	3.3	3.0
Geography	20	80	90.8	30.0	37.9	2.2	2.9
History	23	100	93.5	39.1	41.4	3.2	3.0
Sociology	13	100	86.3	69.3	34.3	3.9	2.7
English	56	100	95.3	53.6	38.6	3.5	3.0
French	3	100	88.9	66.6	40.4	3.3	2.9
History of Art	12	91.7		25.0		2.5	
Music	5	100	95.0	20.0	43.0	2.6	3.1
Computing	20	85	80.7	5.0	21.8	1.7	2.2
General Studies	16	93.7	82.1	6.3	27.4	1.9	2.3

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

65. In **mathematics**, the inspection covered the A-level and AS-level courses offered by the school. Students study modules in pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. There is good provision for those pupils who are re-sitting GCSE mathematics. The teaching of the application of number leading to the key skills qualification is at an early stage of development. It was not possible to see any lessons in either key skills or GCSE owing to timetable arrangements.
66. In **science**, the focus was on **biology** and **chemistry**, but physics was also sampled. In **physics**, examination results at A-level were above average in 2001 and they are likely to be at the same level in 2002. AS-level results were below average in 2001 but showed improvement in 2002. Two lessons were observed. Teaching and learning were good in one and satisfactory in the other. In the good lesson, the teacher's very good knowledge of the subject was well used to give clear explanations. Students gained good understanding of Planck's constant and applied it confidently in calculating unknown quantities from a variety of data.

### Mathematics

Provision for mathematics is **good**.

#### Strengths

- A-level mathematics results in recent years have been consistently in line with, or above, national averages.
- There is a good match of teachers to the needs of the mathematics curriculum.
- Teaching and learning are good. The relationships between teachers and students are good. Students have confidence in their teachers.
- The subject is well led. Very good teamwork ensures effective monitoring of students' work and progress that enhances their achievements.

#### Areas for improvement

- Raise standards in AS to ensure the consistency of good achievement.
- The use of information and communication technology to enhance learning.
- Provide subject specific measurable targets to improve attainment and determine value added achievement.
- More opportunities to discuss and debate mathematical ideas.

67. The GCE A-level examination results in 2001 were in line with those of all other schools nationally. The six students who took the examination gained a pass grade but the proportion gaining the higher grades was below average when compared with other schools. In relation to their GCSE results, they performed as well as expected. The provisional A-level results for 2002 indicate an improvement, with an improved number of students achieving higher grades. Over the last four years, A-level results have fluctuated and were best in 2000, when they were above the national average. There was a wide spread in the results of the students entered for the new AS-level examination, with overall standards being below national expectations.
68. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of samples of students' work confirm that standards are close to the expected levels. Students' achievement is good in relation to their GCSE results owing to thorough teaching, regular assessments and their positive approach to the subject. Year 13 students of all abilities and background are achieving well at this stage in their course. In the lessons seen, students were consolidating their learning of the basic principles of algebra and trigonometry and were able to apply algebraic skills effectively to solve complex problems involving trigonometrical functions. Teaching demands a brisk pace of work and much material is covered in lessons, with students embarking on further work on problem-solving. They display a range of secure knowledge throughout the mathematics syllabus and can relate and apply the work of one

area of the syllabus to another. They can recall and use knowledge of standard mathematical models to represent situations in the real world. Students' statistical skills are well developed and they can analyse complex data, drawing relevant conclusions. Students' understanding of mean, variance, probability and cumulative distributions is good and they are able to solve complex problems involving the exponential functions. Most students recall knowledge very well. Written work is well presented on the whole and matches the confidence that students display in the classroom.

69. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course but, nevertheless, higher-attaining students are achieving well. They have developed considerable confidence in using graphical calculators to solve problems involving quadratic functions. They are successful in moving from GCSE work into new areas of mathematics. Written work is well advanced and students are making good progress in developing their skills of independent research. Lower-attaining students need support in applying previously learned algebraic concepts to solve problems and consequently make slower progress and lack confidence.
70. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. A high level of expertise is used to provide stimulating and direct teaching, often through skilful questioning as well as explanation. There is strong mutual respect between teachers and students and relationships are excellent. The result is that teachers create a powerful learning ethos based on intellectual rigour and high expectations of learning outcomes. Students are challenged appropriately with well-focused activities. For example, Year 13 students, working in pairs, solved given problems on trigonometrical equations and shared their methods with peers. The teacher's relaxed approach gave them confidence to participate and very good learning followed as a result. Individual students feel well supported, particularly with their portfolio work, and their progress is well monitored. The initiative to improve literacy skills is beginning to have positive impact on sixth form mathematics work. Teachers stress the meanings of key words but there is a need for greater involvement of students in discussion of mathematical concepts and ideas. Assessment of students' work is undertaken through revision assignments at the end of each topic. These provide good preparation for external module tests. However, measurable, subject-specific targets are not set to determine value-added achievement.
71. Students work hard. They have very good attitudes towards their work. They are keen to learn and to succeed. Students appreciate the quality of support, the good structure of A-level courses and the high expectation that they will work hard. As a consequence of assessment procedures which place a great deal of emphasis on students' individual needs and progress, each student is aware of his or her own strengths and weaknesses and of how to improve the level of performance.
72. Overall, improvement in mathematics in the sixth form since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The new AS and A-level courses have been introduced with satisfactory outcomes. The good achievement and good teaching can be attributed to the fact that the department is very well led and managed by a committed and hardworking head of department, assisted by a teacher with responsibility for A-level mathematics. The new head of department's enthusiasm for mathematics is evident, as is his commitment to raising standards. Teachers are experienced and well qualified and the A-level teaching is shared across the faculty to maximise the use of available expertise. Teaching plans for A-level courses are kept under review. Good quality textbooks supplement the teaching but little use is made of information and communication technology to add interest or to broaden the range of teaching strategies.

## Biology

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

### Strengths

- A-level results are improving.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and use it effectively to engage students' interest.
- Students concentrate well and this results in good learning.
- Students are willing to participate fully in lessons because they feel secure that their contributions will be valued.

### Areas for improvement

- Assessment is not used effectively enough to identify individual students needing extra support, or to provide encouragement to raise their expectations to a higher target grade.
- Not enough support is provided for students experiencing difficulty with the technical language of biology.

