

INSPECTION REPORT

TOLWORTH GIRLS' SCHOOL
and
CENTRE FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

Surbiton

LEA area: Kingston upon Thames

Unique reference number: 102603

Headteacher: Mrs Clarissa Williams

Reporting inspector: Michael Buckley
30517

Dates of inspection: 28th - 31st October 2002

Inspection number: 249807

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Modern
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Girls with a mixed sixth form
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Anna MacCafferty
Date of previous inspection:	26 th April 1996

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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	4 - 7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	8 - 10
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	11 - 18
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	18 - 19
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	19
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	20 - 25
PART D: THE SIXTH FORM	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	26 - 27
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?	27 - 28
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?	28 - 29
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?	29 - 30
Assessment	
Advice, support and guidance	
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?	30
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	30 - 31
Leadership and management	
Resources	
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	32 - 51

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Tolworth is a large, non-selective, girls' secondary modern school with a mixed sixth form. It is very popular locally and there is a great deal of pressure on places, with over 500 applicants annually for the 210 places in Year 7. There are 1,020 girls in Years 7 to 11 and the sixth form has 268 students. Overall, 230 pupils (18 per cent) have a minority ethnic heritage. They come from a wide variety of backgrounds, the largest group of which is Indian. Thirteen pupils are refugees, mostly from Afghanistan. Of the 104 pupils learning English as an additional language, only 13 are at an early stage. All of these proportions are high nationally but comparatively low for outer London. Eight per cent of pupils (106) are recognised as being eligible for free school meals. This is a low proportion but it is rising each year. Altogether, 108 pupils have special educational needs (eight per cent), including three in the sixth form. Fourteen of these pupils (1.1 per cent) have statements identifying the additional support they need, mainly for specific learning difficulties. These figures are comparatively low. The school has been re-awarded 'Beacon School' status and it is a training school for the national Initial Teacher Training initiative, taking 24 students. It has won a number of national awards, including the ARTSMARK Gold Award and the Department for Education and Skills' School Achievement Award for consistent improvement in examination results. It has been accredited by 'Investors in People' and it is an active participant in the international 'Comenius' project. The school is applying for Art College status. The attainment of the great majority of pupils when they enter the school is close to the national average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Outstanding leadership, very good management and consistently very high standards of teaching combine to make this an exceptionally effective school. Standards reached in the Year 9 tests and in the GCSE examinations are well above the national averages and results at A-level are above, and often well above, the national averages. The achievements of pupils and students of all ages are very high. Pupils' attitudes to learning are a particular strength. Their enthusiasm for school, their behaviour and the quality of relationships throughout the school are all excellent. The school provides excellent value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils and students of all ages reach consistently very high levels of attainment and achievement.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good throughout the school.
- The school very successfully includes all its pupils and students, regardless of their age, gender, cultural or religious backgrounds or abilities, in the full range of its activities.
- Very good provision for personal development ensures that attitudes are very good and behaviour is excellent.
- The quality of educational leadership is outstanding and management is of a very high quality.

What could be improved

- The assessment and prediction of pupils' performance are not consistently based on nationally recognised systems.
- Accommodation is overcrowded and, in some areas, unsatisfactory.
- Statutory requirements for religious education and collective worship are not fully met.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since it was last inspected in April 1996, the school has made good improvements on what were already very high standards of provision and achievement. All the key issues identified then have been

thoroughly and successfully tackled, apart from those to do with religious education and collective worship. The quality of teaching has improved significantly.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	n/a	n/a	B	

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

Overall attainment in the GCSE examinations was well above the national averages and the averages for girls from 1999 to 2001 inclusive and there was further improvement in 2002. The results in 2001 were above those for other schools in similar socio-economic circumstances. Over the last few years, the GCSE results have been particularly good in art, drama, design and technology and physical education but not so strong in Spanish and German. The AS and A-level results for 2001 were above the national average but this year's overall results are very slightly lower. The 2002 results were outstanding in art and design and well above the national averages in mathematics, business studies, drama, geography, history and English. Standards in the 2002 Year 9 tests were well above the national averages for all pupils and the national averages for girls in English, mathematics and science. Teachers' assessments show that attainment in the other subjects of the National Curriculum is consistently well above the national averages. These very high standards have been maintained for the past four years. Attainment on entry to the school is close to the national average and pupils make very good progress throughout the school. Although the inspection was at the beginning of the school year, attainment in the work seen was already above the levels expected nationally in all the subjects inspected or sampled in Years 7 to 11 and often well above expected levels in Year 13. Across the school, standards in art are exceptionally high. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have been introduced successfully and standards in both these areas are also very high. Pupils with special educational needs achieve very good results. The school sets realistic but challenging targets which it regularly achieves and pupils are well on their way to meeting those set for next year.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	These are very good. Pupils like school and take a very active part in the wide range of activities offered to them. Their attitudes contribute significantly to forming an effective and harmonious school community.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is excellent. This creates a secure environment that develops pupils' confidence and contributes significantly to the very high quality of teaching and learning.
Personal development and relationships	The relationships at all levels are exemplary with high levels of mutual respect and trust across the school community. Pupils actively seek out the many opportunities offered to take responsibility.
Attendance	The school's overall attendance level is above national averages whilst the incidence of unauthorised absence is well below that of similar schools.

Pupils' enthusiasm and commitment to achieving well create a positive and harmonious environment for learning. There is a strong sense of community within the school in which all pupils, irrespective of their background, culture or abilities, are fully included.

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.

Teaching and learning are of a very high quality throughout the school. Only one of the 118 lessons seen was unsatisfactory while more than eight out of every ten were good or better and more than half were very good or excellent. There is no significant variation in quality between subjects or different year groups. English, mathematics and science are very well taught. Particular strengths of teaching are the very high levels of knowledge and understanding that teachers have of their subjects, their very high expectations of pupils and the often imaginative and creative approaches they use. Relationships are excellent and teachers' management of their pupils is nearly always outstanding. Pupils respond to this in very positive ways. They try exceptionally hard to do their best and to improve. They are eager to learn and concentrate very hard. On a very few occasions, teachers do not use assessment to meet the needs of all the pupils in their classes, leading on occasions to some underachievement in individual lessons. In a small number of lessons, teachers tend to spoon-feed pupils, limiting the opportunities for them to develop independent questioning or investigative skills. Generally, however, teachers are very knowledgeable about and sensitive to different learning needs and cater for them very skilfully, enabling pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, to make very good progress. Literacy and numeracy are very well taught and achievements are very good in these areas.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	These are good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form. Curriculum planning is very good. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum is very well adapted to meet almost all pupils' needs and aspirations.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This provision is very good throughout the whole school. Pupils are identified on entry and those with statements are monitored effectively. Individual education plans have realistic targets linked effectively to key skills and pupils are assessed regularly. The Code of Practice is very closely followed.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The few pupils learning English are very well supported and make very good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	This is very strong. Spiritual provision is very good. A very strong sense of morality is evident throughout the daily life of the school. Social development is very well promoted through ensuring that everyone is included in the school community and by a strong focus on equality and the wide range of links to the community. An abundance of poetry, drama and art very effectively develops a broad cultural awareness.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good academic and personal support for pupils. Very effective pastoral care systems. Heads of year show a strong sense of personal commitment to ensuring all pupils feel supported.

The school has a strong commitment to inclusive education and makes every effort to meet the needs of all its pupils. This year, not all pupils in Year 11 study information and communication technology and

not all those in Year 10 study design and technology but this will be remedied next year. Extra-curricular provision and enrichment activities are very good. The school's partnership with parents is well established and contributes well to academic and personal development. The school does not meet statutory requirements for providing religious education for older pupils and does not hold a daily act of collective worship.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff	Outstanding educational leadership from the headteacher is very well supported by the leadership team. Very high standards are set and maintained in teaching and learning. The school is very well managed. The work of heads of department and heads of year is of very high quality so that pupils' personal and academic development flourishes.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their responsibilities very effectively. They are very well informed and, as individuals, they are actively involved with different areas of the school's life. This enables them to monitor developments closely and to play a significant part in shaping the school's future.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Development planning is very firmly based on educational principles. The systems for monitoring progress towards the school's targets are very thorough and rigorous. Evaluations are clear and accurate.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are very efficiently and effectively deployed so that they produce as much benefit as possible for the pupils and students. Where additional funding has been received, the school has used it well for its proper purposes.

The school is unusually successful in realising its aims and meeting its targets. These apply to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils as well as to their academic achievements. The number of teachers and their experience and qualifications match the demands of the curriculum very well. Accommodation is unsatisfactory in several curriculum areas. In places, the fabric of buildings is poor and teaching space is inadequate. The school is generally well resourced. The principles of 'best value' are very closely followed.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The high expectations staff have that pupils will work hard and achieve their best. The leadership and management of the school. How the school helps pupils to become mature and responsible. Good teaching. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The amount of homework. More information about pupils' progress. Working more closely with parents.

Overall, the responses to the parents' questionnaire and the contributions at the parents' meeting indicate high levels of confidence in all aspects of the school. The inspection team fully supports the positive views of the school. The amount of homework set is in line with national guidelines but individual teachers do not always follow the school's homework timetable. Annual reports clearly show progress and parents are involved with target-setting. The school has strong links with parents, particularly through the heads of year and it actively encourages parental involvement.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

This sixth form, known as the Tolworth Centre for Continuing Education (TCCE), has 268 students - 245 girls and 23 boys. This makes it a larger than average sixth form and it is still growing. The majority of students are from Year 11 of Tolworth Girls' School but a growing minority, including the boys, are recruited from other local schools. Admission requirements differ, depending on the courses chosen, but they are similar to those set by most sixth forms and they are intended to give as many students as possible the opportunity to study their chosen courses. Most students enter with at least C grades in their GCSE examinations. TCCE offers courses in 27 different subjects at AS and A-levels, courses in three subjects leading to different levels of the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) and Intermediate and Foundation courses leading to GNVQ awards in two different areas of study. All the courses are taught on site by the staff of TCCE although, occasionally, arrangements are made for students to attend elsewhere for a part of their course.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is exceptionally effective. Standards of attainment and levels of achievement are very high. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good and often outstanding. There is a very good range of choice covering subjects at AS and A-levels and vocational courses at intermediate and advanced levels. These meet students' needs very well. The sixth form is very well led and managed and it is cost-effective.

Strengths

- Examination results that are above and often well above, the national averages.
- Consistently very good and often excellent teaching and learning.
- A very good range and variety of relevant courses.
- Very good support and guidance for students.
- Students' excellent attitudes and behaviour and excellent relationships at all levels.
- Very high standards of leadership and management.

What could be improved

- Calculation of the value added in the sixth form by measuring the students' potential against their actual attainment and the unit cost.
- The quality of the accommodation.

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	Good. A-level results are well above the national average and students achieve well. AS-level results in 2002 were poor. Teaching is good and teachers are committed to their students' success but there is scope for wider use of information and communication technology. Leadership and management are excellent.
Biology	Very good. Very good teaching leads to very good learning and achievement. A-level examination results have been above the national average for the last two years. The subject is very well led and managed.
Design and technology	Very good. A-level results are above national averages and standards of attainment in the work seen are good. Teaching is very good. The good pace of lessons combined with the teachers' thoughtful and sensitive approaches enable all students to make rapid gains in skill and understanding. Leadership and management are very good.
Business	Very good. Students make significantly better progress in this subject than their GCSE results predict. This is as a result of good teaching, very good support for individual students and very good relationships between teachers and students. A-level results are well above the national average. Leadership and management are very good.
Health and social care	Very good. Very good teaching and learning lead to good achievements for most students. Very good links with work experience placements. Students are hard working and have high aspirations.
Art	Excellent. Excellent teaching and learning resulting from highly effective teamwork amongst teaching staff. Consistent, exceptionally high results in A-level examinations and outstanding achievement from students of all levels of attainment. Exciting, visually stimulating sketchbooks.
Media studies	Good. By the end of Year 13, students are achieving above average results. The quality of the teaching is good and students are actively engaged in the lessons.
Geography	Very good. Standards at A-level are well above average and students achieve very well. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers know the subject very well and lessons are well planned.
History	Outstanding. Standards are well above average. Students achieve very well as a result of very good, supportive teaching. Leadership is excellent.
Psychology	Very good. Excellent leadership and management, together with very good teaching, enable students to take responsibility for their own learning. As a result, students learn well and achieve high standards at A level.
English	Very good. Standards are above average and A-level results are well above the national average. Teaching is very good and students are committed to their learning. Work in this subject is led very effectively.
French	Very good. Very good teaching leads to very good progress and very high standards of attainment in Year 13. A-level results are above the national average. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject. Leadership and management are very good.

Work was sampled in other subjects. In these, the quality of teaching and learning was consistently very good and, in one physics lesson, it was excellent. In almost all of these lessons, attainment was

above or well above the nationally expected levels and students' attitudes to their work were excellent. In no case was attainment below the expected level. The school has strength in depth across all the subjects offered in the sixth form.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good support for students includes very effective induction procedures. Consistent and good quality mentoring and tutoring enable students to make good progress and achieve good results.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The provision for sixth form students is very well led and managed. Staff and students show an exceptionally strong commitment to improving standards and to equality of opportunity. Students' attitudes and their personal and academic progress are very carefully monitored. Financial planning is good and the budget is very well managed so that resources are used efficiently. The sixth form accommodation is unsatisfactory.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The range of courses enables them to follow programmes of study that suit their talents and aspirations. The clarity, accuracy and usefulness of the printed information about subjects and courses. The help and encouragement they are given to study and research independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff do not always treat students as mature young adults. The school does not always listen to and take account of the views of students. There is not enough information about progress towards the qualifications they hope to obtain.