73. A-level results were well below the national average in 2001 and no students gained the higher grades. Standards were lower in biology than in other subjects in the school. Although the performances of female and male students vary from year to year, there is no consistent pattern of difference. In 2002, the results were much higher than in the previous year. AS-level results for Year 12 students in 2001 were above the national average and similar levels were reached in 2002. Very few students did not complete their courses.
74. Standards in lessons and written work are in line with the nationally-expected levels, reflecting the improvements in the most recent A-level results. Students achieve well in their lessons and often very well. For example, in one lesson, students quickly developed a good understanding of the structure and function of prokaryotic cells and were able to identify different types under the microscope. In their coursework, students often demonstrate high levels of attainment in fieldwork research carried out during residential visits. Potentially higher-attaining students sometimes do not achieve as well as they should because work is not extended beyond the basic content of the lesson. Students in Year 12 have only just started their course. There is a wide range of prior attainment but overall standards are above the average for AS-level courses.
75. Teaching and learning were good in all the lessons seen and sometimes very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use it well in helping students to learn. For example, in a very good lesson, the teacher engaged students' interest by referring to commercial uses of microbes and then used questioning very effectively to develop their understanding of plasmids. Students felt confident in responding to the teacher's questions because they knew that their contributions would be valued. Students appreciate the quality of discussions that often develop in biology lessons on issues such as the effects of using antibiotics on cattle and human cloning. Their learning is helped by thorough marking and annotations in the margin often suggest how their work could be further improved. Teachers structure the work well, helping students to produce accurate notes for revision purposes. Well-chosen source material develops their skills in extracting relevant information for themselves. However, teachers sometimes place too much reliance on such materials so that students are not given enough encouragement to search more widely for relevant information. A significant minority of students, particularly in Year 12, have difficulty in fully grasping the technical language of biology. Students use information and communication technology effectively in presenting their coursework and, in some cases, for improving the accuracy of their measurements, but they have not yet mastered its use in presenting numerical information graphically.
76. The head of department post has been vacant for an extended period. However, a new post-holder has very recently been appointed and is beginning to address issues such as the more effective use of assessment to raise attainment. The positive effects of a more interactive approach to teaching are already beginning to benefit students. Improvement since the previous inspection has

been satisfactory. Examination results in 2002 showed marked improvement after a period of decline since 1997.

## Chemistry

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

### Strengths

- A-level results are improving.
- Teaching is good overall. Teachers use their very good knowledge of the subject to provide clear explanations.
- Students find teachers approachable and willing to give them extra help when they need it.
- Teachers build well on students' existing knowledge and this helps them to assimilate new learning quickly.

### Areas for improvement

- The consistency of teaching is too uneven across the department and, as a result, standards are higher in some lessons than in others.
- Assessment is not used effectively enough to identify individual students who need extra support or encouragement to raise their expectations to a higher target grade.

77. A-level results were in line with the national average in 2001. Students' performance in chemistry was similar to that in other A-level subjects, although the proportion gaining higher grades was below average. In 2002, the results were much higher than in the previous year. With one exception, all those students entered for A-level chemistry over the last five years have gained a pass and male students usually do better than females. AS-level results for Year 12 students in 2001 were high. Results in 2002 were lower but several students intend to improve their grades by re-entering for some of the tests. Very few students did not complete their courses.
78. Standards in lessons and written work are generally above the levels expected but there is marked variation between lessons. In one Year 13 lesson, students tested unknown liquids to find out whether they were aldehydes or ketones but fewer than half could explain why these two types of compound affect Fehling's solution differently. Students' achievement in part of this lesson was only average. While many caught up with earlier work, others missed the opportunity to find out more about the underlying theory. In another lesson, the same students' attainment was above average. They applied their previous knowledge of Le Chatelier's Principle to predict the effects of changing the conditions of equilibrium mixtures and then showed that they understood how equilibrium constants are determined. Students achieved very well in this lesson because they all developed new understanding from their previous knowledge. Students in Year 12 have only just started their course but standards are already above average for AS-level. They use the mole concept confidently in calculating the concentrations of solutions.
79. Students make good progress through the sixth form. For example, early in Year 12 they build on their knowledge of atomic structure from GCSE work and then quickly begin to apply their deeper understanding in explaining how different structures lead to different properties. Supporting data to confirm students' good progress were not available from the school.
80. Teaching and learning are good overall and this leads to success for students in their examinations. More than half the lessons seen were good or very good and the rest were satisfactory. Teachers' very good knowledge of the subject is well used in helping students to learn by giving clear explanations, for example of the principle of dynamic equilibrium. The teacher had searched the Internet before one very good lesson to find background information about the derivation of the rate equation. Students appreciated their teacher's efforts to make the lesson interesting and their learning was very good because they concentrated throughout the full length of the two-hour lesson. In less successful lessons, the pace is too slow because teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are too low. For example, in a lesson about organic

compounds, students were not asked to speculate about reasons for the differences they observed while carrying out a straightforward practical exercise. As a result, they achieved less than they could have done. Questioning is not always used effectively to encourage students to think about the reasons underlying the observations they make.

81. Students appreciate their teachers' willingness to help them in overcoming difficulties. They learn well from each other, for example, when working in small groups on research projects that are then presented to the whole class. However, they do not often take the initiative in furthering their own learning. They use their skills in information and communication technology confidently in searching the Internet and improving the appearance of their work but are less confident in using technology for measurement because lack of suitable equipment restricts opportunities.
82. A new head of department has very recently taken up post and is beginning to consider measures to further raise attainment. For example, assessment is being used more effectively to identify individual students who need support and to encourage others to raise their target grades. There are plans to develop links with industry to increase students' awareness of the wider importance of their work. Differences in the quality of teaching and learning across the department have not yet been addressed. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. Examination results were particularly good then but the 2002 results suggest that the decline seen in most years since then has been halted.

## ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The design and technology department teaches only A-level **product design**.

### Design and technology

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

#### Strengths

- The enthusiastic and inventive teaching.
- The high quality of relationships between teachers and their pupils (students).
- The very high quality of leadership, developing the subject very well since the last inspection.

#### Areas for improvement

- Appropriate high level ICT equipment, including computer-aided design (CAD) and computer-aided manufacture (CAM).

83. In 2001, seven students entered for the subject. Six of them obtained grades C, D or E but none achieved an A or B grade. This pass rate was below the national average. Results were much better in 2002 but national comparisons are not yet available. The results overall reflect the fact that the department takes in students of all abilities, many of whom obtained only a grade C in the GCSE examination and, in this context, students do well.
84. In lessons, standards of achievement are at the expected levels, with drawings that steadily improve as the course progresses. Drawing skills by the end of the course are generally good, although formalised conventions are not readily used. The rigour of the course improves designing skills and the good use of industrial studies and prepared materials allows technical knowledge to improve dramatically. However, limited opportunities to experience computer-aided design and manufacture restrict the development of students' understanding of this strand of the work.
85. Teaching is never less than good and on occasions it is truly excellent. For example, excitement, verve and vitality were brought into play when students took on differing rôles as they offered advice on each other's design projects. Relationships are very good, allowing students to accept and give criticisms without rancour. Teachers prepare lessons well and they provide very good teaching materials. Learning is very good in lessons. The fast pace and thoughtful approaches

adopted by teachers, together with their supportive attitudes, allow students to express their ideas effectively verbally and through drawing. The lower-attaining students feel very well supported and give of their best so that they too make very good progress. Students learning English as an additional language receive additional help from their teachers to ensure that they are clear about their design tasks and they also receive help in their written work. As a result, they make very good progress. Students engaged on individual tasks are not afraid to ask their teacher for help and engage in good dialogue.