The inspection team fully supports the positive views expressed by the students. None of the students interviewed during the inspection, including representatives of the sixth form committee, endorsed the concerns expressed by a minority of students, nor did the inspection team find any evidence to support those concerns. On the contrary, there is evidence that the students are frequently consulted about the school in general and about sixth form provision in particular.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils and students of all ages reach consistently very high levels of attainment and achievement.

1. The attainment of the majority of pupils entering the school in Year 7 is close to the national average. They make very good progress through all year groups and, although the inspection took place early in the school year, the majority are already performing at levels above those expected nationally.
2. In 2002, the results of the national Year 9 tests were well above the national averages for all pupils and the national averages for girls in English, mathematics and science. These very high standards have been maintained for the past four years. For all subjects together, the results have been well above the national average and the average for girls over the last three years. The proportions of pupils who reach the higher levels are well above the national averages in all three subjects, with some pupils reaching the top five per cent nationally. When compared with the results of other schools in similar socio-economic circumstances, Tolworth's results are well above average in English and mathematics and above average in science. The trend in all three subjects has been upwards, despite a slight dip in science in 2001 and above the national trend. Results for 2002 show continuing improvements in English and science but a slight drop in mathematics. Teachers' assessments show that attainment in the other subjects of the National Curriculum is consistently well above the national average.
3. In 2001, the proportion of pupils obtaining five or more A* to C grades was well above the national average and had been so for the previous three years, increasing each year. A further improvement in 2002 means that this proportion is now significantly above the national average. The proportion obtaining 5 or more A* to G grades has been above the national average for the past four years. This percentage has been more or less the same each year. In 2001, the proportion obtaining one or more A* to G grades was slightly below the national average but, this year, all pupils achieved at least a G grade in every examination taken. The average point score was above the national average for girls and well above the national average and this has been the case over the last four years. Overall, the trend is in line with the national one, but at a higher level.
4. Most pupils take nine subjects for the GCSE examinations. The percentage obtaining nine A* to C grades is increasing and, in 2002, it was 46 per cent. Results for 2002 show a greater improvement in the percentage of A* to C grades than was seen nationally, with this proportion being significantly higher than the national figure for girls and an improved average point score. The results are above the national averages in all subjects except German and Spanish, where they are slightly below average. The school achieved particularly good results in art, business studies, history, music, single science and sociology. When compared with the results of other schools in similar socio-economic circumstances, the overall proportion of A* to C grades and the average point score are well above average.
5. When compared with their prior attainment in the 2000 Year 9 tests, almost all of the Year 11 pupils who took the GCSE examinations this year have made good or very good progress. However, if the 2001 GCSE results are compared with those of other schools achieving similarly very high results in the 1999 Year 9 tests, the proportion achieving five or more A* to C grades is below average and the average point score is well below average. The main reason for this is that the school is non-selective and it is in a borough where selective schools tend to recruit the very highest-attaining pupils. Consequently, Tolworth has comparatively fewer of those who are likely to achieve A* grades and comparatively more pupils who are likely to obtain a grade D or lower. Its very high standards in Year 9 place Tolworth in a category of schools that achieve standards well above those of most schools nationally but it has comparatively fewer pupils who can extend

their achievements still further to reach the highest standards at the most demanding levels of the GCSE examinations.

6. In 2001, the overall average point score for AS, A-level and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education entries was above the national average and above the average for boys. It was close to the average for girls. The school's results were also higher than the average for all providers of post-sixteen education. Provisional figures for 2002 show that results at AS-level overall were not as good as those for 2001. This was mainly due to a poor performance in mathematics caused by an inappropriate choice of entry criteria and modules. Nevertheless, the overall percentage of A and B grades was above the average for all pupils nationally and slightly above the average for girls. Boys in the sixth form did better than boys nationally.
7. At A level, the unconfirmed results for 2002 show that the percentage of A* to B grades and the percentage of A* to E grades were above both the national average and the average for girls. Almost 99 per cent of the 181 entries obtained a grade E or better. The most successful subjects at A level were art and design, drama, design and technology, English, sociology, psychology and physics. The subjects with the lowest proportion of A* and B grades, compared with the national averages, were mathematics, geography and chemistry. Results for 2002 show improvements in business studies, chemistry and history.
8. In English, pupils are attaining at above the levels expected for their age. This is reflected in the work seen during the inspection. By the end of Year 9, most pupils have made very good progress. They can write coherently in a range of forms and styles. Story writing, in particular, is good. The highest-attaining pupils are also very competent in critical writing, such as their reviews of Shakespeare, having learnt good analytical skills. The new system of 'Process Write' is already having a positive effect on pupils' ability to edit their own work, correct any errors and redraft to improve the overall style. Reading standards are good. The most able form clear opinions, for example, about the characters in *Macbeth*. Pupils have good opportunities to speak for a wide range of purposes, including presentations to whole classes. Plenty of opportunities are provided for a wide range of discussion and pupils are expected to explain clearly why they prefer one particular story to another.
9. Pupils in Year 11 are achieving at higher levels than are normally expected for their age. In writing, all pupils make very good progress and produce polished pieces of informative and imaginative writing. The higher-attaining pupils are confident in their critical analysis of the work of Dickens and other writers, easily explaining often quite difficult concepts. In a Year 10 class, some excellent teaching extended pupils' knowledge of the language used in the prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* and explored how it would have been understood by Elizabethan audiences. This improved pupils' confidence as readers and they all learnt very effectively. Pupils can read and understand a wide range of poetry and prose and the most able can analyse in detail the technical style of writers. Skills in speaking and listening also improve and pupils have very well developed confidence in presenting their work to the whole class. Work in pairs and groups also improves, with most pupils achieving a good understanding of how to modify what they say when addressing different audiences.
10. Standards of literacy throughout the school are good, with reading and writing skills being slightly stronger than those evident in speaking. Departmental plans show that improving literacy skills is a major focus of their work. In most subjects, teachers are aware of the need to concentrate on literacy. For example, key words are displayed and, in mathematics, modern foreign language, science, history and geography lessons in particular, they are explicitly taught to most classes. Teachers insist on pupils using the correct technical vocabulary for their subject. This is strongly evident in science and history. In mathematics, teachers emphasise new concepts by highlighting new vocabulary in their presentations. In many subjects, pupils have to do extensive written work. In religious education, they frequently have to explain their own views on matters that are open to argument. Most pupils make good progress with their spelling and handwriting and the good presentation of completed work is a high priority for all subjects. In several subjects, pupils have to undertake their own research projects. The well-equipped school library is extensively used for this work. Reading has been and remains a significant feature of many

- lessons. Pupils are expected to read independently and the school makes effective provision for different forms of reading. In several subjects, including drama, modern foreign languages, science, English and history, group work is well developed and pupils speak and listen effectively during those times. However, pupils are generally not so secure when speaking in whole class settings. Pupils listen attentively to each other and to adults.
11. Evidence from work seen reflects the high standards in mathematics achieved by pupils in Year 9. Most have very good number skills and confidently use mental methods in calculating answers. They can use percentages, fractions and decimals, comfortably changing from one to another as they solve problems. Most pupils can work systematically, generalise answers and confidently explain their work to their teacher and to other pupils in their class. Pupils can use algebra with confidence to generalise equations of sequences after identifying the pattern of numbers involved. They show very good understanding of space and shape and good data-handling and statistical skills. Their problem-solving skills are well developed. The use of computers is limited, as the mathematics department is in the process of acquiring appropriate software.
 12. Attainment by the age of 16 is well above average. Most pupils in Year 11 can use a range of sophisticated techniques for solving equations. They can solve quadratic equations and use trigonometry with ease. The GCSE statistics course is integrated into the mathematics course and all pupils confidently use a range of statistical techniques to analyse information and present their findings in a variety of ways. They can explain their work confidently to their teacher and to other pupils, giving logical arguments for their method and recognising the success of others. When working through investigations, pupils readily share experiences and are mutually supportive in discussing various routes through a particular task.
 13. Standards of numeracy across the whole school are high and pupils employ a wide range of skills and approaches. The school has a well-developed policy on numeracy that ensures a consistent approach across all curriculum areas. Many examples of good numerical skills were seen and mathematics lessons are well used to reinforce them. Pupils' mental skills are very advanced and many can work out complex answers in their heads. For example, in one lesson on probability, pupils could work in either fractions or decimals, readily converting from one to another. Numeracy skills are used in a number of subjects apart from mathematics. In physical education, pupils used them to work out fitness levels and count pulse rates. In science, pupils measure lengths in metric units and they use graphical representation more confidently than could be expected. Accuracy in measurement is stressed in design and technology. Pupils are taught to use calculators but are not over-dependent on them. They can draw, use and interpret charts, graphs and diagrams accurately in all subjects, as the need arises.
 14. In science, standards in Years 7 to 11 are in line with those expected nationally. Most pupils are making good progress towards the ambitious objectives set for the end of Year 9 but, at this early stage of the school year, only a relatively small proportion are working above the expected levels. Nevertheless, pupils can express their ideas clearly and practical skills are developed early. A high level investigation was seen in Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, a greater proportion of pupils are achieving well, showing a good grasp of concepts such as chemical equations and units of energy. In information and communication technology, most pupils in Years 7 and 8 make satisfactory progress and learn to use word-processors, spreadsheets, databases and graphics. Older pupils, following the half-GCSE course, develop, explore and communicate information well, particularly through integrating text and graphics and researching on the Internet for homework. Their skills in responding to and controlling events by planning, testing and modifying sequences of instructions are less secure. There is no systematic teaching of the subject in Years 9 and 11 but relevant skills are developed in some lessons, for example in design and technology, geography, history and English. Standards in the other subjects sampled were all at least in line with those expected nationally and they were well above level in art and geography.
 15. Overall, the progress of pupils with special educational needs is very good. The progress that they make when they receive additional lessons in the learning support department is good. Most pupils with special educational needs read to reflect their level of attainment and use appropriate strategies to pronounce words and develop meaning. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 who have poor reading skills make very good progress in the reading recovery programme that is

designed around the use of phonics, comprehension, scanning and spelling. Younger pupils withdrawn from a second language for additional literacy support make good progress in managing their own work and in extending their vocabulary through spelling and reading. In mainstream lessons, the majority of pupils are integrated successfully. In mathematics, pupils with special educational needs work competently on problem-solving involving number sequences, the area of rectangles, triangles and circles, problems involving time and simple equations. They begin to understand number and are developing a good understanding of place value. The few pupils learning English as an additional language also make very good progress owing to the very high levels of support and teaching they receive.

16. This is a very high-attaining school that sets itself realistic but challenging targets for pupils and students in all year groups. The results of the Year 9 tests, the GCSE examinations and the results of AS and A-level examinations have met and generally significantly exceeded all the targets set for the past four years.

The quality of teaching and learning is very good throughout the school.

17. Teaching and learning are consistently very good across the whole school. Only one of the 118 lessons seen was unsatisfactory while more than eight out of every ten were good or better and more than half were very good or excellent. Almost one in every ten lessons was excellent. There is no significant variation in the quality of teaching and learning between different subjects or different year groups. However, the teaching in the sixth form is of a very high quality indeed. Some rather pedestrian teaching was seen in science in Years 7 to 11 but, nevertheless, English, mathematics and science are very well taught overall.
18. Particular strengths of teaching are the very high levels of knowledge and understanding that teachers have of their subjects, their very high expectations of pupils and the often imaginative and creative approaches used. These factors enable teachers to plan their lessons taking into account the points where pupils are most likely to experience difficulties and where they may find the going easier. Critical points in a lesson's structure are well used to make understandable and concise summaries. Teachers respond flexibly to pupils and ask questions that challenge them to think out answers rather than simply supply facts. Where teachers have highly developed skills, for example in art and music, their own competence and enthusiasm give great confidence to pupils, encouraging them to experiment and to push themselves further. Another strength of the teaching is the skilful use made of one-to-one support and support for small groups of pupils while they are working independently. The quality of lesson planning is very good; learning objectives are made clear at the start of lessons and generally reviewed at the end. However, teachers sometimes leave too little time for this activity. Teachers make very good use of homework and mark work very constructively.
19. Relationships are excellent and teachers are often successful in making lessons fun. As a result, teachers' management of their pupils is nearly always outstanding and pupils' responses are very positive. Pupils generally know their targets and the levels they are achieving and understand what they have to do to improve. They try exceptionally hard to do their best. They are eager to learn and concentrate very hard. Virtually all pupils volunteer to take an active part in learning, knowing their contributions will be valued and respected. On a very few occasions, teachers do not use assessment to meet the needs of all the pupils in their classes, leading to some underachievement in individual lessons. In a small number of lessons, teachers tend to spoon-feed pupils, limiting the opportunities for them to develop independent questioning or investigative skills. This was evident in some of the younger science classes, where opportunities for pupils to think for themselves and show initiative were sometimes missed.
20. Teachers are generally very knowledgeable about and sensitive to different learning needs and cater for them very skilfully, enabling pupils of all abilities to make very good progress. Pupils with special educational needs receive effective help and encouragement from teachers and from the learning support team. Consequently, they learn very well and their achievements are much better than might be expected. In additional lessons in the learning support department, the attitudes and behaviour of pupils with special educational needs are very good. They ask and

answer questions well and discuss subjects with confidence. They concentrate hard, behave very well and take a pride in their work. They work at their own pace, accepting help and they all say that they feel very well supported and know where to go if they have a problem or need any help. They are involved well by teachers and their peers. The few pupils who are at the early stages of learning English as an additional language are also very well supported by specialist teachers and by teachers in the subject departments.

21. Literacy and numeracy are very well taught. The school has spent a great deal of effort in establishing these disciplines and teachers have had additional opportunities for professional development. They have adjusted very well to the new demands and teachers in all subjects have successfully adapted such concepts as key words, strategies for mental mathematics and initial plenary sessions to suit their own subjects. As a result, learning and achievement are very good in these areas.

The school very successfully includes all its pupils and students, regardless of their age, gender, cultural or religious backgrounds or their abilities, in the full range of its activities.

22. The school has a strong commitment to inclusive education. It has explicit aims and values, including a commitment to good relationships and equality of opportunity for all, which are reflected in all its work. There are effective procedures for consultation, planning and review. The philosophy, policies, planning and management of provision for pupils with special educational needs are very good. Learning support is successful across the school because all departments assume the responsibility for helping pupils and students to achieve as much as they possibly can, whatever their starting point or learning difficulty. The quality of care and welfare for these pupils is good. They are identified and tested on entry. Pupils with statements are monitored effectively and annual review assessments meet all statutory requirements. Individual education plans have realistic targets linked to key skills and pupils are assessed regularly. Additional assessment of reading is effective and constructive comments are fed back to pupils.
23. The Code of Practice for pupils with special educational needs is well understood and is implemented in the spirit and the letter. This is a school where the learning support department makes an unusually strong contribution to the standards of attainment and the quality of learning. Some pupils in Years 8 and 9, who have difficulty with literacy and numeracy, receive curriculum support instead of a second modern language. They also receive in-class support in other subjects. They receive effective help and encouragement from teachers and the learning support team, they improve their skills and understanding and their achievements are similar to those of other average-attaining pupils. Pupils with individual education plans make good progress towards their set targets. Older pupils make good progress in the use of information and communication technology to improve their coursework in withdrawal groups for literacy support and in life skills courses.
24. As a result, there are numerous examples of exceptional individual achievements and many pupils with special educational needs achieve six or more GCSE passes, often with grades A* to C. This success is due in part to the provision of option support in Years 10 and 11 that enables course work and homework to be brought up to a high standard. Last year, three pupils with statements of special educational needs returned to study in the sixth form.
25. The school has few students learning English as an additional language. However, provision for them is good across the school. There are good systems for welcoming pupils and for their induction that include both year teams and subject teachers. Good guidelines for supporting pupils learning English as an additional language in lessons are widely used and the co-ordinator gives regular support to teaching departments. A clear learning plan for each pupil forms the basis of additional support in lessons, supplemented by an 'alert card' that each pupil has, reminding teachers of their learning needs. Good-quality learning resources help these pupils to make similar progress to that of their peers. Their attainment reflects the overall very high levels achieved in the school.

26. The introduction of the Literacy Strategy across the curriculum has had an early impact. In particular, the imaginative process of linking this work with the needs of the more able has helped the school understand more of all pupils' learning needs. The headteacher and one of the assistant head teachers are steering the strategy group effectively. Early monitoring suggests that able pupils are being relatively well catered for across many subjects and that a better match of work to needs has followed. The school is aware that further monitoring of the overall impact of the strategy will be essential to ensure that the implementation becomes fully embedded.
27. Pupils and parents are particularly complimentary about the schools' work to provide personal and academic support for all its pupils. The school's partnership with parents is well established and contributes well to academic and personal development achievement. The school provides very well for the care, guidance and support of the pupils, as well as for their welfare and safety. There are very well established procedures for dealing with child protection issues and no serious risk to the health and safety of the pupils or staff was evident during the inspection. The pastoral care structures are well established and known by the pupils. The heads of year work very hard, often in their own time, to deal with personal and welfare issues. They are readily accessible throughout the school day and have established very effective links with other staff in the school. Parents and pupils rate this aspect of school life very highly. The staff know the pupils very well and have a good understanding of their social and personal circumstances. Incidents of bullying are rare but, when they do occur, the pupils state that staff deal with the matter quickly and effectively. There is as a very low incidence of exclusions.

Very good provision for personal development ensures that attitudes and behaviour are excellent.

28. The school values highly and promotes very strongly the personal development of the pupils. Many opportunities are provided for them to take responsibility, inside and outside the classroom. Pupils are given unsupervised use of classrooms during breaks and at lunchtime. They value this trust and respond by treating property with great respect and they often tidy the rooms before they leave them. Other opportunities to take responsibility include representation on the school council and organising fund-raising activities. Students in the sixth form help in the main school by providing mentoring and support for younger pupils. Provision for personal and social development is very effectively promoted through the newly developed programme of citizenship and the lessons in personal and social education, as well as through other subjects of the curriculum.
29. Pupils' enthusiasm for school is outstanding. Their attitudes to learning and their standards of behaviour are exemplary and make an excellent contribution to learning and achievement. Pupils concentrate very well, listen closely to teachers and engage wholeheartedly in activities. In many lessons, they ask relevant and often searching questions to further their knowledge and understanding. They are fully aware that their teachers have high expectations and are keen to meet them, showing a genuine eagerness to do well and try hard. They take great care with written work, which is nearly always well presented.
30. Relationships across the whole school are excellent and contribute very strongly to the friendly, secure and happy learning environment. There is a very real sense of inclusiveness in the school community. During the inspection, no evidence emerged of racism or of violent, unkind or oppressive behaviour. Behaviour in and out of classrooms is excellent. Pupils respect their teachers and carefully follow the guidance they provide. Lessons proceed without disruption so that teachers meet their objectives and very high standards of learning and achievement are maintained. Despite their large numbers, pupils move about the school in an orderly and mature manner. There have been no permanent exclusions and only eight fixed-period exclusions in the past 12 months. These figures are well below the national averages and represent an improvement since the last inspection. The level of unauthorised absence is also well below national averages.
31. Provision for spiritual development is very good even though the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship. Religious education lessons explore in depth the spiritual dimensions of

various faiths. Displays around the school show high levels of spiritual awareness touching on a variety of issues, such as world peace. Spiritual development is very well fostered through planned activities in various areas of the curriculum. For example, in an English lesson on *'Richard II'*, pupils explored the nature of evil and its origins. Some outstanding displays in the corridors and other communal areas provide excellent demonstrations of how beautiful artefacts can be created from waste materials. The school has enabled pupils to explore and express in very moving ways their own and other people's experiences and emotions arising from bereavement.

32. A strong sense of morality pervades the daily life of the school. There is an emphasis on fairness and equality of opportunity and teachers stress the importance of valuing others and of mutual respect. The school's ethos strongly reflects moral values that are actively and consistently reinforced. These values are embedded in behaviour policies that are consistently and fairly applied. Behavioural expectations and boundaries are explicit and well understood by the pupils. There is a very strong awareness of social issues, such as inclusion and democracy. In lessons, pupils work well in groups or pairs and demonstrate good interpersonal skills. The school supports the pupils' involvement in a wide range of charitable work, mainly through fund-raising activities. A large number of pupils are actively involved in these activities and they have raised substantial sums for a variety of causes. Social development is promoted through ensuring that everyone is included in the school community and by exploring the wide range of links to the wider community. For example, the local MP, representatives from the police and health services have all recently visited the school to talk to pupils. There is also a very good range of outside visits and residential trips, which further pupils' social awareness and development.
33. Cultural awareness is very well promoted across the curriculum and in the outstanding displays of pupils' work. Pupils very successfully express their growing awareness and appreciation of their own and other cultures through poems, drama and art. For example, during 'One World Week', a number of participants from other cultures visit and take part in activities with the pupils. This event enables pupils to find out about other cultures at first hand. Some pupils voluntarily participated in a public event commemorating the violent death of a local young Asian man by performing their own programme of dance. As part of an anti-bullying programme, pupils expressed their own, often powerful, feelings about racism, bullying and victimisation through their poetry and art. The products of their work form a striking display in the school's main foyer.

The quality of educational leadership is outstanding and management is of a very high quality.

34. The educational leadership provided by the headteacher is outstanding. She has a very clear view of how the school should develop, not only in terms of academic attainment but also as an educationally inclusive organisation with a very strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural ethos that permeates every part of school life. This is clearly visible in the excellent relationships that exist between pupils and adults at every level, the very high degree of commitment to learning and raising standards shown by pupils and staff and the very high expectations set, as well as in the school's academic success.
35. The headteacher is very well supported by the leadership team. They share responsibilities for strategic planning and for monitoring the school's progress towards its targets. This work is done very effectively through weekly leadership team meetings and weekly individual meetings with the headteacher. Each half term, a longer meeting is held that conducts a formal review of progress. Members of the leadership team also have pastoral links with year groups. They meet heads of year once a week and have frequent meetings with heads of department. These middle managers not only carry out their pastoral and academic duties very well but they are also widely involved in the planning for the whole school, often chairing working parties. Younger staff are also drawn into planning and development through these working parties, so that the staff as a whole feel responsibility for and ownership of policies and are proud of the school's progress. There is a very high level of shared commitment to the school's continuing success.
36. The governors work very closely with the school and fulfil their responsibilities very effectively. They are very well informed by regular reports from the headteacher and financial statements from

the senior administrative officer. As individuals, they are actively involved with different areas of the school's life. This enables them to monitor developments closely and to play a significant part in shaping the school's future. They conduct their business through a number of committees of which the strategic policy group, the budget monitoring group, the premises committee and the personnel group meet most regularly. These groups are unusual in that they have strong and active representation from the school's senior management. Their minutes indicate that they are not prepared to take anything for granted and that they hold robust discussions about key decisions. Governors have been actively involved with the school's bid for Art College status. Many of them visit the school regularly to make contact with heads of department or other relevant staff and they sometimes go into lessons by prior arrangement. The chair of governors has formal monthly meetings with the headteacher and they are in frequent contact by telephone and e-mail. Governors take their responsibilities as links between the school and the community very seriously and a 'governor of the month' system ensures that the governing body is always represented by at least one governor at every public occasion.

37. The cycle of developmental planning is linked to the financial planning cycle. It follows a logical pattern of rigorous review and target-setting in which all staff and governors are involved at various points. The targets set directly address the school's educational aims and targets are set for each department in departmental action plans. These are reviewed in individual discussions with the head teacher. The school improvement plan is a detailed document that sets time deadlines, identifies responsible persons and costs and criteria for measuring success. Departmental plans follow a similar structure. Budgetary planning is securely based on educational priorities and financial management is very good.
38. There are very good arrangements for monitoring curriculum development and the quality of teaching. This is done systematically by heads of department according to an agreed set of criteria. Observations are recorded and points for improvement are shared with teachers. The leadership team also monitor teaching and have been responsible for a number of initiatives intended to widen the range of strategies used. The success of this is reflected in the very high quality of teaching seen and the improvement since the last inspection. Arrangements for performance management are very good. The Literacy Strategy is being very well managed and effectively implemented and provision is good. The strategy has been linked with the school's work on developing better provision for more able pupils. A clear and well-organised sequence of work has been in place since July 2001, led by an assistant headteacher.
39. The quality of leadership and management in the learning support department is very good. The learning support team plays a key role in the development of the inclusive practice that permeates the school. Procedures for managing provision for pupils with special educational needs are effective and efficient enabling the school to follow all the guidance in the Code of Practice. The learning support assistants are very efficiently deployed to ensure that those pupils with statements of special educational needs receive the best possible support. Funding for special educational needs is used appropriately and resources are very well targeted to support the teaching and learning of these pupils.
40. 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 newly qualified teachers and the graduate trainee teachers. Professional development days are well planned and have a focus relating to the priorities identified in the school development plan. Departments base their training needs on their own departmental priorities and individual members of staff have the chance to identify and benefit from appropriate training linked to performance management. Effective procedures enable the school to monitor the impact of any training undertaken. Overall, the whole system is efficient and effective.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The assessment and prediction of pupils' performance are not consistently based on nationally recognised systems.

41. The progress of individual pupils and students is very closely monitored and challenging targets are set. The majority of students know their targets and understand what they need to do to improve. However, systems of target-setting have not yet been fully developed to determine value-added achievement by measuring potential against actual attainments. The school is considering ways of improving the system with a greater use of self-assessment by pupils and students and value-added analysis.

Accommodation is overcrowded and, in some areas, unsatisfactory.

42. Significant aspects of the accommodation are unsatisfactory. In the more modern parts of the building, teaching accommodation is good and enables the curriculum to be taught well. There is good accommodation for mathematics and geography but substantial improvements are needed for science, design and technology, business studies, music and information and communication technology.
43. The sixth form building is in poor condition. For example, the windows cannot be opened because of the risk that the glass will fall out. The size of the building barely accommodates the current number of students and difficulties are likely to occur with the planned increase in numbers. The lack of adequate teaching space places restrictions on teaching methods. For example, opportunities for students to work in small groups or in pairs are limited. The school is actively addressing the accommodation issues.

Statutory requirements for religious education and collective worship are not fully met.