86. The course allows all the students to work on tasks within their capability and, as they improve, the work can be extended to stretch them further. Arrangements for assessment are excellent. The skilful design and technology technician gives excellent support to the department by providing high-quality resources tailored to the needs of the course. However, the learning environment is barely adequate and the poor surroundings are not conducive to the production of exciting and effective design proposals or inventive outcomes.
87. The management of design and technology is excellent and the departmental development plan shows how all staff are involved in its development. The new members of staff are carefully inducted into the work of the department to ensure that they can work at the highest level and yet bring their own ideas to fruition in the teaching scheme. There has been a very good improvement in simplifying and making more effective the provision of the subject and in the good range and quality of work that students have produced since the last inspection.

## **BUSINESS**

The school offers AS and A-level courses in **business and economics** and courses leading to the Intermediate GNVQ and the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) in **business**. Only the last was inspected and it was not possible to sample the others.

### **Business education**

Overall, the quality of provision in Business Studies in the sixth form is **good**.

#### **Strengths**

- Consistently good examination results.
- Teaching is good overall.
- Good leadership, with clear responsibilities for co-ordination.
- The generally good quality of relationships between teachers and their students.
- The good integration of information and communication technology into students' learning.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Ensuring that students have an induction that fully prepares them for the rigours of sixth form work.
- Ensuring that the best teaching practice is consistently applied.

88. In the year 2000, 16 pupils sat the vocational A-level examination in business studies and their point score was very high compared with the national figure. In 2001, the same course had 14 students entering for the examination and their point score again was very high. Compared with their attainment at entry, students do very well in this subject. In 2002, similar results were obtained but no national comparisons are yet available. The standards of work seen are above the expected levels and students make effective use of information and communication technology. Teachers monitor the work regularly and provide helpful comments that help students to further improve their work. Generally, students understand the context of the world of work but are less confident in the area of current affairs.
89. The quality of teaching is mainly good. A very effective range of approaches ensures that teaching matches the students' capabilities. Teachers work hard to prepare relevant lessons and take pains to explain and often to explain again so that students learn well. The potentially higher-

attaining students, however, are not sufficiently stretched in some lessons to achieve their full potential. Teachers are very knowledgeable about the subject, and the use of computers and projectors improves the presentation of lessons.

90. Learning is good in lessons. Most often, students listen well to their teachers and join in willingly in the lessons. They have confidence in the teachers and ask for further explanation if they do not understand, knowing that their teachers will provide a positive and helpful response. As a result, very good progress is made. The fast pace of lessons, students' obvious interest and their generally very good levels of concentration allow good coverage of the syllabus and adequate time for coursework. Homework is regularly set and the good project work shows students taking responsibility for their own learning.
91. The accommodation and resources are barely satisfactory. There is no specialist base room for the subject and teachers have to bring projectors to use in the lesson, taking valuable time to set up the equipment. The co-ordination and management of the subject are very good and this has allowed good progress to be made since the last inspection. An influx of new staff, keen and enthusiastic, working hard together to improve the courses and the quality of teaching, is a strength. The schemes of work are of a very high standard and the school rightly perceives this area as being important to the quality of the sixth form provision.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The school offers AS and A-level courses in **computing**.

### Computing

Overall the quality of provision for AS and A-level computing is **good**.

#### Strengths

- Teaching on the AS and A-level courses is well planned.
- Support and guidance for students are good.
- The assessment and monitoring of students' work are very thorough.
- Students are very enthusiastic and work well, particularly in the production of coursework, which has shown a good improvement in the last year.

#### Areas for improvement

- The proportion of higher grades awarded in the theory papers needs to be improved further.
- The school should ensure that all students are suited to the demands of the A-level courses.
- Additionally, a wider range of courses should be provided to match the broad range of aptitude and ability in the sixth form.

92. Courses in computing have been introduced since the last inspection. In 2001, AS-level results were below the national average for all grades but the most recent results, in 2002, show a good improvement. All students passed the examination and the percentage achieving the higher grades doubled compared with the previous year. There is no significant difference in attainment by gender or ethnicity. The first group to take the A-level examination produced encouraging results overall, although the percentage of students achieving the higher grades reflected the group's performance at AS-level in 2001. National comparative data were not available at the time of the inspection. Male students achieved more of the higher grades but a number were also ungraded. All of the female candidates passed the examination. Students have scored more highly in the more practical aspects of coursework, for example, in spreadsheet and database coursework. Marks for theory modules have been more modest.
93. The work seen in Year 12 lessons and in portfolios indicates that most students on the AS-level course this year are making appropriate progress and working at least in line with expectations in the early weeks of the course. A minority of the students are finding the more theoretical aspects

of the course challenging. The minimum entry requirements in terms of GCSE mathematics have not always been adhered to and, in one lesson, some students had to work hard to come to grips with calculating in binary numbers. In Year 13, students have been encouraged by their success in the AS-level examination and are making good progress. Attainment in lessons and in coursework is good, reflecting the efforts being made by teachers and students to increase the numbers attaining higher grades.

94. Students in Year 13 are employing a wide range of contexts for their A-level coursework and their greater creativity is an indication of their progress and increased confidence. Work on relational databases for specific clients demonstrates a mature approach and a good understanding of the technological requirements of an interesting range of business and community settings with a variety of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Students are keen to demonstrate how their work has progressed, comparing it with examples of their AS coursework which is stored in their network files.
95. The majority of students in Year 12 and all students in Year 13 show very high levels of interest and enthusiasm for the subject. They are very co-operative and respond well during whole-class sessions, although some Year 12 students still lack confidence in the first month of their course. Students in Year 13 are very willing to discuss their work in detail, using appropriate terminology. One student was able to demonstrate an impressive 'live' website, which he had worked on in Year 12. Most students have appropriate computing facilities at home and they can use computers in school when they need to, despite the restricted numbers of networked machines.
96. The subject is taught by a small group of teachers who work closely together, specialising in particular aspects of the different courses. Teaching in Year 12 is never less than satisfactory and more often good and, in Year 13, teaching is good and often very good. Lessons have clear aims that are discussed with students. Effective use of presentational software is a feature of most lessons, allowing teachers to recapitulate particular aspects if necessary, frequently providing reviews at the end of lessons. Generally, teachers use question and answer techniques well to reinforce learning and to keep students focused although, in several instances, opportunities were missed to engage all students actively in planning discussions. The Internet is used effectively for on-line resources and students are expected to inform themselves about course specifications and requirements from the examination board's web site. Assessment is thorough and there are good procedures for recording and monitoring the performance of individual students. Examination module results are analysed in detail and used to inform planning. Parents are kept well informed about students' work and progress.
97. The department has learned a great deal from its recent experiences while establishing the AS and A-level courses. Planning and strategies have been appropriately modified and refined in the light of experience and this is having a very positive impact upon standards. The current curriculum caters for a limited range of students and this does result in some mismatch between students' aptitude and the demands of the Advanced-level courses. The school is developing a long-term view on this issue and is aware of the need to broaden the range of courses on offer.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The school's sixth form provision for **visual art** consists of AS and A-level courses, the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) in art and design, and the GNVQ Intermediate and Foundation-level courses. These were inspected in depth. In addition, the school offers AS-level courses in the **history of art**, where two lessons were sampled, and in **photography** and **film studies**, where no lessons were seen. Lessons seen on the history of art show that students are interested and engaged with their current studies about classical architecture and the quality of teaching is good. Many useful trips are undertaken to a wide variety of classical European sites.

The school also offers courses in **music**, at AS and A-level and in **drama and theatre studies** at A-level. Both of these courses were inspected.

### **Art** [AS and A-level courses (A2)]

Provision for art and design at A-level (A2) and at AS-level is **very good**.

#### **Strengths**

- Excellent A-level results that are amongst the highest in the country.
- Similar very high standards in current students' large oil paintings on canvas.
- The very high quality of figure drawing and painting and of portraiture.
- Very good, often excellent teaching resulting in these exceptionally high standards of work.
- Very highly motivated students who work extremely hard to achieve these exceptional results.

#### **Areas for development**

- Accommodation for art, which is unsatisfactory.

98. Students' results in A-level examinations in recent years have placed Thomas Tallis amongst the highest-attaining schools in art nation-wide. Over 90 per cent of the relatively large numbers entering the subject obtained A grades in 2002 and all the remainder gained B grades. Results were similar in 2001, although not quite so high. This performance is excellent and results were similarly high for Year 12 students entering AS-level courses in 2002. The department's retention rate is very high and students hardly ever leave the course.
99. Attainment seen on inspection matches these very high standards. As a result of very good and often excellent teaching, students rapidly acquire very high levels of technical skill in painting and drawing, particularly in oil painting on large-scale canvas. Using this expertise, they develop excellent quality in their visual studies, particularly of the human form and in portraiture, in both of which the department excels. Many students join A-level art courses from other schools because the department rightfully has a reputation for excellence in these fine-arts disciplines. Students from the main school enter the sixth form with high levels of competence in painting and drawing from their GCSE course, giving them a secure start in these key aspects of two-dimensional work. All students enter a sixth form where expectations are extremely high, with newcomers often needing to catch up with basic skills. Their progress is rapid and their achievement is good because they, like other students in the department, are very highly motivated towards their work.
100. Students enter the courses because they know about the very good teaching they will experience and all students feel that they are achieving very well. Those who recently entered Year 12 are already achieving standards well above average, for instance, in figure drawings in charcoal and in ceramics work based on life-sized sculptures of human heads. Although most students have not worked with clay for many years, their technical skills are very good. The research done for both projects also shows high levels of competence and a very good depth of investigation. Many students in the early stage of Year 13 are already working at the highest levels of attainment in their oil paintings. Here they are starting to develop an individual style, still mainly in painting figures and portraits against different backgrounds. This fine-art course provides a good balance to the school's alternative provision of an advanced vocational course for those students who wish to

follow a wider, differently orientated curriculum at a similar level. Students' wide-ranging critical investigations and personal studies are highly analytical, reflective and critical, both of the artists' work they study and of their own work.

101. The very high quality of teaching is the principal factor in students' exceptional achievements. A new team of teaching staff is supporting the head of department in maintaining the very high standards of previous years. The department is characterised by very high expectations and very good personal understanding of the pedagogic aspects of teaching the subject at this level. Overlying this are teachers' own very good personal competences in art, which students recognise and admire. Planning, both explicit and implicit, is a great strength, resulting in pacy, well-organised lessons where little time is wasted. Students recognise and appreciate the very mature ways in which they are managed, with staff treating them as adults, mostly able to organise and manage their own learning. The one-to-one 'mini-tutorials' that students enjoy with staff during all lessons are highly focused and effective, challenging and stretching them to higher achievements. In these sessions, there is genuinely interactive dialogue, where teachers listen carefully to students' views and ideas as well as providing astute assessment and other very useful contributions. Teachers encourage students to visit galleries, especially London galleries, independently, and most take advantage of this opportunity. All learn a great deal through these visits, integrating what they learn very effectively into discussions with teachers and into their own work. The visits, combined with their formal school-based learning of Western European art, add significantly to students' cultural understanding and to their personal development.
102. Department management remains very good, as it was at the time of the last inspection. The very capable, experienced head of department retains a strong commitment to the highest possible attainment for students and is outstandingly successful in this objective. A newly-appointed team of young teachers is similarly committed. Despite some extensions since 1997, accommodation for art remains unsatisfactory. Some aspects presenting health and safety issues remain unaltered, for example, the kiln room is still unventilated and its flooring hazardous. These affect students little, however. It is the lack of a dedicated sixth form studio which is unsatisfactory, particularly as ever-larger numbers of students, working in the large scale described, have to share studios with younger students. Furthermore, there is no storage for their canvases, which have to be stacked in classrooms and are thus subject to loss and damage. Students cannot work in studios in their free periods and the increasingly large classes make working conditions very cramped. Students tolerate these shortcomings gladly, though, because they realise that the important aspect for them is the very high quality of teaching they experience in the department. The department itself has made a good improvement since 1997, when standards in the sixth form were above average.

### **Vocational Art and Design** [Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) and GNVQ courses]

The school's provision for vocational Art and Design is **satisfactory**.

**Strengths**

- Good teaching is beginning to raise the status of the courses.
- Students in Year 12 have made a good start to the various levels of their courses and they are achieving well.

**Areas for development**

- The school's management of the vocational art and design courses is not good enough.
- The vocational courses lack parity of esteem with the school's academic provision for art.
- Poor accommodation provides an unsatisfactory learning environment for students.
- Unsatisfactory resources for the needs of vocational students restrict their understanding of how their studies relate to the world of work.
- Attainment has been below average, particularly at the Advanced level.
- The attitudes of students in Year 13 have been adversely affected by unsatisfactory staffing last year.

103. The provision of art and design vocational courses in the sixth form is complex. However, it provides a useful curriculum option for students whose interests or prior attainment are not well-aligned with the art A-level route. Provision in Year 12 is for GNVQ Foundation and Intermediate-level courses and for the first year of a two-year Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) course. In Year 13, students are on their second year of the AVCE course. These courses are managed by the technology department, not the art department.

104. Students' attainment in recent AVCE courses has been below average, with a large proportion of submissions ungraded in 2002. Some previous years' results were higher but the number of entries was too small to be statistically significant. GNVQ Intermediate results, again with only small numbers, have been about the national average but with no distinctions amongst recent results. No Foundation-level results are available. A relatively large proportion of students have not completed their courses in recent years.

105. Current students' attainment and achievement vary considerably. The Year 12 Foundation-level course has been made available for a small number of very low-attaining students, many with special educational needs and some with severe learning difficulties, wishing to stay into the sixth form. This course includes units other than art and design, such as one in manufacturing. Attainment seen amongst these students is below average for the expectations of the course. However, the students are achieving well because their previous attainment has often been well below average. Some students here have great difficulties in simple skills, such as measuring during an 'Op Art' project. Several could only mark centimetres accurately with the one-to-one help of the teacher or a learning support assistant. This course provides a useful safety net for some students who started the Intermediate-level and found it too difficult. Some students from last year's Foundation-level course have moved on successfully to the Intermediate-level course this year and are still achieving well, given their underlying low levels of core skills. Students' attitudes to this Foundation course are good and they concentrated well throughout a relatively long lesson.