44. The school does not meet the statutory requirements for teaching religious education in Year 11 or in the sixth form. This was the case at the time of the last inspection but, despite repeated attempts, it has not been possible to appoint enough suitable staff to teach the subject to every year group. Difficulties caused by the widely scattered and inadequate accommodation make a daily act of collective worship impracticable. In one senior assembly during the inspection, it took nearly ten minutes for the very well behaved and orderly congregation of over 600 girls to settle into the sports hall and a similar time for them to return to their classrooms. The school is taking this into consideration in the general review of its daily timetable.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The school overall

In order to raise the already very high standards of attainment and achievement still further, the school's senior management and governors need to:

- develop the school's systems for the assessment and prediction of pupils' performance so that they are consistently based on nationally recognised formulae that will provide a better means of showing the value added by the school;

(paragraph 41)

- continue to search for ways to improve the overcrowded accommodation; and

(paragraph 42)

- ensure that the statutory requirements for religious education and collective worship are fully met.

(paragraph 44)

Sixth form

- Ensure that the statutory requirements for religious education and collective worship are fully met; and

(paragraph 44)

- Replace the unsatisfactory accommodation.

(paragraph 43)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 to 11	51
	Sixth form	67
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		56

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	3	17	18	12	1	0	0
Percentage	6	33	35	24	2	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	8	34	20	5	0	0	0
Percentage	12	51	30	7	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1,020	268
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	106	7

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	12	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	105	3

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	104

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	18

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.9
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	0	180	180

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	150	150	142
	Total	150	150	142
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	83 (88)	83 (82)	79 (84)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	54 (45)	63 (62)	52 (49)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	142	139	127
	Total	142	139	127
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	80 (n/a)	81 (n/a)	71 (77)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	39 (n/a)	60 (n/a)	38 (42)
	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	N/A	179

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	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	130	168	171
	Total	130	168	171
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	73 (68)	94 (94)	96 (97)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	44.4
	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)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	6	63	69
	Average point score per candidate	8.2	6.9	7.0
National	Average point score per candidate	5.3	5.6	5.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	5	57	62	1	6	7
	Average point score per candidate	17.6	16.6	16.7	18.0	15.0	15.4
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1,025	7	0
0	0	0
51	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	1	0
37	0	0
5	0	0
4	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
13	0	0
5	0	0
11	0	0
103	0	0
0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	81.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.7

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	390

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
	£
Total income	3,798,757
Total expenditure	3,732,780
Expenditure per pupil	3,188

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

Key Stage 3	25.7
Key Stage 4	23.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Balance brought forward from previous year	Nil
Balance carried forward to next year	65,977

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	23.1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	26.8

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,288
Number of questionnaires returned	388

30 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.	45	48	4	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	49	43	2	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	39	54	3	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	54	12	2	1
The teaching is good.	43	50	2	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	46	12	2	10
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	42	5	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	33	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	29	52	11	2	6
The school is well led and managed.	57	37	2	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	49	44	3	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	44	42	4	1	8

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

45. In 2001, the overall average point score for AS, A-level and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) entries was above the national average and above the average for boys. It was close to the average for girls. The school's results were higher than the average for all providers of post-sixteen education. Provisional figures for 2002 show that results at AS level overall were not as good as those for 2001. This was mainly due to a poor performance in mathematics caused by an inappropriate choice of entry criteria and modules. Nevertheless, the percentage of A and B grades was above the average for all pupils and slightly above the average for girls and the majority of subjects achieved a 100 per cent pass rate at grade E or better. Boys in the sixth form did better than boys nationally. At A-level, the overall unconfirmed results for 2002 are slightly lower than those for 2001. Nevertheless, the percentage of A* to B grades was well above and the percentage of A* to E grades was above the overall national average and the average for girls. The most successful subjects at A level were art and design, drama, design and technology, English, sociology, psychology and physics. The subjects with the lowest proportion of A* and B grades, compared with the national averages, were mathematics, geography and chemistry. Results for 2002 show improvements in business studies, chemistry and history. The results in AVCE courses are close to the national average in business and above average in health and social care and travel and tourism. Despite the slight drop in overall results at AS and A-levels, the school is successfully maintaining very high standards. Retention rates are very good and a high proportion of students successfully gain entrance to their chosen courses in higher education.
46. Overall standards of work seen in the sixth form are well above those expected for the stage of the school year. They were above or well above the expected levels in every subject inspected and particularly high in art and design, geography, history and psychology. Progress through the sixth form is very good and students achieve standards that are above and often well above, those that could be predicted from their GCSE results. Students with special educational needs are very well supported and make very good progress. This is the case even in areas where standards of attainment are not so high, such as the Intermediate health and social care course. Students learning English as an additional language receive a lot of individual attention and teachers modify tasks to meet their needs. They too make very good progress. There are no significant differences between the attainment and progress of groups of students. Students develop very good skills in communication and numeracy, although a few need more encouragement in oral communication and debate. Skills in information and communication technology are less systematically developed and, although all students have open access to computers in the library, they are less frequently available for classroom use during lessons. This limits what they can accomplish in some subjects, such as biology. All departments set challenging targets that have mostly been met over the past three years and the school has exceeded the targets it sets for itself for the past three years. Inspection evidence indicates that current targets will be met and often exceeded, in the subjects inspected and that very good progress is made in the sixth form.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

47. The students' attitudes to school are very good. They show high levels of enthusiasm for their work and are eager to do well. Their commitment to success emerged clearly during discussions. Students have set their sights high and are willing to work hard to meet their aims. When arriving for studies, they display a strong sense of purpose and quickly settle into school routines. Discussions with students who have joined the sixth form from other schools reveal that they are very quickly assimilated by the inclusive nature of the school and its wide range of activities. Students take a keen interest in the life of the school as a whole. For example, they

provide support and mentoring for younger pupils in terms of both emotional support and help with aspects of the curriculum.

48. Students speak very favourably about their relationships with staff and the majority see this as a particular strength of the sixth form. They respond very well to the advice and support given by staff, especially their tutors. Relationships between students are excellent. There is a strong sense of mutual support and friendship. Students moving into the sixth form are given advice and help by their more experienced peers.
49. Students are keen to take responsibility for their own learning environment. The sixth form committee is very active in arranging events and it is the forum for consultation about issues to do with the sixth form and the school as a whole. For example, the committee were consulted and given the freedom to choose the décor when the social area was recently redecorated. Students are provided with a range of opportunities for social and moral development, mainly through the courses being studied. For example, in media studies, the students focus on and discuss issues such as gender, stereotyping and the consumer society, whilst topics in philosophy and ethics include abortion. Spiritual and cultural development is also very good in the sixth form.
50. Attendance is very good. It is only slightly below that of the school as a whole and levels of unauthorised absences are low. Students are keenly aware of the impact of poor attendance on their work.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

51. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are of a very high standard indeed. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen; more than nine out of every ten lessons were good or better and two-thirds were very good or better. Teaching was excellent in almost one lesson in every eight. The teaching of art is excellent but, otherwise, there are no significant differences between the quality of teaching and learning in different subjects.
52. Teachers are very skilful in using their extensive knowledge of their subjects to promote the very good learning that takes place. Their enthusiasm for and expertise in their subjects are used to motivate and inform students. Teachers have very high expectations of what students can achieve that are carefully linked to accurate assessments of their needs and abilities. Teachers assess and monitor students' progress very well and very good use is made of performance data. Progress is checked regularly and students know what level they are working at and what their targets are, based on their GCSE scores and their teachers' expectations. If individual students submit work that does not come up to the expected standards, they are generally expected to repeat it. Teachers ensure that students know exactly what is expected of them for the final written examinations and also what tasks have to be completed for the course.
53. Excellent working relationships create a relaxed but very focused environment with shared learning at its core. Lessons are characterised by the enthusiasm and active engagement of students and teachers. Students concentrate well and remain on task throughout the whole of the lessons. This is particularly notable in small groups, where they maintain a mature focus on the task in hand. Positive relationships with their students underpin the teachers' excellent management of their classes and allow them to inject humour, encouragement and very helpful guidance. In addition, they plan a rich range of activities, ensuring that all students contribute fully in lessons. Students appreciate the support of their teachers and their commitment is total.
54. The lessons are very well planned, with clear objectives that challenge students across the whole attainment range. Teachers structure lessons so that they provide a series of different, progressively challenging tasks. For example, in mathematics, teachers' questions are carefully sequenced to develop a clearer understanding of new concepts. In a Year 12 lesson on co-ordinate geometry, the teacher used questions very well to summarise previous work before developing the theory further and exploring different approaches to reaching a solution. Good lesson planning is linked to imaginative teaching methods to maintain students' interest. In one excellent lesson about photosynthesis and respiration, questions were carefully selected so that

the teacher could transmit her enthusiasm for the subject to her students. She conducted the lesson at pace and maintained very high expectations, frequently checking that learning was taking place. In a lesson about gaseous exchange and exercise, Year 12 students learnt very well because the teacher broke the lesson up into a range of activities with clear time targets, ensuring that the momentum of learning was maintained.

55. In the best lessons, teachers have strategies to ensure that students take responsibility for their own learning. This high-quality planning results in very high standards of learning and attainment. In an excellent lesson in psychology, the teacher set a sequence of timed tasks in which students practised how to extract information from written resources. As a result, the students became increasingly skilled in carrying out independent research and compiling their own notes. These were checked when students fed back their findings to the group. Teachers' very good organisation and high expectations generally ensure that students learn well, acquiring and consolidating new knowledge and skills. A very good balance has been struck between support for students and their personal development as independent learners. Occasionally, though, teachers offer too much direction and spoon-feed students with information.
56. Teachers provide students with good opportunities to develop basic skills in communication and numeracy. For example, in geography, written work is drafted and redrafted to improve its quality and students are given many opportunities to present their work orally. The initiative to improve literacy skills is beginning to have a positive impact on sixth form mathematics work, where teachers stress the meanings of key words. However, in several subjects, students have too few opportunities to use information and communication technology. For example, in biology, there are not enough sensors or computers for students to analyse the data from their experiments.
57. A strength of teaching on vocational courses is that teachers enable students to make the links between the very good range and variety of work experience they undertake and the theory studied at school. In health and social care, students make frequent spontaneous references to what they have learned from practical experiences and from speakers and visitors from the health and social care-related professions. In business, students are encouraged to offer their own opinions and use their prior business knowledge to provide answers to the specific questions posed, although not all do this without prompting.
58. Students' work is marked with clear advice about how they might improve and, in lessons, teachers provide frequent feedback and positive criticism. Students then adapt and improve their work. Homework assignments are regularly marked and students are given clear judgements on the quality of their work with helpful comments about how to improve it. Assessment is rigorous and very effective. Regular testing and one-to-one discussions with teachers have a major influence on progress. Students know clearly how to improve their work. However, short-term target-setting has not yet been developed fully as an assessment tool to challenge the higher-attaining students and to determine value-added achievement. The system could be improved further by more target-setting, greater use of self-assessment by students and value-added analysis at AS and A-levels.

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

59. The breadth and balance of the sixth form curriculum are very good. Almost all students can follow their choice of subjects and parents and students are very pleased with the provision. Altogether, a choice of twenty-seven subjects is offered at AS and A levels and about two-thirds of the students follow these courses. Most take up to four AS-level courses in Year 12 and three or four A-level courses in Year 13. The school has developed a range of vocational courses leading to the Advanced Certificate in Vocational Education (AVCE) in business, health and social care and travel and tourism, as well as the related Intermediate-level GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism and health and social care. About ten per cent of students are following an AVCE course and about one fifth of students are studying a combination of AS or A-level and vocational courses.

60. This is a very well planned programme with entry requirements designed to offer opportunities for post-sixteen education to as many students as possible while maintaining the very high standards of success for which the school is rightly noted. Students with special educational needs are very well supported and many achieve very high standards. Students say that their aims and aspirations are very well met and the courses are very carefully matched to local circumstances. Progression is built in to the courses and it is very carefully monitored. Additional access to a foreign language is now offered through a business language course in Spanish. Work-related education is strongly developed in health and social care and business and in the leisure, travel and tourism programmes. Teachers are expert in encouraging students to make links between their work experience and the theoretical learning obtained at school.
61. Very good resources for careers education and guidance are supported by regular tutorials and students are well advised about choice of careers and higher education. Key skills are very well taught through subjects as well as in dedicated sessions. Elements of health and sex education are taught in tutorials and through the personal and social education programme that also addresses moral and cultural issues. Students are encouraged to take responsibility for younger pupils, acting as mentors and as 'helpliners' to provide support and advice. They also participate in the school council and the sixth form committee. The sixth form offers a very wide range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities with a high take-up rate. Very good links with the community support work placements as well as providing many relevant visiting speakers.
62. The sixth form does not meet statutory requirements for the provision of religious education or daily collective worship.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

63. Assessment is thorough, with detail built up over a five-year period. All departments use prior attainment data to predict grades at AS and A-levels and a new reporting system is based on half-termly minimum grades. There is very detailed monitoring for individual students and challenging targets are set. The majority of students know their targets and understand what they need to do to improve. Assessment information is also used well to plan teaching and curriculum development. Systematic revision is well supported.
64. However, systems of target-setting have not yet been fully developed to challenge the higher-attaining students, to evaluate how far students reach their true potential and to measure the value added against unit costs. The system could be improved further by greater use of self-assessment by students and value-added analysis at AS and A-levels.