106. The current Year 12 Intermediate class is already a large group and was still growing at the time of the inspection, with new entrants or transfers from other courses in the school. Many students have relatively low levels of literacy, written work in particular being weak. Art standards vary greatly amongst this group, who are mainly boys. Most show the standards expected for Intermediate-level, using line and tone effectively in their colour and pencil drawings of kitchen implements and fruit and vegetables for their current project. Others are below average in these aspects of their work and few are above average. These students' use of word processing to evaluate their research and practical work is average for this level. This group displays a wide range of attitudes towards their work but, in the lesson seen, most worked with appropriate concentration and effort.

107. The new Year 12 AVCE students are highly motivated and capable, keen to explore ideas and visual media. Their work reflects the standards expected for an Advanced-level course. Research

for their new project on printing shows good visual investigation and annotation. They worked briskly and effectively in the practical printing lesson seen. Attitudes are very good here, with students potentially capable of reaching high standards when they submit their units of coursework.

108. The Year 13 AVCE group are very different. A high turnover of teachers in their first year caused very great difficulties and the students are left feeling discontented and disappointed with their course. They had many different teachers, some of them supply and cover staff, and did not make the progress of which they were capable last year. Now they have new staff who, despite their lack of experience, have started to forge good relationships with these students and who have high expectations of them. New teachers are working very hard to ensure that, under their care, these students do as well as possible this year. Nonetheless, attainment here falls short of the expectations for this stage of their course. Evidence of students' improving attitudes indicates that they can make up this ground if they work well this year. Given their turbulent background in Year 12, these students are also achieving well but now need to focus hard on the standards of the artwork they produce. Some sculptures here show innovative thinking and appropriate standards in exploring unusual media. Their designs for business cards in another lesson showed their drawing skills to be weaker though, and this aspect needs improvement.
109. Teaching on the vocational courses is split between technology teachers and art teachers. Almost all this group are new to teaching, or new to the school, or both. None has experience of vocational courses. All are working very hard to understand the criteria for this wide range of courses and all the teaching seen was good. This is a commendable picture, given teachers' inexperience and the fact that they have only known these groups for a few weeks. Teachers are just beginning to have realistic expectations of the various levels of the vocational courses and are adjusting their teaching accordingly. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their own disciplines are good but gaps exist in their ability to focus sufficiently strongly on the pure art aspects of some units. Likewise, the importance of the integration of the key skills of information and communication technology, literacy and numeracy is not yet fully embedded and opportunities are often missed to emphasise and improve these. This is partly because of unsatisfactory resources and some opportunities were taken, for instance in the Foundation lesson, where measuring was an unexpected weakness. Much greater emphasis needs to be placed on the application of students' studies to the world of work.
110. The school recognises that the recent management of the vocational courses has not been entirely satisfactory. Following the departure of the teacher who previously had responsibility for them, oversight passed to the head of design and technology, who is also GNVQ co-ordinator and who is already overloaded with additional, onerous whole-school responsibilities. A satisfactory holding position has been reached but the current situation is unsatisfactory for the longer term. The heads of the two departments principally involved have too many other responsibilities to be expected to manage the vocational courses effectively. As a result, these courses, even the AVCE course, lack parity of esteem with the more academic art courses. The nature and status of these courses within this Arts College are unequal. Staffing turbulence is an added difficulty. This has affected students on the vocational courses significantly more than students in the art department. The numbers of staff involved are very high and liaison between the individuals involved is not effective. This group has not yet been formed into a team and is struggling to keep pace with demands. It is mainly the good teaching of the staff and their good will that make the vocational courses as viable and as effective as they are. The school-level management of these vocational art and design courses requires urgent review and improvement.
111. Added to these shortcomings are several other important weaknesses in provision. Accommodation for the vocational courses is poor. No vocational centre or base of any kind exists. This greatly hinders the development of students' understanding of a proper, work-related art environment. They need this in order to place their studies in the context of the world of art and design work. Inappropriate, poorly-resourced technology workshops, with no ethos connected with fine art, or poorly converted laboratories provide the accommodation for vocational art courses. These create an unsatisfactory environment to generate high standards of artwork. Apart from books in the general library, no magazines or periodicals provide students with resources for

research about applications of their work to employment or to continuing education. Students have unsatisfactory access to information and communication technology, which should be integral to both their artwork and their research. Design software is out-dated. Only in one lesson in Year 13 did students encounter the notion of computer-assisted design and manufacture and their understanding of the application of technology in artwork is unsatisfactory. Community projects are being planned, where students can contribute visual art and other aspects of vocational work to the local environment.

112. No vocational art courses existed at the time of the last inspection. Their provision has added a useful dimension to the school's art curriculum, but the current resourcing, accommodation and management are unsatisfactory and are a key issue for the school to resolve.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- The quality of teaching.
- The attitudes and commitment of the students.

### Areas for improvement

- Retain more students in Year 13.
- Improve students' knowledge of harmony.

113. AS and A-level courses are taught in Years 12 and 13. Results of the AS-level examinations were above the national average in 2001, with all five students gaining passes. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades was in line with the national average. Attainment was higher in 2002, with all three male students passing the A-level examination and, again, the higher-grade pass rate remained in line. Of the two students who sat AS-level music in 2002, one gained a higher grade and is now following the second year of the course and the other was unclassified. In relation to their GCSE results, a number of students did slightly better than expected.
114. Although the ten students in the current Year 12 have only just started the course, they are achieving well and making good progress in developing their performing skills as a result of effective teaching that demands much of them. Slower progress is made in understanding harmonisation because of a lack of basic theoretical knowledge. The attainment of the student in Year 13 is above average and the well-planned teaching is helping to establish an understanding of musical conventions.
115. Teaching is very good overall and students learn well because they are exposed to a rich and varied diet of music that is carefully matched to their needs and interests. The range of methods used to support learning includes clearly-stated objectives and a well-chosen pace to match students' abilities. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject that they use to good effect in their questioning and in the challenging tasks they set. In a Year 12 lesson devoted to the conventions of New Orleans Jazz, very good teaching and a first class practical demonstration by the teacher (a trombonist) developed students' learning through group improvisation and solo playing. The same students were less successful in a lesson on western tonal harmony. Careful explanation by the teacher of how to add an arpeggio bass to a simple melody encouraged higher-attaining students to make a little progress and test the outcome of their work by playing their examples on the piano. Lower-attaining students showed weaknesses in their understanding of the primary triads and, because of this, made less progress. In a Year 13 lesson on sixteenth-century religious music, the teacher's very good knowledge and the use of short, taped extracts of a 'Mass' by Palestrina reinforced the students' aural recognition so that the inter-twining plainsong themes could be identified in the score of a four-part setting of the 'Kyrie'.
116. Students are keen, attentive and respond well to the teaching and to the varying musical experiences to which they are exposed. The inclusive nature of the subject encourages pupils and students to take part in extra-curricular musical activities. As part of the course, all students are willing members of the school's senior choir and this also helps cultivate their aural skills. Students co-operate well with one another, contribute to other musical groups and help younger musicians to do well. This contributes to the school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students display a keen interest in the course and the opportunities offered and a few are considering a musical career. All students work independently on improving their performing skills and three students have their own band which features at school concerts.
117. The very good teaching and learning are the results of work in the subject being well led and managed. The three teachers have complementary musical interests and this contributes to the richness of the curriculum offered. Monitoring, evaluation and assessment are effective. There

has been good improvement since the last inspection, with the new computer suite almost ready and A-level music now being taught in the school.

## Drama and theatre studies

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

### Strengths

- The very good teaching in the subject enables students to develop their knowledge and understanding of the philosophies and ideas of a number of theatre practitioners and apply these practices to their own work.
- The personal enthusiasm for the subject displayed by teachers and their ability to create an animated, rigorous working environment where very good learning can take place.
- The imaginative interpretation of the A-level syllabus that provides students with a challenging and imaginative range of drama activities.

### Areas for improvement

- Raise standards of attainment in written work by providing regular opportunities for students to make a strong personal response to the plays they explore and the practical activities they undertake.

118. Standards of attainment in the 2001 A-level examination were well above the national average, with all sixteen candidates gaining A to E grades and nine gaining grades A or B. Results in this year's examination are closer to the national average. Standards fluctuate each year and are very susceptible to the academic ability of individual students. Standards in the subject have been maintained since the last inspection.

119. Five lessons were observed and the standards observed in lessons were above the expected levels. The large majority of students arrive in Year 12 with a good range of skills and strategies that reflect the above-average examination results achieved at the end of Year 11. Students then go on to use and build on these skills in more demanding situations as they progress through Years 12 and 13. They study the philosophies and ideas of a number of accepted practitioners, such as Stanislavski, Brecht, Artaud and Berkoff, and use what they have learned in the study of a range of plays and devised pieces of drama.

120. Good examples of this were observed in Year 12 lessons as students considered the physical theatre of Steven Berkoff and his play *'Metamorphosis'*. Students engaged in a rigorous physical warm-up and used freeze-frames to focus on important episodes in the play. They then moved on to consider how individual scenes in the play could be interpreted in Berkoff's style. Despite being engaged in the course for a few weeks only, students worked with commitment and interest and produced some work of high quality. They had an effective understanding of physicalisation and demonstrated the ability to create character through the use of body and voice. The students were able to make constructive comments about their own and others' work and used these comments to improve the quality of their work. Students were already developing an understanding of the relationship between actor and audience - one of the central ideas in Berkoff's style of acting.

121. Students in Year 13 displayed a good knowledge of Brecht's approach to drama, both in his style of acting and the staging of his plays. This was seen as students devised their own drama on the horrors of the First World War, following on from the teacher's very good exposition on life in the trenches. Students also considered the First World War as depicted in *'Oh What a Lovely War'* as well as considering work from the war poets. All of this provided excellent stimuli for the students' own work. Students worked in a collaborative manner when devising their pieces of work. They listened to and valued each other's ideas, experimented with a number of approaches to the stimulus, refined and improved their work through rehearsal and came to a consensus about the final framework.

122. Students also extended their knowledge of Brecht as they focused on one of his pieces of scripted drama, the short play, *'The Seven Deadly Sins'*. The quality of practical work was much influenced by their very positive attitudes and their ability to work with sustained concentration, often over a whole morning of activities. Whilst students produce good and often very good practical work, a number of them are less secure in their written work. A lack of confidence and fluency here means that some rely too much on the ideas and opinions of others. This prevents them from making a strong personal response to the plays they have seen and studied and the practical activities they have been involved in.
123. The quality of teaching in drama and theatre studies, as observed during the inspection, ranged from good to excellent and was very good overall. Teachers are very secure in their knowledge of the subject and convey it to students in a meaningful and imaginative manner. This makes a very positive contribution to students' learning. Teachers make good use of their own skills and talents and use them to extend the students' skills without imposing on students' ownership of their work. Lessons are well planned, organised and managed, with teachers providing a range of stimulating and challenging activities within a single session. The real personal enthusiasm that teachers bring to their work is a significant factor in the very good practice taking place. Teachers create an animated and rigorous working environment in which very good learning can take place.
124. The subject is led by an enthusiastic and well-informed head of department. The department has a very good scheme of work, with the A-level syllabus being interpreted in a challenging and imaginative manner. The department utilises a good range of assessment procedures with practical and written work being assessed both during and at the end of units of work. Regularly opportunities are provided for students to participate in a range of workshops provided by visiting theatre companies. These, along with visits to local and national theatre productions, provide students with an extended and enriched curriculum.
125. The necessity for students to work in a collaborative manner and the opportunity to explore universal moral issues in a range of plays from different countries and cultures around the world make a very positive contribution to students' moral, social and cultural development.

## HUMANITIES

The school offers courses at AS and A-level in **geography**, **history** and **sociology** and at AS-level in **philosophy** and **psychology**. There are plans to offer these last two subjects at A-level next year. Provision was inspected in history, sociology and psychology but there was no opportunity to sample work in geography or philosophy.

### History

Overall, the quality of provision in history in the sixth form is **good** and it continues to be a strength of the school, as it was at the time of the last inspection.

**Strengths**

- The good standards achieved by students.
- The commitment of staff and the good teaching, which is supported by very good planning and class management.
- The very well-structured curricular provision that is well matched to the needs of the students.
- The effective monitoring of students' progress that ensures equal opportunities and inclusion for all.
- Students' very positive attitudes to their studies.

**Areas for improvement**

- The school needs to carry out a statistical analysis of students' achievements in AS and A-level examinations compared with their performance in the GCSE examinations.
- The department needs to be more pro-active in ensuring that the library provision for the current themes studied by students is improved.
- Teachers need to improve their technique of questioning students, probing their thinking and making whole-class discussion more effective.

126. Students perform well in AS and A-level examinations. In 2001, the A-level results were close to the national average and this year they show a marked improvement, with almost half of the candidates gaining grades A or B. All the students achieved A to E grades and the results were among the best in any subject in the school. The trend of the past few years has been for results to fluctuate, reflecting students' overall performance year-by-year at GCSE. Students' performance at AS-level in 2002 is likely to be above the national average, as over half the candidates gained grades A or B. This reflects good progress through the year. The results were better than those for 2001. In recent years, male students have slightly outperformed female students at AS and A-level, a characteristic that was not observed during the inspection and cannot be accounted for by the department. There are no overall differences between the performance of students from different ethnic groups. Almost all the students who have started the history courses in the last four years have completed them. A significant number achieved well in 2002 in relation to their previous attainment.

127. Students' standards of attainment are above average and they learn well, a conclusion of the previous inspection. Year 13 students have a good grasp of the historical concepts related to their present studies, even though they have just begun their individual assignments. They articulate their ideas well orally and in written work and can explain clearly historical terms, such as 'orthodox' and 'revisionism', and relate cause and effect in topics such as the Cold War. They recognize different sorts of sources and their work benefits from their willingness to search extensively for relevant material. One student, for example, was able to explain clearly how he had reached hypotheses on the downfall of the Knights Templar and the research he intended to pursue to test them out. As Year 13 students have just started their assignments, the questions they have set themselves to research tend to be one-dimensional, but the positive way in which they respond to the good guidance they receive from their teachers indicates the potential they have for further development.