Advice, support and guidance

65. The support and guidance provided to students are very good. Well-established induction procedures are very effective and enable students to settle quickly into their studies. This is especially so for students coming into the sixth form from other schools. They report very favourably on the welcome they are given and the very good relationships that quickly form between staff and other students. Male students, entering the school in Year 12, feel that they are rapidly assimilated into the school's community and that they are treated with fairness and respect.
66. There is a very strong ethos of mutual respect and staff have very high expectations of students. They want students to do well and to achieve their goals. Very effective tutorial sessions help students to meet their aspirations and enable them to understand and maintain their progress. Although a few students would like further support in this area, the majority express high levels of satisfaction with the efforts of teaching staff. The welfare and well-being of the students are very

carefully monitored. Staff are very approachable and willing to deal with personal issues or, when appropriate, to call on the services of other professionals, such as counsellors.

67. The school provides very effective advice and good opportunities for students to make decisions about courses of study, university choices and careers. Students are clear about their futures and have already made important choices about university or employment. In the school as a whole, pupils are made well aware about this area of their education. For example, there are very good quality prominent displays in the communal areas of the school. Through these displays, pupils of all ages can learn about the type and content of courses in the sixth form and they are given points of contact should they wish to know more. The school's very good provision ensures that, by the time pupils have a chance to enrol in the sixth form, they already have had sound advice and developed a very good awareness of what is available.
68. Procedures for monitoring attendance are systematic and very effective. Staff react quickly to any emerging problems, establishing the causes, providing support and, if necessary, placing students on short-term reports. The absence of unacceptable behaviour, such as bullying, racism or other oppressive behaviour creates a learning environment that is friendly, caring and safe.

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

69. Almost half of the students completed the questionnaire sent out before the inspection. The results show very good levels of satisfaction with the sixth form provision. Particular strengths include the range of choices available, enabling students to follow courses of study in line with their talents and career aims, the very good range of accurate and helpful printed material about subjects and courses, and the encouragement students are given to undertake independent study and research. The inspection team fully endorse these views.
70. Responses to the questionnaire indicate that a minority of students feel they are not treated as responsible young adults. A much smaller minority feel that the school does not take account of students' views and that information and advice about progress and life after school is not sufficient. However, when inspectors interviewed students, including members of the sixth form committee, none of these areas emerged as issues. The school regularly conducts surveys of students' opinions about the effectiveness of teaching and the results are used well to improve sixth form provision.
71. Parents are actively encouraged to contact staff to discuss any concerns or to find out how well the students are progressing. Annual progress reports are of very good quality and provide parents with a good understanding about how well students are doing.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

72. The Tolworth Centre for Continuing Education is very well led and managed by a very enthusiastic and committed director and her deputy. The principal aim, to enable students to develop as independent adults, is fully met and a very clear educational philosophy underpins the planning of the programmes that are offered. This is based on the principle of offering appropriate opportunities for further education to as many students as possible. The range of courses is wide and carefully chosen to meet a variety of needs and aspirations. The very high standards of teaching and learning seen during the inspection are indicators that the successful record in examinations is likely to continue. The staff working with sixth form students show the same exceptionally strong commitment to improving standards and equality of opportunity as their colleagues in the rest of the school.
73. Direct management of the teaching staff is through the heads of department but the director of the sixth form has a very clear view of classroom practice and liaises very closely with the staff

concerned. Very close attention is paid to raising standards in all areas of provision. Students' attitudes and their personal and academic progress are very carefully monitored by the tutorial team, all of whom have regular meetings with the director of the sixth form or her deputy. If there are any causes for concern, these are dealt with promptly and effectively and students are given very close support.

74. The development of the sixth form and its progress towards its targets are carefully and systematically monitored by the director in consultation with heads of department and, in turn, by the headteacher and governors. Proposals for development are built in to the school's overall planning cycle and are carefully considered by governors. Financial planning is good and the budget is very well managed so that resources are used efficiently. The principles of 'Best Value' are properly observed and the sixth form is cost-effective.

Resources

75. The number, qualifications and experience of the teachers are very well matched to the curriculum offered. Resources are good in all curriculum areas but the sixth form accommodation is unsatisfactory. The fabric of the building is in a very poor state of repair, to the extent that the windows cannot be opened safely. The teaching space is inadequate for the number of students on roll, limiting opportunities for small group work. The school is fully aware of these problems and is actively pursuing plans for new accommodation, subject to the necessary funding being found.

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

In the inspection, thirteen 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 those courses completed in 2001 where national information is available.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	1	0	62	0	15	0	1.5

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	50	43	7.0	5.8
Biology	7	100	88	43	34	6.6	5.5
Chemistry	6	83	90	17	43	4.3	5.9
Physics	1	100	88	0	40	4.0	5.7
Design and technology	6	100	91	33	30	6.3	5.4
Business studies	8	88	92	13	32	4.3	5.5
Business AVCE	4	2 distinctions: 2 merits				12.0	10.5
Health and social care AVCE	4	2 distinctions: 2 merits				15.0	10.8
Art and design	22	100	96	95	46	9.8	6.6
Dance	3	100	89	0	39	4.7	5.5
Drama	7	100	99	86	38	8.6	6.6
Geography	5	100	92	40	38	6.8	5.7
History	7	100	88	14	35	6.3	5.4
Sociology	6	100	86	100	35	10.0	5.3
Other social studies	11	100	87	73	34	8.4	5.3
English	20	100	95	65	37	7.2	5.9
Communication studies	13	92	93	38	31	6.2	5.5
French	4	100	89	50	38	5.5	5.6
Other modern foreign languages	1	100	93	100	56	8.0	6.8

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England

Leisure and tourism	9	100	N/A	67	N/A	N/A	N/A
Health and social care	10	70	N/A	40	N/A	N/A	N/A

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The school offers courses leading to the AS and A-level examinations in mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics. The focus was on mathematics and biology but lessons were sampled in chemistry and physics.

In chemistry, students show a good breadth of knowledge, which they apply to achieve new understanding and solve complex problems. Students' investigational and analytical skills are well developed. Year 13 students, for example, preparing antifebrin, worked competently and safely and were able to interpret experimental data and calculate percentage yield.

In physics, highly effective teaching challenges all students and, as a result, they make very good progress. Students demonstrate a very good grasp of concepts such as vibration and simple harmonic motion. In a Year 13 lesson, achievements were particularly good, as highly effective demonstrations engaged all students in making accurate observations and enabled them to test valid hypotheses. For example, students investigated successfully how different variables, time, length, mass and amplitude affected displacement, velocity and acceleration.

Mathematics

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **good**. Lessons in pure mathematics and statistics were seen for Year 12 and in pure mathematics for Year 13. Students' work was scrutinised and a representative sample of students interviewed.

Strengths

- Standards at A-level are well above the national average.
- Teaching and learning are good, leading to good achievement.
- Enrichment of students' experiences through the Senior Mathematics Challenge.
- Very mature and positive relationships at all levels.
- Departmental management is excellent. Very good teamwork ensures effective monitoring of students' work and progress.

Areas for improvement

- In 2002, too many students were unsuccessful in the AS modules.
- Setting short-term subject-specific targets to determine value-added achievement.
- Applications of information and communication technology to support teaching and learning.

76. The standards achieved by students in the A-level examinations in 2001 were well above the average for all schools and for similar schools. All students achieved a pass grade between A and E. The percentage gaining higher grades A and B was above the national figure and the average point score was well above the national average. These results have been rising consistently over recent years. In 2002, all students were successful in gaining A to E grades though the average point score has declined slightly. In 2001, the results at AS level were below the national average. In relation to their GCSE grades, students achieved well at A level but their achievement was unsatisfactory at AS-level. Provisional AS-level results for 2002 have dropped significantly and are disappointingly poor. This was partly due to the low entry criteria adopted for the mathematics course and partly due to the choice and organisation of the modules. Students found some of the modules linguistically challenging and inaccessible. The department is self-critical; it has examined all the contributory factors for this substantial underachievement and has taken sensible steps to arrest this decline. These include, for example, the introduction of new AS modules and a revision of the way they are organised and taught. Many students retaking GCSE mathematics improved their results.

77. Students in Year 12 found the transition from Year 11 to AS-level challenging but most are achieving standards that are in line with the national average. A high proportion of students are on course to gain A to E grades. Their good achievement is due to thorough teaching as well as to their positive approach to the subject. Higher-attaining students, studying trigonometry, algebra and co-ordinate geometry, assimilate new ideas well and apply them to complex situations. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, students demonstrated a good grasp of arc and sector formulae, which they used successfully to solve trigonometrical quadratic equations. Average-attaining students make steady progress, extending their knowledge and skills and developing their ability to use them in solving standard problems. Strong individual support from teachers, inside and outside lessons, enables lower-attaining students to achieve well and reach satisfactory standards.
78. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of samples of students' work confirm that, in Year 13, standards are above average and achievement is good. Students discuss their work and contribute to lessons confidently. They display a secure knowledge of topics studied earlier and apply this to new situations, extending their understanding. In a lesson about finding and solving equations for a circle, students demonstrated a sound knowledge of algebra, co-ordinate geometry and linear graphs before solving the circle equation graphically. Skills in algebra and analysis are well established, as is the work with calculus. Students' statistical skills are well developed. For example, they can analyse complex data to calculate the product-moment correlation coefficient. Their understanding of mean, variance and probability is good. Students' work is well presented and their folders well organised, which helps their revision. However, there is little evidence of their skills in information and communication technology being employed to extend their understanding.
79. The quality of teaching overall is good. The teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of the subject, very good organisation and high expectations ensure that students learn well, acquiring and consolidating new knowledge and skills. A particularly strong feature is the use of questions in a well-structured sequence that leads students to a clearer understanding of new concepts. In a Year 12 lesson on co-ordinate geometry, the teacher used questions very well to summarise previous work on this topic before developing the theory further and exploring techniques to provide a solution and, finally, allowing students to demonstrate their understanding. The teaching could be improved further if all lesson plans included the specific learning objectives to be reached and an indication of the timing of each phase of the lesson. On occasions, there is insufficient time left for a comprehensive review of the key concepts learned in the lesson. The initiative to improve literacy skills is beginning to have a positive impact on sixth form mathematics work where teachers stress the meanings of key words. However, there is a need for the greater involvement of students in discussion of mathematical ideas.
80. The regular completion of the homework is a key feature supporting good progress. Half-termly tests and the use of past examination questions help students to understand examination criteria. Individual students feel well supported and their progress is well monitored. Assessment is usually very helpful and constructive. In many lessons, good verbal feedback gives students the opportunity to assess their progress accurately in relation to the requirements of the course. Students' work, particularly end-of-unit tests, is marked using examination criteria. Short-term target-setting has not yet been developed fully as an assessment tool to challenge the higher-attaining students and to determine value-added achievement. The system could be improved further by more target-setting, greater use of self-assessment by students and value-added analysis at AS and A-levels.
81. Students work hard and have very positive attitudes towards the subject. The quality of learning is always good and often it is very good. Students are invariably very well motivated and make good progress in lessons. When working on problems, students often show perseverance and interest. Where students are required to apply knowledge and understanding to unfamiliar mathematical situations, they relish the challenge although some lack appropriate strategies to engage in the task systematically. They need more opportunities for independent work and personal enquiry.

82. The mathematics curriculum is broad and balanced but, because of the recent poor performance at AS-level, the department has reviewed the choice of modules. It has spent considerable time developing, writing and reviewing course outlines and schemes of work in order to reflect these changes. All A and AS-level students are also given the opportunity to enrich their experience of mathematics through the '*Senior Mathematics Challenge*'. The subject is well resourced with well-qualified and experienced staff and good textbooks and materials, although there is a shortage of suitable modern computer software. Accommodation is well suited and much of it made more interesting by excellent stimulating displays of students' work, mathematical models and posters.
83. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and all matters raised then have been tackled successfully. The department has a clear commitment and a strong determination to maintain and raise standards. A development plan identifies appropriate priorities and schemes of work are very detailed and helpful. The departmental handbook is a useful working document. Leadership and management of the department are excellent. The new head of department has ensured that staff have ownership of the policies adopted. The team spirit within the department is excellent and all members convey a caring and supportive attitude towards each other and to the students. Procedures for recording and analysing assessment data have improved considerably since the last inspection and have become more effective in promoting improvement in attainment levels.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Very good leadership and management of the subject.
- Very good teaching leading to very good learning.
- Standards above the national average for the last two years from previously broadly average students.
- Students achieve better results than might be expected from their GCSE results.
- High numbers of students opting for the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Purchase more computers and sensors so that students can make use of data-logging equipment in their experiments.

84. The proportion of students at A-level who gained a grade E or better and the proportion gaining the highest grades, A and B, have been above average for the last two years. Previously, A-level results had been well below the national average. Although the number of male students is low, both male and female students have performed equally well. Very few students have failed to complete the course, indicating the department's success in maintaining students' interest.
85. At AS-level, the proportions of students obtaining the highest grades and of those obtaining a pass grade are above the national average. The number of students choosing to study biology is high and has increased since the introduction of AS-level. There are currently two groups in each of Years 12 and 13. Biology is without doubt a cost-effective subject in the sixth form. Importantly, the number of students who have opted not to study biology to A-level is relatively low. Again, this reflects well on the department, since most students must be dropping subjects other than biology for their Year 13 studies. In relation to their GCSE results, students do better than might be expected at both AS and A-levels.
86. The standard of work of current students is above average. One group of Year 13 students showed above average understanding of photosynthesis and respiration and were able to apply their knowledge well. Although several in this group have not continued to study chemistry

beyond GCSE level, their teacher has been able to develop the requisite understanding for them to follow the course. Another group of Year 13 students showed above expected knowledge and understanding of bone structure around joints. Students in Year 12 have only just started their course but are achieving well. Their knowledge and understanding of GCSE work on respiration is above the expected level. In general, students' notes are of high quality, providing them with very good records.

87. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very well as a result. The principal strengths of the teachers are their excellent knowledge and understanding of the subject, very careful planning, and their use of a wide range of methods and resources to aid learning. Teachers provide students with sufficient opportunities to develop their basic skills of communication and numeracy. However, teachers cannot provide students with the opportunity to use data-logging equipment because there are insufficient sensors and computers. It is very important at this level that students can link sensors to their experiments so that they can use computers to analyse the data obtained. In the lessons seen, students learnt very well because their teachers made high demands of them.
88. Good lesson planning linked to imaginative teaching methods and the excellent selection of homework tasks all help to maintain students' interests. In one lesson about photosynthesis and respiration, Year 13 students learnt very well because of excellent teaching. Questions were carefully selected so that the teacher could transmit her enthusiasm for the subject to her students. She conducted the lesson at pace and maintained very high expectations, frequently checking that learning was taking place. In a lesson about gaseous exchange and exercise, Year 12 students learnt very well about tidal volume, vital capacity and residual volume. The teacher broke the lesson up into a range of activities with clear time targets, helping to keep learning to a maximum throughout.
89. The students had no difficulty in deciding to study biology in this school as opposed to going elsewhere because they have well deserved confidence in their teachers. They show very high levels of interest and respond well to the variety of teaching styles that they experience. When working in small groups, students cooperate well, always listening to others' points of view. The majority of students plan to study biology or a related course at university. This is further testimony to the way teachers have been able to transmit their own enthusiasm for the subject to others.
90. The very good provision stems from very good leadership and management. The four biology teachers form a strong team and meet regularly to share ideas.
91. Since the last inspection, standards have improved and the number of students opting for biology has increased.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The school offers courses at AS and A-levels in design and technology and food technology. The inspection focused on design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Well-constructed schemes of work, which have very good systems for feeding back to students so that they can improve their work.
- The very well-organised and enthusiastic teaching.
- The very high quality of relationships between teachers and their pupils.
- The very high quality of leadership, developing the subject well since the last inspection.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation that matches the needs of the courses and provides a better designed environment for learning about designing.
92. The school offers an AS-level course in design and technology that students follow for the first year and an A-level course that they can follow for the second year. In both courses, students have a choice to specialise in either product design or food technology. Over the last three years, results at A-level have been above national averages. At AS-level, the number of entries has been low but, in 2001, there was a much larger entry and a good pass rate although there were no A or B grades. However, the department takes in students of all abilities, many of them with only C grade or below in the GCSE examination and the students do very well in this context.
93. In lessons, standards of achievement are above the expected levels. Drawings steadily improve as the course progresses and those students who also study art are able to produce some splendid freehand drawings of their ideas. Design skills are well developed by the notable use of computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture and this is a strength of the provision. Students are given the opportunity to use the software on their own machines at home, providing even greater opportunities for many.
94. Social and moral issues are tackled effectively in lessons and in the personal studies and the multi-cultural dimension is extremely well developed in the food technology area. Each student has sensitive individual support throughout the course and their teachers guide them very effectively. This is because assessment is built into the course so that students know how well they are doing and develop strategies to improve their performance.
95. Teaching is very good. Relationships are very good and teachers work together as a team to plan the courses very effectively. Lessons are very well prepared and are supported by very good teaching materials so that learning was good or better in every lesson seen. The good pace and thoughtful approaches adopted by teachers, together with their supportive attitudes, allow students to make rapid gains in skill and understanding.
96. The lower-attaining students feel very well supported and give of their best so that they too make very good progress. Students are engaged on individual design tasks but, when they need help, they ask their teacher and engage in good dialogue. The course is designed to allow each student to work on tasks within their capability and, as they improve, the work is extended to stretch them further.
97. The learning environment is adequate but the poor accommodation is not encouraging, despite the efforts of the staff to provide stimulating displays. Overall, the facilities do not inspire students to generate exciting and effective design proposals, using their surroundings as a model. The management of design and technology is very good and the departmental development plan shows all staff are very involved in its development and contribute to its outcomes. 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.
98. There has been a good improvement in the subject since the last inspection and the previous high standards have been maintained. Design and technology offers students the opportunity to work on AS and A-level courses that match their capability and allows them to achieve very well, particularly considering their prior attainment.

BUSINESS

The school offers courses at AS and A-levels in business studies and an Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) in business. All three courses were inspected.

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

Strengths

- Students make significantly better progress in this subject than their GCSE results predict.
- Teaching is good with very high expectations of students.
- Teacher-student relationships are very good and produce a friendly but purposeful working environment in lessons.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are very positive; they research business topics to good effect.
- The department provides a very good, broad, balanced and enriching curriculum.
- Assessment of and support for students' learning is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation is unsatisfactory; classrooms are cramped and stuffy and do not always provide an appropriate learning environment.
- Teachers should continue the monitoring of lesson objectives to ensure they are appropriate and explicit, particularly to ensure that the most able are always stretched.

99. Attainment in business studies at A-level has generally been satisfactory, with results in line with or above the national average and all students usually obtain at least a pass grade. Provisional results for the 2002 AS-level examination show significant improvements, with over half gaining the top grades, illustrating the very good progress made by all students who study the subject. The results of the examinations for the AVCE show that, as with the A-level course, students make better progress than their GCSE scores predict. In 2001, all students gained either a distinction or a merit grade in this course. The good progress made by students is as a result of good teaching and very good relationships between teachers and students that produce a friendly but purposeful working environment in lessons.
100. The achievements of current A-level students are at least in line with national expectations, with several students who gained the top grade in the AS examination exhibiting excellent skills in analysis and evaluation of business issues. Most students have a good understanding of basic business terminology but some need to be more accurate in using it when presented with written case studies or teachers' questions. In a good Year 12 class on organisation structures, the teacher used a variety of methods to enable students to understand and link 'chain of command' and 'span of control'. Students' written research work in a good Year 13 lesson clearly illustrated how customer service strategies were utilised by large retail outlets to ensure customer satisfaction. In another good Year 13 class, students were able to use role-play to argue the advantages and disadvantages of development proposals from the viewpoint of different stakeholders. A very good Year 12 class on the use of 'SWOT' analysis was marked by the teacher's effective planning and management of the lesson and by the quality of the individual support given to students. As a result, very clear progress was made in students' understanding of the topic.
101. Teaching is good and often very good, with no unsatisfactory lessons observed. Teachers are very knowledgeable and prepare interesting and stimulating lessons using a variety of approaches. However, objectives are not always explicit enough, particularly regarding the higher-attaining students, to help teachers evaluate how effective lessons have been. As a consequence of the excellent working environment generated by enthusiastic teachers, students remain on task throughout the whole of the relatively long lessons. Students are encouraged to offer their own opinions and use their prior business knowledge to provide answers to the specific questions

posed, although not all students are prepared to do this without prompting by the teacher. Students were particularly forthcoming with interesting and knowledgeable comments in a Year 12 lesson on the role of packaging in marketing different products. Lessons are inclusive and cater for all levels of attainment and background. Students work collaboratively and are respectful towards each other's contributions.

102. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department is committed to raising the status and standards of the subject. The staff teaching the courses bring a wealth of educational and business experience to the department and regularly meet as a team to ensure consistency of approach and to share good practice. Staff new to teaching or to the department are very well supported. Assessment is very well used so that students are aware of what they are currently achieving and what they are expected to achieve. Whilst learning resources are very good, including good access to and use of dedicated departmental computers, accommodation is poor. There are enough classrooms to accommodate the current courses but they are often cramped and stuffy and do not always provide an appropriate learning environment for students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

103. The school provides AS and A-level courses in information and communication technology and the subject is also covered as part of a key skills course. These courses were not the main focus of inspection but two lessons were sampled. Students on the key skills course demonstrate good skills. Some very good teaching enabled them to acquire a very good grasp of the main features of the hardware and they learned to understand more advanced features of word-processing and websites. Students on the AS-level course are working at the expected level but their progress is not as good as it should be because of the work missed in Year 11.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

104. The school offers single and full award courses in travel and tourism and in leisure and tourism leading respectively to the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) and to the GNVQ Intermediate diploma. Neither of these courses was inspected but the examination results are encouraging. One lesson in travel and tourism was sampled. Standards of attainment were close to those expected and the teaching was good, well informed and supportive.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Health and Social Care

The school offers courses at several different levels in Health and Social Care. A one-year GNVQ Intermediate course is available, sometimes also providing for foundation level students. Others take the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) course as a single A-level (A2) equivalent, or as a full course, equivalent to two A2 qualifications.

Overall, provision for health and social care in the sixth form is **very good**.

Strengths

- Very good teaching and learning.
- Good achievement for the majority of students.
- Very good links between the wide range of work experience, visiting speakers etc. and school-based learning.
- Very hard-working students, many of whom have high vocational aspirations.

Areas for improvement

- Some students' skills in critical evaluation are weaker than expected.

- A greater range of teaching methods is required in some lessons to enable students to make more effective oral contributions to discussions.

105. In recent years, numbers on health and social care courses have been low, sometimes too small for statistics to be significant, but examination results have generally been above the national average. Numbers have increased lately and the department has grown significantly.
106. In 2002, GNVQ Intermediate grades were above the national average and scrutiny of their work shows these students achieved very well, given their underlying attainment. Attainment in the 2002 AVCE courses was below average, although some of these students had come through GNVQ Intermediate and their achievements were good, given their background. Students mostly achieved grades higher than those predicted when they started.
107. Standards of work in the current Year 12 broadly match the expectations for the different courses. GNVQ students have made a very good start. In one lesson, they were learning very effectively about planning food for young, elderly or incapacitated people and about ways of feeding adults that preserved their dignity. Many of these students have special educational needs or learning difficulties and have very good support from department staff and from learning support assistants outside lessons if they require it. Students learning English as an additional language are also doing well in this group. Achievement overall in this Intermediate group is already very good. Students starting the single award in Year 12 are also learning well but, in a lesson seen, they were having more difficulty than might be expected with terminology. Many could not accurately define words such as 'analyse' or 'evaluate', which are crucial to their understanding of examination and coursework requirements. Students on the Year 12 full award course have also made a very good start. These students work very well in groups and can understand and present orally ideas and artefacts from 'story-bags'. These were items provided by the teacher intended to demonstrate the use of 'story-boxes' that the students intended to use for 'teaching' elements of literacy to reception and Year 1 pupils in a local primary school.
108. Scrutiny of Year 13's work in portfolios and files shows a range of standards. Attainment in the AVCE single group is broadly below average. Few show the potential to achieve higher grades. Again, achievement is often good because these students' initial predictions were low and most are achieving at the upper level of their predicted range. In a lesson about the theory of language development, these students were very unresponsive and made little spoken contribution to the discussion. These attitudes do not help their attainment. By contrast, students in the full award group are very articulate and highly engaged in their learning and they achieve above average standards overall. Many here are on track to attain A or B grades. These high standards were evident in a lesson on research. Students showed very good independent working skills and could discuss articulately the interesting range of areas they have chosen for research. Here, achievement is often very good, mostly well above their predicted grades. However, many students find it difficult to be critically evaluative in their portfolio work. Staff work hard to improve these skills, but some remain lower than expected.
109. The quality of teaching is very good and most students learn very effectively. Staff bring a good variety of background knowledge to their teaching and all involved have a good understanding of vocational learning. This leads to very high expectations of students' performance, for example of their ability to work independently. Planning is very good, with small teams working effectively together. Whole team meetings are difficult to organise because of the range of personnel involved but overall management of the team is good. A key strength of teaching is the skilful way in which teachers enable students to make the links between the very good range and variety of work experience they undertake and the theory studied at school. Students make constant, spontaneous reference to what they have learned from practical experiences such as these placements and from speakers and visitors from the health and social care-related professions. They enjoy very good relationships with their teachers in school and learn a great deal from these outside experiences.
110. Students of all abilities and backgrounds are very well directed into the health and social care courses and ably supported while they are studying, so that they all progress well. Even when

lessons take place in inappropriate, unhelpful accommodation, such as technology rooms, students remain concentrated and hard-working, learning well despite many interruptions. The two subject-specific rooms are useful, providing a good range of accessible, subject-related resources that students use well in their work. Assessment is rigorous and very effective. One-to-one discussions with teachers have a major, positive influence on progress. Students know clearly how to improve their work.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The school offers courses at AS and A-level in art and design, textiles, music, dance, drama and media studies. The focus was on art and design with textiles and on media studies but lessons were sampled in music and drama.

Two lessons in drama were sampled. In these, teaching and learning were good, leading to good achievement. Year 12 students, studying Berkhoff's production of *'Metamorphosis'*, displayed a good grasp of character and plot development, improvising their own interpretations of a scene with good critical understanding. Teachers intervened with challenging ideas to improve the performance of all students. Students' attainment in both the AS and A-level examinations is well in advance of national results. In the one music lesson sampled, students performed their short compositions based on a basic blues or boogie electronic bass and provided well-structured and perceptive critiques of one another's compositions. The teacher had a very good rapport with students, was extremely well prepared and conducted the lesson at a good rate. Most of the students were working at levels likely to take them to A or B grades in the AS-level examination.

Art and Design (including Textiles)

Provision for art and design in the sixth form is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Excellent teaching and learning resulting from highly effective teamwork amongst teaching staff.
- Consistent, exceptionally high results in A-level examinations.
- Outstanding achievement from students of all levels of attainment.
- Exciting, visually stimulating sketchbook explorations.
- Very high standards in a rich range of often unusual media, particularly in textiles.