128. Students in Year 12 are at the very beginning of their course but are already making good progress and achieving well. This is mainly because of the good teaching, a well-structured course and thoughtfully produced learning materials. Their work on the Suffragette Movement and discussion about the likelihood of a letter to a personal friend being propaganda or not showed they have good historical skills. These include the ability to annotate written sources, identify key points and distinguish between a general overview, the more detailed statement and particular statements needed to support an historical argument. They are still at a stage, however, where inter-student discussion and the resultant cross-fertilisation of ideas are not common, aspects that the teaching is not yet fully exploiting.

129. The majority of the students write well. They take notes in a range of formats, including bullet points, diagrams and matrices, using whichever is the most effective for their work. Their notes contain a good balance of factual information and evaluation. Students' folders are well organised, reflecting beneficial input from their teachers, and provide a manageable source for reference and

revision. Essays on the Russian Revolution showed an ability to argue logically from a variety of source materials and draw sustainable conclusions from the evidence. Students' work reflects regular and sensible use of information and communication technology.

130. Students contribute well to their own achievement through their very positive attitudes to study. They listen well and are conscientious when in pairs or groups, or when working on their own. Their ability and willingness to take personal responsibility for their work, an attitude engendered by the effective teaching strategies employed, is a great advantage and ensures a very committed approach to their individual assignments. Teachers encourage them to evaluate their own work and that of other students, a practice that contributes well to their learning and encourages a mature attitude to study. In one well-managed session, for example, the teaching enabled students to see the importance of valid evidence, appropriate historical vocabulary, substantiated judgements and a planned structure in a sample of writing.
131. Overall, the quality of teaching is good and, in a significant minority of lessons, it is very good. It impacts well on students' learning, as was the case at the time of the previous inspection. Teachers' planning is very good and the well-structured learning materials contribute effectively to students' good standards of achievement. New members of staff also benefit from the tight structure, which is well tested. Teachers are knowledgeable and confident, although they could probe to encourage students to be a little more reflective about their ideas and more willing to challenge each other's views in whole-class discussion. They use a range of strategies very effectively and one lesson may include group work, pair work, 'spidergrams' and the study of historical sources. This ensures that all students are included and enables those of different gender and race to perform to their potential. Teachers use overhead projectors and encourage students to use computers to enrich their learning. They share the objectives of their lessons with students and make very good use of their own assessments and the students' self-evaluations to match their planning to students' needs. The practice of different teachers sharing the teaching of the same groups is very well managed and adds to students' experience.
132. The very secure planning and well-established curriculum are improvements on what was reported at the time of the previous inspection. The subject is well managed within a supportive faculty structure that provides very good support for the two newly-qualified teachers. The acting head of department is enthusiastic and committed and provides the effervescent leadership that promises well for the department's future. Learning materials are well organised and used, although the school library does not provide sufficient support for some of the topics studied by the students. However, students' experiences are enriched by extra-curricular activities, such as the visit of two students each year to Auschwitz and of others to local and distant libraries and museums for research purposes. The departmental development plan identifies appropriate priorities for a department that contributes strongly to the school's overall performance.

## Sociology

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

### Strengths

- Pass rates in A-level and AS-level examinations are well above the national average.
- Students have a very good understanding of theoretical approaches in sociology.
- Lessons start with clearly stated objectives.
- A good variety of teaching and learning activities is used in the classroom.
- There is excellent regular assessment of students' learning.

### Areas for improvement

- The scheme of work is inadequate to support teaching and learning.
- The library has few up-to-date textbooks.

133. For the past two years, examination results for the AS and A-level courses have been significantly above the national average. In each year, all of those entered have passed the A-level examination and well over half have obtained either grade A or grade B in the AS and A-level examinations. The upward trend in results has been maintained despite a steady increase in student numbers.
134. The standard of students' written work is high. Their essays show a very good understanding of theoretical perspectives and an ability to both apply and evaluate such theories when discussing sociological issues. For example, they were able to assess the significance of a wide range of sources of evidence when considering the assertion that marriage is in decline.
135. Teaching is good overall. Learning objectives are set out at the beginning of each lesson and are often referred to at the end of the lesson. Lessons contain a good variety of teaching and learning activities which help to develop a range of skills, including critical evaluation and effective communication. For example, in one lesson, students had to report back to the class on the extent to which case studies from different societies questioned the claim that the nuclear family is universal. The students are provided with good-quality handouts to support teaching. An example of this is an extract from a 1950s home economics textbook outlining the qualities of the perfect wife, that illustrated well the changing rôles of women over the years. However, some of the more theoretical content is excessively challenging for students in the first few weeks of the AS course. Although students are encouraged to become independent learners, there is scope to make much greater use of information and communication technology, particularly the Internet, to fulfil this aim.
136. Students' learning is thoroughly assessed. Lessons often start with a recapitulation of what has been learned in the previous lesson and a variety of exercises is employed to test students' understanding. For example, in one activity, students were required to match a list of statements with the appropriate feminist theory. Homework assignments are thoroughly marked and students are supplied with detailed and constructive feedback as to how to improve their grades. Mark schemes used by examination boards and chief examiners' reports are used to help students identify what is required to produce high-quality coursework. The relationships between teachers and students are very good. Students respond well to the tasks that are set and there is a friendly and productive atmosphere in the classroom and good informal support is provided outside the class. However, there has been very little in the way of activities that would enrich the sociology curriculum.
137. There is no one currently responsible for leading and managing sociology. The previous head of department has yet to be officially replaced so that the teachers are left to devise their own teaching and learning methods and resources. The scheme of work is inadequate to support teaching and learning as it comprises only a list of topics and assignments, without details of teaching methods, resources or timings. Although the subject has a designated based room, this is not used for A-level teaching. The library contains very few up-to-date textbooks suitable for the students, restricting their opportunities for undertaking additional research and reading.

## **Psychology**

138. Psychology was introduced in the sixth form in September 2002 and so it is too early to form any firm conclusions about the standards of attainment. Timetabling arrangements meant that only one lesson could be seen. The quality of teaching was very good and the students showed an enthusiastic interest in the subject. For example, they conducted a lively class discussion about experiments designed to show that children learn violence through imitating adult rôle-models. At such an early stage of the course, the students have made a good start in developing the appropriate study skills and understanding of psychological theories.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

The school offers AS and A-level courses in **English, French, German and Italian**. The courses in English and French were inspected.

## English

Provision for A-level English is **very good**.

### Strengths

- The school is successfully raising the attainment of students.
- It provides consistently very good teaching.
- It gives very effective support to all students, particularly those who find the subject challenging or who have difficulty in meeting the considerable demands of the course.

### Areas for improvement

- The school makes insufficient use of assessment data in order to measure accurately the effectiveness of the provision.

139. In 2001, attainment in A-level examinations was close to the national average. The majority of students obtained C grades and the percentage of students who attained grades A or B was below the national average. These results were not as good as they had been in the two previous years, when attainment was above the national average. In the previous four years, no candidate has failed to attain an A-level grade. The provisional results for 2002 indicate that there has been a considerable increase in the percentage of students who obtained the highest two grades, indicating that there will be a significant increase in the average point score for the subject. Attainment in the 2001 AS-level examinations was much higher than the national average, with three quarters of all students entered attaining grades A to C and more than half obtaining grades A and B. No student failed to obtain a grade. The results for 2002 indicate that very similar levels of attainment have been maintained.