Areas for development

- Students could contribute more to oral sketchbook reviews to heighten awareness of critical analysis for their own personal studies.
- The department needs more computers and software to enable students to include creative ICT work in portfolios.

111. The school offers AS and A-level courses in art and design and in textiles. A few students opt for both of these, in which case they take fine art (painting and drawing) as the non-textiles examination.

112. Recent A-level results have consistently placed students' achievements amongst the highest nationwide. Most students with a background in the school achieved very high results at GCSE, where standards are also exceptional. Even so, their achievements in the sixth form are very good indeed. Newcomers to sixth form art and design courses usually enter because of the deservedly very high reputation the department enjoys within the community. Almost all students who start courses finish them and almost all Year 12 students go on into Year 13.

113. Art and design courses are a popular option for A-level studies. In 2002, an exceptionally high proportion of students attained A grades in both AS-level and A-level examinations. Only a few attained grades below B at AS-level and almost none did so at A-level. Similarly excellent

attainment is evident in students' current work. They develop great strengths in their visual, exploratory investigations in sketchbooks, which form the basis for final pieces in an impressive variety of media. Most have learned through their GCSE years how to produce these visually stimulating, exciting research books. With increasing maturity, sketchbooks become highly expressive and individualistic in the sixth form. These experiments often lead to serendipitous creative effects that students pursue with vigour and interest. They combine techniques and materials to great effect to produce artefacts of very high quality in two and three-dimensional media. A stimulating feature of the school's environment is the excellent display of these items in corridors and elsewhere, serving both to celebrate students' excellent achievements and to inspire others.

114. Given students' average attainment on entry to the school, the value added in art is excellent. Many students' relative weaknesses in literacy and study skills such as skim-reading, mean that theoretical work and critical studies are weaker than the excellent standard of practical work. Very good teaching of these skills within the department enables students to improve the standards of their personal studies (the historical, theoretical elements) to match those of their artwork. These standards are difficult for students to achieve, though and many have to work very hard to create this match. Work in all media is outstanding but work in textiles is particularly impressive. Students themselves contribute significantly to such high achievement. They are highly motivated, hard-working and committed, thoroughly enjoying their work and often doing a huge amount outside lessons. They appreciate greatly the excellent relationships they enjoy with teaching staff and enjoy feeling challenged and stretched, knowing they will achieve their potential in the department. Students of all abilities and from all backgrounds achieve equally well in art and design. The high level of absence in one Year 12 lesson was very unusual and was swiftly followed up by staff.
115. The outstanding learning described arises from excellent teaching. The close-knit team provides a very good range of expertise which fits students' needs highly effectively. Team-teaching with large groups means that all students benefit from a range of this expertise and from a variety of approaches to their work. Students and teachers have to overcome the difficulties imposed by unhelpful single lessons and by having no dedicated sixth form studio space but all manage this with good grace and without compromising standards. Very effective sketchbook reviews show high levels of critical assessment from staff, followed by excellent one-to-one sessions in all classes. Teachers are very skilful at combining encouragement and praise with critiques related to the demands of the examinations and the raising of standards, guiding students effectively in ways of improving their work. Students' relative weakness in critical studies could be further improved if they, too, could contribute more to reviews of their peers' sketchbooks, but this is difficult in single lessons. Without exception, all students studying art benefit enormously from the teaching, in terms of their personal creative development. Their exceptional achievement provides individuals with spiritual uplift and contributes very significantly to their cultural development. The visible presence of such excellent artwork is so evident throughout the school that it also has a wider inspirational effect.
116. Departmental management is excellent and the high standards described in the last report have been maintained. Given the excellent standards and achievement described, the department is well placed to support the imminent Arts College proposal. Information and communication technology is used only occasionally for creative work. Some staff do have the requisite expertise but the department needs more higher-level computers and programmes to equip students fully for this aspect of artwork in higher education into which many progress.

Media Studies

Overall, the provision for media studies is **good**. Students make good progress and, by the end of Year 13, they are producing work that is above nationally expected levels.

Strengths

- The standard of work is above national expectations by the end of Year 13.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards the subject.
- The quality of the teaching is good.
- The leadership and management of the subject are good.
- There are effective schemes of work and a clear strategic plan for the development of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Students have insufficient opportunities to evaluate their own or others' work or to take part in whole-class discussions.
- There is insufficient secure storage for the resources that are necessary to provide the course.

117. Media studies is a course that has been introduced into the sixth form since the last inspection. There is no media studies course in Key Stage 4 but all students have had experience of the media units that are part of the GCSE English course.
118. Results in A-level media studies over the past three years have been above the national average. The 2002 AS-level results were disappointing. Students received grades far below those predicted, although the coursework moderator agreed the marks awarded by the school. These results are inconsistent with the standards of work observed during the inspection and are currently subject to re-marking. Lesson observations and the examination of students' work indicate that, at this stage of the course, standards are at the nationally expected levels in Year 12 and above them in Year 13.
119. Standards in media studies are good. In Year 12, students are able to build quickly on the media work that they undertook in GCSE English. They have good knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of the subject and the quality of their work is at the level that is expected for this stage of the course. Written work is well presented and shows evidence of thorough personal research. In discussion, students are able to use subject-specific terminology with confidence and have a clear understanding of the structure and demands of the course. In Year 13, they continue to develop their critical skills and their written coursework contains some very perceptive analysis across a range of media forms. The practical work that they produce is of a high quality and above the level expected. Students are skilled in areas such as the subtle effects that can be achieved through the use of soundtracks to accompany a moving image. The commentaries that they produce to accompany the practical units clearly explain the rationale behind the production choices made and contain perceptive evaluations of their work. They are also confident in their use of information and communication technology.
120. Media studies are well taught. The teachers have good knowledge of the subject and regularly attend training courses run by outside bodies. Lessons are well structured and teachers use a wide range of approaches. Occasionally, too much of the lesson is led by the teacher and opportunities for whole-class discussion are missed. Marking is constructive and students have a clear understanding of the levels they are achieving but they need more opportunities to be involved in the evaluation of their own and other students' work. Relationships with students are very good and the effective classroom management ensures a positive working atmosphere in all lessons. The effective teaching leads to good learning and nearly all students make good progress. They are enthusiastic about the subject and about the quality of the teaching that they receive. They are fully involved in the lessons and soon become adept at using the specialist terminology which, at first, they find challenging.

121. The accommodation and resources are adequate for the current course and there is a rolling programme to upgrade or replace some of the current equipment for information and communication technology and some of the cameras. However, there is not enough secure storage for resources, some of which are kept in cardboard boxes on working surfaces. The small collection of media education books in the school library is not yet adequate for all aspects of the course.
122. The leadership and management of the subject are shared effectively between two members of staff. There is a clear development plan for the subject and schemes of work are in place. Systems for monitoring and assessment are well-established and effective and liaison between the three teachers is good. The syllabus has been chosen for its practical bias and is in line with the school's bid to become a specialist college for art and design.

HUMANITIES

In this curriculum area, the school offers geography, history, government and politics, law, sociology, psychology and philosophy and ethics at AS and A levels. The focus was on geography, history and psychology, but sociology and law were also sampled. In sociology, GCE A-level examination results were well above average in 2001. All students obtained grades in the A to B range. The 2002 results reflected similar attainment, with the majority of students obtaining A or B grades. All students obtained a grade in the range between A and E. The school has requested an investigation by the examining board into the grades awarded for the 2002 GCE AS-level examinations for both sociology and psychology. In the one sociology lesson observed, the teaching was very good. Very good planning included a range of activities designed to enable the students to take responsibility for their own learning. This resulted in students making very good progress in the skills of evaluating evidence and communicating their findings to the group. In law, the teacher was very well-prepared and knowledgeable. Students confidently provided answers defining different criminal acts and standards seen were above those expected. All five A-level students passed in 2002, two with the top grades.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards in Year 13 are well above average. AS level results were very high.
- Students achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment.
- Teaching and learning are very good and reflect very good subject knowledge and very good lesson planning.
- Students work with a high degree of independence.
- Relationships are very good and students feel well supported in their study of geography.

Areas for improvement

- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support students' oral presentations.
- At present insufficient use is made of objective data to set realistic targets for students.

123. In 2001, the results in A-level geography were broadly in line with the national average and showed a steadily rising trend in terms of average point scores. This trend has continued with the 2002 results. In each of the past three years, the pass rate has been 100 percent. Eleven students followed the AS course last year. Provisional results indicate that standards were very high, with ten of those students obtaining the higher A or B grades. Retention rates are good. Overall, standards show a good improvement since the last inspection when there were no Year 13 students.
124. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of samples of students' work confirm that standards are well above average and achievement is very good. In Year 12, students have made a good

beginning with their environmental investigation following on from a four-day residential fieldwork course on the Gower peninsular. They can collect relevant data and use appropriate techniques to analyse it, including, for instance, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. Year 13 students have very good knowledge and understanding of the topics they have studied. For example, their presentations on natural hazards reveal a comprehensive in-depth knowledge of aspects of physical geography. They can carry out research independently using a wide range of sources, including the Internet. They confidently share their findings with their peers in oral presentations, as was seen in a lesson on hurricane Mitch. There was excellent interaction between students asking perceptive questions of each other to deepen their understanding of the effects of the hurricane on a number of different interests. They have very good debating skills. Students make very good progress in the sixth form. Fieldwork assignments are now of a high standard with thorough conclusions and evaluations. There is clear progression in both learning and thinking.

125. Teaching is very good and students learn very well as a result. The teachers' very good knowledge of and expertise in the subject are used to motivate and inform students. Lessons are very well planned, with clear learning objectives shared with students. Very good working relationships create a relaxed yet powerful learning environment. Teachers use every opportunity to reinforce geographical skills and to develop the key skills of number and literacy. Written work is drafted and redrafted to improve its quality. Students are given many opportunities to present their work orally, though they would benefit from the use of information and communication technology so that they can present more professionally and develop their oral skills even further. High expectations challenge students and they are expected to carry out their enquiry and research independently. Occasionally, though, teachers offer too much direction and spoon-feed students with information. Homework assignments are regularly marked and students are given clear judgements on the quality of their work with helpful comments about how to improve it.
126. Leadership and management are good. Performance in the subject is monitored and evaluated. There is a good quality residential fieldwork experience provided by the department. Students are well supported. Assessment is regular and thorough, though much greater use should be made of objective data to help the setting of realistic targets for individual students. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

History

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

Strengths

- AS-level results are well above the national average and A-level results are improving.
- Students achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment.
- Teaching and learning are very good. Learning is tightly structured to maximise each student's potential.
- Students are well supported by good quality assessment and very good study booklets produced by their teachers.
- Students have excellent attitudes towards the study of history and the numbers who wish to study the subject at AS and A-levels are growing.
- Leadership of the subject is outstanding.

Areas for improvement

- There are no resources for information and communication technology available within the department to meet the needs of the A-level curriculum.

127. Students' performance in A-level examinations over the past three years has shown a steadily rising trend in terms of average point scores. Over the same period, they have maintained a 100 per cent pass rate of grades from A to E. In 2001, although the number of students obtaining the higher A and B grades declined, overall results were above the national average. Provisional

results for 2002 saw the number of A and B grades rise again above the national levels of 2001 and showed an improvement on the results reported at the time of the last inspection. The AS-level results for 2002 were very high, with 93 per cent attaining A or B grades. Retention rates are good and only three students have not continued on to the A-level course. History is growing in popularity and the numbers of students following the A-level course this year has increased considerably.

128. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of samples of students' work show that standards are well above nationally expected levels and achievement is very good. Year 12 students have already developed skills in communication and in the evaluation of evidence. Essay writing is well structured with evidence to support individual judgements, as was seen in a written evaluation of the effectiveness of the Weimar Republic as a democracy. Year 13 students analyse historical sources critically and evaluate a wide range of evidence effectively. For instance, many have written good extended pieces supporting the view that the main reason for collectivisation in Stalin's Russia was political rather than economic. Written work is of a very good standard and the majority of students can write analytical substantiated conclusions with evidence of wider reading, including the work of contemporary historians. Students show a very good knowledge and understanding of the periods and topics being studied. They have well-developed research skills and use the Internet and information communication technology to add to their knowledge, in spite of having no computers within the department.
129. The quality of learning is very good because of the well-focused, experienced teaching in the department and the students' highly committed application to study. Their attitudes to the subject are excellent. The quality of teaching is very good. Very good knowledge of and enthusiasm for history are used to motivate and inform students. Teachers create a powerful learning ethos by imposing a tightly structured, carefully planned learning routine with high expectations of learning outcomes. A very good balance has been struck between support for students and their personal development as independent learners. Students are encouraged to develop as historians, to think as historians and to recognise different interpretations of historical events. An example of this was seen in a Year 13 lesson on Nazi values. They are provided with a wide range of excellent support materials and students make rapid increases both in the range of their knowledge and the depth of their understanding. Assessment is regular and teachers' marking is thorough, with detailed comments designed to improve attainment and maximise potential.
130. The very good achievement and very good teaching can be attributed to the fact that the subject is extremely well managed by a committed and hard working head of department who has been in post for two years. Her leadership is outstanding. There is clear and systematic development planning, systematic monitoring and evaluation of performance and effective action is taken. Teachers share a very clear vision as to the best way to teach and assess the course to obtain the best from their students. They have total commitment to raising standards and the effects of this can already be seen in the results achieved in 2002. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection. However, the provision of facilities for information and communication technology within the history department would further improve standards on the individual study element of the A-level course.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- The students' attainment in the GCE A-level examinations is very good.
- The teaching is very good.
- The leadership and management of the department are excellent.
- The procedures for monitoring students' progress are very good.
- Students' attitudes are excellent and they achieve well.
- Students' readiness to take responsibility for their own learning is exceptional.

- The relationships between students and teachers are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The use of information and communication technology is underdeveloped.
- Risk assessment is not included in lesson plans.
- Opportunities for key skills are not highlighted.

131. Psychology was not part of the school's curriculum at the time of the last inspection. Since its introduction in 1998, it has rapidly gained in popularity.
132. In 2001, A-level results were well above average, with all students obtaining grades between A and E and three-quarters obtaining grades A or B. Half of the candidates obtained a grade A. These results represent good progress for the A-level students in relation to their earlier GCSE results. The results for 2002 reflect a similar high standard. These standards of attainment have been consistent over the last three years.
133. The work seen in lessons and in students' files for both A-level and AS-level courses was very good and well above expected levels. Students demonstrate outstanding independent learning skills. As a result, they are able to synthesise, compare and describe different theories, pick out key features of different research and use specialist vocabulary well. In a Year 13 lesson on phobias, students were able to explain how certain phobias might develop in relation to classical and operant conditioning theories. They were able to pick out the key features of Pavlov's and Watson's experiments and relate these to new situations. They also demonstrated reasoned consideration of methodological and ethical issues in relation to Watson's research. Students in Year 12 have made rapid progress since the beginning of the course. They are able to describe theories well for assessment. For example, they are able to describe several different models of memory and many higher-attaining students are able to criticise and evaluate psychological research effectively. Students are confident in their use of specialist vocabulary and use terms such as 'echoic' and 'iconic' with ease in relation to memory. Students demonstrate very good knowledge of the attachment process in early life and many are able to criticise and evaluate theories of maternal deprivation with confidence.
134. The relationships between teachers and students are very good. Students are exceptionally enthusiastic about the subject, find it very interesting and are successful in their studies. The increasing popularity of the subject has resulted in relatively large teaching groups in Year 12 and a series of topic-based seminars with smaller student numbers, involving prior preparation requirements, take place to address individual students' needs. The seminars are organised on an equitable basis and have promoted very good independent learning habits.
135. The teaching is very good. All of the teaching seen was good or better, most was very good and it was excellent in one third of the lessons seen. The students benefit from being taught by well qualified, enthusiastic teachers who are committed to ensuring that they achieve well. The lessons are very well planned, with clear objectives expressed in terms of what students should gain from each lesson. The lessons are well structured and include a variety of activities to challenge and motivate students across the specified attainment range. The planning and use of homework are excellent. Risk assessments that are necessary when dealing with sensitive issues are not included in lesson plans. A prominent feature in lesson planning is in the design of strategies to ensure that students take full responsibility for their own learning. This high-quality planning is translated into action and results in the very high standards of learning and attainment.
136. In an excellent Year 12 lesson on the functions of sleep, the teacher established the conditions that enabled the students to take responsibility for their own learning. This was achieved by using several timed tasks in which the students rehearsed the skills needed for extracting information from a resource booklet relating to theories of sleep. The same process, using a writing frame, was repeated for each of four theories. As a result, the students became successively more skilled in carrying out independent research and compiling their own notes.

These were then checked when students used their communication skills very effectively to feed back their findings to the group. Whilst key skills in communication and the application of number are developed through the normal course of teaching, opportunities for addressing key skills are not highlighted for students. Information and communication technology is used by some students, mainly for presentations of their work and Internet references are highlighted in the schemes of work, but skills in this area are underdeveloped.

137. Teachers assess and monitor students' progress very well and very good use is made of performance data. Progress is checked regularly and students know what levels they are working at and should be working at, based upon their GCSE scores and their teachers' expectations. If individual students submit work that does not come up to the expected standards, they have to repeat the work until it does, demonstrating the high expectations of teachers. Teachers ensure that students know exactly what is expected of them for the final written examinations and also what tasks have to be completed for the course. Students' files are well organised and marked work contains informative comments. Very effective evaluations at the end of lessons use a non-threatening 'traffic-light' system to enable students to inform the teacher of their progress.
138. The head of department demonstrates excellent leadership, management and classroom skills, leading by example. He is supported by a committed team of new staff who, in spite of their limited experience, already demonstrate some of the highest levels of expertise in their teaching. The head of department monitors teaching and learning very well and provides valuable mentoring for his team of newly-qualified teachers. All the necessary documentation is in place to ensure smooth and effective short, medium and long-term running of the department. The schemes of work are thorough and well developed and include contributions from all the staff in the department. Money for resources has been spent wisely to support the teaching and learning. All students have an up-to-date textbook and access to a very good range of supplementary material. The accommodation mainly consists of dedicated teaching rooms that are improved by display material designed to inform and focus students' minds on various requirements of the courses.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

In this curriculum area, the school offers AS and A-level courses in English language and literature, English literature, French, German and Spanish and a new course in business Spanish. The focus of the inspection was on English and French but work in German and Spanish was also sampled in both the sixth form and the main school. Overall, the provision for modern languages is very good. In both German and Spanish, the quality of teaching and learning is good in the main school and very good in the sixth form. The attainment of students in German and Spanish is at least in line with average expectations in the main school and often above average in the sixth form and their attitudes to their work are always very positive.

English

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

Strengths

- The very good results at A-level, including the proportions of very high grades achieved.
- The quality of teaching, which is very good overall. Teachers have a clear sense of purpose, present challenging tasks to the class and have very high expectations of what should be achieved.
- Leadership and management are very good; the subject is led with passionate commitment which provides very clear direction for staff and students.
- Short and medium-term assessment is very thorough and is shared with students, enabling them to have a firm understanding of areas of their work that need development.
- Relationships are very good: students share ideas freely and work in a mature and business-like manner.

Areas for improvement

- Planning needs to be further refined as the new courses develop, building on existing good practice.
- Ensuring that all students are taking an active role in lessons.

139. Courses in English literature and in English language and literature combined are offered at GCE A and AS-levels and completion rates are high. GCE A-level examination results in 2001 and 2002 show significantly high attainment compared with the national averages for the subject. Over the last four years, the pattern of results has shown a rising trend. In the two most recent examinations, a much higher proportion of students gained grades A and B than hitherto and there was a virtually 100 per cent pass rate. Although there are currently no figures on which to base comparisons with schools nationally, the 2002 AS-level examination results present a reasonable platform for future success at A-level. In relation to their GCSE results, students did as well as predicted, making good gains and added value from GCSE to A-level.
140. The standards of work seen during the inspection were above the expected levels. This represents a very good level of achievement overall. Students enjoy their study of literary texts and their essays show developing skill and confidence in critical interpretation and analysis. In the lessons seen, students were doing well as a result of effective teaching supported by challenging and inspiring materials. In one Year 13 lesson on *Othello*, students sensitively explored the layers of meaning in speeches by *Iago*, analysing and evaluating different nuances of meaning. Some higher-attaining students make penetrating comments on their reading. However, oral skills are not always sufficiently well developed in whole-class settings, where contributions to discussion in some lessons tend to be limited to brief answers or references to the text being studied. However, students collaborate very well in smaller groups when asked to do so. When carrying out a systematic analysis of the different uses of language in *Richard III*, students worked painstakingly to gain a better understanding. An appropriate critical vocabulary is developing in both Years 12 and 13. The carefully structured lessons and well-chosen activities clearly focus on improving all students' knowledge and understanding. Most students are moving towards appropriately reflective and critical readings of the texts under study but not all can sustain these insights in extended class discussion.
141. Students often write at length, taking great care over the preparation and planning of extended pieces of writing. Their detailed note-making, both in lessons and in independent study, is a highlight. Most students write accurately and are developing an appropriate style. Many students use information and communication technology to assist study and access Internet-based materials to support their research and independent enquiry. Students in Year 12 have just started their AS-level courses but they all worked on preparatory reading during the summer and the majority are achieving well. In a lesson on *The Dolls House*, several students contributed thoughtfully to a whole-class discussion on some of the subtler aspects of *Nora's* character by close reference to the play. In another Year 12 lesson, students role-played different characters from *Twelfth Night*, justifying their actions and behaviour to good effect, as well as deepening their understanding of the complexities of the plot. This helped them to highlight the different ways that Elizabethan and modern audiences would appreciate the play.
142. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and employ a wide range of effective teaching methods to motivate and challenge students. Lessons are conducted in a purposeful manner with a determined focus on learning that engages the interest of all. Lively and interactive methods and approaches demand a high level of commitment from the students. Many students maintain an active personal approach to study. Teachers use their very good knowledge in their questioning and explorations and in the tasks they set. A Year 12 lesson on variations in patterns of speech demonstrated that high levels of expectation, together with excellent classroom management, led to challenging tasks being successfully completed.
143. Students like and respect their teachers for their evident commitment and shared passion for literary study. Relationships are very good and the whole ethos is one of shared learning. An

atmosphere of enthusiasm and active engagement with learning was apparent in all lessons. Students concentrate well and, as a result, are able to identify detailed features of a variety of different texts and of linguistic features. This is particularly notable in small groups, where a mature focus on the task in hand is successfully maintained. Feedback to students on their work is good and regular use of assessment supports learning in lessons. Written work is marked with helpful marginal notes and comments on how students can improve their performance.

144. The leadership and management of the department are very good. An energetic and enthusiastic team demonstrates commitment to continual improvement in standards. Teachers encourage students to read widely around the syllabus and make use of their own substantial knowledge to give breadth and context to work on set books. The new syllabuses are being translated into schemes of work that effectively reflect the subject's requirements and set a firm foundation for good teaching. These now need to be extended further. The department is actively engaged on producing course materials that will support lesson planning and preparation, with clearly defined learning objectives and criteria for assessment. Potential grades are carefully predicted yet better comparative analysis and tracking of attainment would inform further planning and improvement. Resources are very good and are used effectively to extend learning.
145. The curriculum is very good and includes good extra-curricular enrichment. Theatre trips are a strong feature of this. At the last inspection, the quality of provision was judged to be very good and there have been further good improvements since then. Attainment has improved, both in terms of the number of higher grades being achieved in examinations and in the overall pass rate. The quality of teaching overall is now very good. The quality of students' oral work needs to be improved so that they make sustained spoken contributions, not solely when working in groups, but also in whole-class contexts.

French

Overall, provision in the subject is **very good**.

Strengths

- Attainment in Year 12 is good and, in Year 13, it is very good. Students make very good progress and the oral skills of Year 13 students are impressive.
- Teaching is a particular strength and it is often outstanding.
- Students' attitudes to their work are excellent. They are fully committed to their studies and take their work seriously.
- The languages department is very strongly led.

Areas for improvement

- Some reluctance by students to initiate the foreign language.
- The numbers of students following courses in French and Spanish remain comparatively low.

146. Over the last four years, the number of students undertaking courses for AS or A-level examinations has been low. The standards achieved have also fluctuated but the most recent results are above last year's national average at AS-level and about in line with national averages at A-level, albeit with a small number of candidates.
147. The evidence from work seen in lessons and the scrutiny of coursework indicates an improving trend. Attainment overall in French is often above expected levels and written work shows growing attention to accuracy. Spoken language, particularly in Year 13, is very impressive and it is improving in Year 12, as students deal well with the transition from GCSE to AS-level and begin to master more complex language and structures. Pronunciation and intonation are usually good. In Year 13, the students cope well with the challenges of interpretation, listen attentively to advice and improve their presentation, taking full account of the guidance given. Attainment in Year 12 shows variations in the confidence of students where some pronunciation is too anglicised and

they are still too reliant on the teachers' prompts. In both Year 12 and Year 13, listening and reading comprehension skills are strong and students have a solid grasp of basic structures. This represents an improvement since the last inspection.

148. Teaching is very good and sometimes outstanding. One of the lessons seen was excellent and all the others were very good. Teachers use the foreign language consistently, frequently challenge their students and maintain a brisk pace to ensure that time is well used. Presentation is always very clear and teachers are excellent linguists. They have developed very positive relationships with their students and offer much encouragement as well as very helpful guidance on examination techniques. In addition, they plan a rich range of activities and ensure that all students contribute fully in lessons. Students learn well and appreciate the support of their teachers. Their commitment is total and, in the best lessons, they are developing greater confidence in using the foreign language for their own purposes. Progress overall is very good across the range of skills and students acknowledge the improvements that they are making. Whereas speaking skills are already well developed, the issue of students' independent use of the foreign language has not yet been fully addressed.
149. Students' work is marked with appropriate commentary on how they might improve and, in lessons, the frequent remarks and positive criticism by teachers are taken on board by students who are then able to self-correct and thereby improve upon their efforts. They use dictionaries well, make appropriate notes and are keen to support one another.
150. The department is very well led by a strong head of department who has a clear vision and a determination to raise the profile of languages in the school. Staff work well as a team and share good practice. Many efforts are being made to review standards, set targets for improvement and improve opportunities for language study through visits abroad and lunchtime activities. The department has recently established a joint '*Comenius*' initiative to develop website material with European partners. Additionally, steps are being taken to maintain the comparatively high numbers of students studying German, as well as extending opportunities to other students through a new business language course in Spanish. The department is well resourced, classrooms benefit from high quality display and the accommodation is very suitable. However, more regular use could be made of televised and videotaped material and of information and communication technology.