140. The full range of evidence seen during the inspection indicates that attainment on the A-level course is higher than that seen nationally. The high standards identified in the previous inspection report have been maintained. The school's flexible policy for admitting students to the course means that there is an extremely wide range of prior attainment amongst students on the A-level course. However, they all achieve very well, despite the fact that some students find the course particularly challenging and have some difficulty in adapting to its demands. The students in Year 12 who have very recently embarked upon the course have already adapted well and approach their work in an appropriately analytical way. Students make particularly good progress from the start of the course in organising their work, in handling a very large and disparate volume of reading material, in structuring their written answers in a way which addresses the requirements of the assignment and in adopting a suitably objective and formal style.

141. All students have a good knowledge of their texts and use them confidently. They show a growing understanding of the ways in which writers use language in order to develop their themes. The good-quality discussions to which students contribute have a very positive impact on their progress. For example, students studying *'Enduring Love'* as one of their first A-level texts made very good progress in understanding the two main characters through group discussion and then by feeding back their views to the whole class for further discussion. Students make good use of the wide variety of additional reading material they are given and annotate and record in ways that will assist their revision. Written assignments are carefully planned and structured so that the work of all students, including those with lower prior attainment, is clear and usually meets the requirements of the question. Higher-attaining pupils develop an authoritative and convincing style. Students undertake a considerable amount of 'reading around' the subject and show awareness of the ideas of a range of well-known literary critics, although lower-attaining students sometimes find this rather difficult to comprehend initially. Students often make careless spelling mistakes.

142. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. All teaching seen during the inspection was at least good and much was very good. Teachers put a great deal of thought into planning lessons with a good range of activities and groupings to meet the needs of all students. For example, a group

preparing for a written assignment on *'The Winter's Tale'* were expected to produce 'freeze frames' of the scene being analysed in order to gain extended insight into its importance. Teachers plan very effectively for the very wide range of abilities in all teaching groups, providing extra support where necessary and extending and challenging the higher-attaining students. Particularly good use is made of group work and all students respond very positively to such opportunities and report back to the whole class in a well-informed and thoughtful manner. Teachers make very good use of questioning to assess students' level of understanding and to promote fruitful and well-focused discussion.

143. Students make good progress by listening to the ideas of others and comparing them with their own. Teachers provide all students with a large volume of additional reading materials, giving students an idea of their context and the ways they have been received over time by critics. Teachers consistently use a number of strategies to assist students in meeting the considerably increased demands of the subject at A-level and in organising the large volume of reading material and written work required. All students make good use of this type of support and their work is well organised and easy to refer back to. Students' work is marked regularly and extensively and teachers' comments are very supportive, recognising success and offering advice for improvement. The high quality of teaching reported after the previous inspection has been maintained.

144. English in the sixth form is very well led and managed. Decisions regarding the way in which A-level provision is organised are made after intense and well-documented discussion. The collegiate approach to management ensures that all teachers make a valuable contribution to the way in which it is organised. The department has a number of effective strategies to support students across the attainment range, ensuring that they all achieve a grade in the A-level examinations. The good provision of learning resources, many of which are produced in-house, has a positive impact on progress. There is a good programme of extra-curricular activities, such as a recent trip to the First World War battlefields, to enrich students' appreciation of their texts and to support their study skills. Insufficient use is made of statistical information to measure the progress students make during the course and thus to identify areas for further improvement.

## FRENCH

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

### Strengths

- Students' attitudes to the subject are very good.
- Teaching is good and sometimes very good.
- Teachers make a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### Areas for improvement

- Extend the use of assessment information to include the element of added value.
- Improve the resources in the library.

145. Over the last four years, the number of students entered for the A-level examination has been low. Results have varied but, in 2001, they were significantly below the national average, with none of the eight students obtaining a higher grade and half the group failing to secure an E grade. However, the results for 2002 show good improvement, with two of the three candidates obtaining higher grades. The trend over four years has been broadly in line with the national average for all schools.

146. In work seen during the inspection, standards of attainment in Year 13 were close to those expected nationally for the stage in course. Students have a good understanding of the foreign language, which the teachers use consistently well in class. They extract information successfully from conversations that they hear on cassette. Their oral skills are satisfactory and their pronunciation is satisfactory. In their work on topics, higher-attaining students write accurately and use different tenses competently. Middle and lower-attaining students are less

consistently accurate and are prone to basic errors, such as the omission of accents or the non-agreement of adjectives and nouns or of subject and verb.

147. In the AS-level examinations in 2002, four of the eight students obtained high grades but three of the other candidates were ungraded. Five of these students have continued their study in Year 13 for the A-level examination. The majority of the current students in Year 12, several of whom have come into the sixth form from other schools, secured grades A\* or A in their GCSE examinations. In the lessons observed, students had a very good understanding of a reading passage on the school system in France and they spoke reasonably confidently. Every student participated in a lesson on family relationships. Those who spoke used some of the new vocabulary that they had learnt in the lesson whilst the remainder listened attentively. These students are at a very early stage in their course and basic errors in their written work are still being ironed out. Nevertheless, several of the students wrote very accurately.
148. The majority of students make satisfactory progress and the higher-attaining students generally make good progress. Over time, students acquire the relevant vocabulary and grammatical structures to enable them to read and write about the wide variety of texts that they cover and to develop their skills in oracy and understanding. Students' attitudes to the subject are very good. They apply themselves well to their tasks, work co-operatively in pairs or groups and relationships are very good. The files from last year's students in Year 12 are well organised and systematic. Students respond to the teachers and contribute well in class.
149. Overall, teaching in the sixth form is good and sometimes it is very good. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and use the language consistently in class. This helps students to improve their aural skills. The teaching of basic skills is very thorough and elements of grammar occur in every lesson. Teachers' planning is very good and lessons are structured to include a variety of different activities and skills so that students maintain their interest and concentration during double lessons. Teachers' expectations are high, so that higher-attaining students are challenged and weaker students are supported. Teaching methods are effective and teachers employ a good range of strategies to ensure that all students are productive and work at a good pace. Exercises, which involve the students in completing blanks in a text from a list of words on the worksheet, are particularly effective, since the students have to think hard and their completed work provides the teacher with a good assessment of what they have retained. Time and resources are used very well. Homework is set regularly and includes independent research. Students' written work is marked thoroughly, with corrections and helpful comments. Relationships are very good.
150. The head of department provides good educational direction for the subject and management is sound. The two teachers who teach the complete two-year course have very similar teaching styles and complement one another well. Students speak appreciatively of the support they receive from their teachers in preparation for their oral examination and in their coursework. The department makes a good contribution to each aspect of students' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. There are few links with France or opportunities for students to participate in work experience abroad but steps are being taken to improve this. Assessment information is not used to calculate the value added by students. Resources in the library are inadequate. Improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory.