

INSPECTION REPORT

URSULINE HIGH SCHOOL

Wimbledon

LEA area: Merton

Unique reference number: 102683

Headteacher: Dr Neil Calvert

Reporting inspector: Mr Michael Buckley
30517

Dates of inspection: 20th – 23rd January 2003

Inspection number: 249809

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of students:	11 - 19
Gender of students:	Female
School address:	Crescent Road Wimbledon London
Postcode:	SW20 8HA
Telephone number:	(0208) 255 2688
Fax number:	(0208) 255 2687
E-mail:	enquiries@ursulinehigh.merton.sch.uk
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Mary Goodden
Date of previous inspection:	20 th January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
30517	Michael Buckley	Registered inspector		The school's results and achievements How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
9563	Jeanette Reid	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
1068	Jan Allcorn	Team inspector	Mathematics English as an additional language	
7926	James Bowden	Team inspector	Sociology	
1819	Roger Crowther	Team inspector	Psychology	
12408	Alan Frith	Team inspector	French	
27296	Akram Khan OBE	Team inspector	Physics Special educational needs	How good are the curricular and other opportunities?
1782	Andrew Lyons	Team inspector	Design and technology	
31688	Brian McGonagle	Team inspector	Art and design	
15576	David Nebesnuick	Team inspector	Business education	
1995	Kate Seager	Team inspector	Leisure and recreation Health and social care	
15372	Patricia Walker	Team inspector	English Careers education	
19983	Haydn Webb	Team inspector	Biology	

The inspection contractor was:

PPI Group Ltd
7 Hill Street
Bristol
BS1 5RW

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33 Kingsway
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WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This is a voluntary aided, Catholic girl's comprehensive school reorganised in September 2002 to take students aged from 11 to 19 years. The school is about the average size, with 1,238 students, but it has a comparatively large sixth form of 263. The sixth form provision is shared with Wimbledon College (for boys) and comprises 600 students altogether, forming a very large consortium. The school's roll is rapidly growing and this year there were 345 applications for 180 places. Just over half the students are White British, with significant percentages of Asian or Asian British, Black or Black British African and other White students who are not British or Irish. There is also a wide representation of other ethnic groups but in comparatively small numbers. Overall, the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is about average for outer London. About one student in every seven is learning English as an additional language and twenty are at the early stages of language acquisition. These figures are high nationally but fairly low for an outer London borough. The main home languages are Spanish, Urdu, Portuguese and Korean. The percentage of students claiming free school meals (seven per cent) is below average for a comprehensive school. There are 85 students with special educational needs in the main school (8.7 per cent), of whom seven have statements identifying the additional support they require from other agencies and there are two in the sixth form, of whom one has a statement. All these figures are below the national averages. Most of those requiring higher levels of support have specific learning needs. A very high proportion of students (over 66 per cent) stay on for the sixth form and around 80 per cent of those leaving Year 13 go onto higher education. The school has received recognition from Investors in People. It has been given a Healthy School Award and it has received validation as a centre for careers advice and guidance.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very effective school that consistently achieves high and often very high, academic standards. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and the school is very well led and managed. It provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- It maintains very high standards of attainment and achievement in Years 7 to 11.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Students have very good attitudes and values and their personal development is also very good.
- The school makes very good provision for educational and social inclusion.
- There is very good, decisive leadership and very effective management.

What could be improved

- Students' punctuality.
- Teachers could provide further encouragement for independent learning in the sixth form.
- More accommodation is needed so that sixth form needs can be fully met.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress from already high standards of provision and achievement since the last inspection in January 1997. All the key issues identified then have been successfully addressed. Provision for and organisation of information and communication technology have been greatly improved, the senior management team has been successfully restructured, very thorough arrangements for developmental planning have been implemented and new and effective measures have been introduced to improve attendance. In addition, high standards of attainment have been maintained, attainment in work seen is better, the quality of teaching has significantly improved and new schemes of work have been produced for every subject. An ambitious programme of new building has been started that has already made important improvements to the school's accommodation.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

Between 1999 and 2001, standards in the GCSE examinations were well above the national averages and well above the results for other schools with a similar proportion of free school meals. The results for 2002 are better than for any of the preceding years. The most successful subjects were English language and literature, drama, history and food technology and the least successful were art and textiles. No national comparisons are yet available for the 2002 A-level results. In 2001, the overall average point score at A-level was close to the national average and, in 2002, the pass rate, the average point score and the percentage of A and B grades all improved. The most successful subjects were mathematics, art, English literature, sociology and French and the least successful were physics, history, business studies and chemistry. Standards in the national tests for 14-year-olds have been consistently above the national averages for girls for the past six years. In 2002, they were well above the average for similar schools in English and science and above the average in mathematics. The indicators show that, when compared with schools where students share similar prior attainment, students at the Ursuline High School are making average progress through Years 7 to 9 and very good progress in Years 10 and 11. Results are close to the targets set for Year 9 and meet or exceed the targets set for the GCSE examinations. Attainment in work seen in Years 7 to 11 is well above the nationally expected levels. Standards are particularly good in English, chemistry, physics and dance and students generally achieve very well. Progress is good in the sixth form and overall standards are above those expected nationally. Particular strengths are in English, French and psychology. Students with special educational needs make very good progress and the most able students and those learning English as an additional language achieve well. Students of all ages are generally well on the way towards meeting their targets.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students have very positive attitudes to school and show a very strong interest in the activities offered. They concentrate hard and work very diligently.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good in class and around the school. Students are friendly, courteous and helpful to one another as well as to teachers and other adults. They quickly learn what behaviour is expected and live up to those high expectations. There is very little bullying or other oppressive behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships at all levels are very good. Students have a very good understanding of the effects of their actions on others. This helps to create a positive learning environment. Students grow into mature young adults.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Figures are above the national average but still just below the 92 per cent threshold.

The school council contributes well to the life of the school. Students become closely involved with work in the community and with fund-raising for charities. A small but significant percentage of students are late in the mornings, disrupting the start of lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. It is better in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form than in Years 10 and 11. Teaching in Years 7 to 11 was very good in English, dance and personal and social education and good overall in the other subjects sampled. One excellent lesson was seen in history. Only two lessons were not satisfactory, both taught by non-specialists. Numeracy and literacy are taught well, as are other aspects of English, mathematics and science. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects and prepare lessons very well. Lessons are generally conducted at a good pace. Teachers have well chosen objectives and communicate them clearly at the beginning of lessons so that students know what to expect and what is expected of them. They have high expectations for learning and students value the standards set and do their best to meet them. Most teachers show a genuine and infectious enthusiasm for their subjects. They are very good at making day-to-day assessments of students' progress and generally skilful at adapting their approaches to meet the needs of all students. Students with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language are supported well. Learning is very good in most lessons. Students work hard and have very positive attitudes towards their subjects. They are very well motivated and make very good progress in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form and good progress in Years 10 and 11. Students listen well, follow instructions and generally take responsibility for their own learning. Sixth form students sometimes lack the confidence to offer suggestions or to contribute to group debates.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The quality and range of learning opportunities offered are good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form. Courses are very well matched to students' aspirations. Provision for citizenship and personal and social education is good. All statutory requirements are fully met.
Provision for students with special educational needs	The quality of provision is good. There are effective procedures for the identification of students with special education needs. Targets in individual plans are precise and review procedures are good.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Overall provision is satisfactory. Students receive good support from subject teachers and from their friends and they have very positive attitudes. However, the school's policy and practice are not yet fully developed.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision is very good in all these areas. Rich opportunities for spiritual development include retreats as well as time for reflection in lessons, tutorials, assemblies and acts of worship. Students are encouraged to consider a wide variety of moral and social issues through lessons and through the wide variety of extra-curricular activities, the Chaplaincy and work in the community.
How well the school cares for its students	A very good picture overall. Students' personal and academic progress is very closely monitored and a very good range of information, advice and guidance is available.

The curriculum successfully enables all students to achieve high standards. The school makes commendable efforts to cater for the aptitudes of all by programmes, such as a work-related consolidated curriculum, workshops on thinking skills, booster classes in English, mathematics and science and intensive training in dance, web-site design and newsletter production. The range of extra-curricular activities is very good and much appreciated by many students. The school has very good relationships with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the head-teacher and other key staff	Very good leadership and management. Educational priorities are clearly identified, targets set and goals achieved. The senior management team and the middle managers all carry out their responsibilities well. There is a strong emphasis on raising standards while, at the same time, creating a positive and friendly learning environment with a strong Catholic ethos.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors carry out their responsibilities very well. They are very well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses and fully involved in developmental planning and in guiding and monitoring the school's progress towards its targets. All statutory requirements are met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is done systematically and very effectively. The senior management team and the governors are formally involved in the process twice a term and middle managers are responsible for monitoring progress in their areas of responsibility. There are regular and frequent line-management meetings.
The strategic use of resources	This is very good. Staff and equipment are well deployed. Financial planning is closely linked to educational priorities and expenditure is very strictly monitored.

All staff and governors are involved in developmental planning, as are, to a lesser extent, the students and parents. This helps to create a positive atmosphere in which everyone is working towards common agreed goals. Everyone associated with the school is strongly committed to its success and it is very well placed to improve still further. There is a good match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory. The principles of best value are very closely observed.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has high expectations. • Students make good progress. • Their children like school. • They would feel comfortable approaching the school with questions or problems. • The teaching is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework is not appropriate. • The range of activities outside lessons is not adequate. • They are not well informed about their children's progress.

Responses to the parents' questionnaire were very positive and the proportion of parents who indicated concerns in the questionnaire and at the parents' meeting was, in most cases, low. Inspectors agree with the positive comments. They judge that the amount and frequency of homework is appropriate and that it is generally well marked, making a valuable contribution to students' learning. Inspectors judge that there is good provision for extra-curricular activities and that parents have good opportunities to learn about their daughters' progress.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

URSULINE HIGH SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The Ursuline High School's sixth form is comparatively large, with 263 female students. It is in a partnership with Wimbledon College (for boys) that forms a very large consortium of 600 students altogether. Curricular planning, teaching and learning are very successfully shared between the two schools. The sixth form curriculum offers a very broad and balanced academic programme of 33 AS-level and 27 A-level courses that are well suited to the aspirations and potential of the students. In addition, vocational courses are offered in business, health and social care and leisure and recreation. The sixth form is rapidly growing as the range of subjects and vocational courses offered increases. About two thirds of the girls in Year 11 continue into the sixth form. Overall, there are more boys than girls in the consortium but the teaching groups at the High School are mostly made up of girls. Entry requirements are in line with those applied by most sixth forms but they are sometimes waived in order to provide opportunities to particular individuals. Overall, the proportion of students from minority ethnic groups is about average for outer London but students come from a very wide variety of different cultures. About three-quarters are from the Catholic faith but students from other faiths are welcomed and their beliefs are carefully respected. A comparatively small number of students are learning English as an additional language and very few are at the early stages of language acquisition. Two students have special educational needs.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very effective. The standards of attainment and students' achievements are good and the quality of teaching and learning is very good. High standards are being maintained and, in some areas, improved. The curriculum is very extensive and provides an unusually wide range of options that are carefully selected to meet the needs and wishes of the students. It is very well led and managed and very cost effective.

Strengths

- High standards of attainment are being maintained.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- The curriculum is very broad and carefully tailored to meet the needs of as many students as possible.
- Teachers monitor progress carefully and provide very good support.
- Relationships are very good.

What could be improved

- More opportunities and support for independent learning are needed.
- There is insufficient accommodation for any additional provision.

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	Overall the quality of provision is good , with the clear potential to be very good. Results are above the national average and students who complete the two-year advanced course achieve very well. Teachers know the subject very well. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers do not always encourage students to predict and hypothesise and some students in Year 12 need additional support.
Biology	Overall, the quality of provision in biology is good . The overall pass rate is above the national average. Teaching is good and teachers use their good knowledge of the subject effectively. Students do not have enough access to information and communication technology. Students need opportunities to develop their own skills of enquiry.
Physics	Good . AS-level results are in line with the national average but A-level results are below average. Students make good progress and their achievement is good, relative to their attainment in the GCSE examinations. Teaching is good and provides interesting opportunities for learning. The most able students need further challenge and there is scope for wider use of information and communication technology to support learning.
Design and technology	Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is good . Results are improving and are close to the national average. Teaching is very good and enthusiastic and relationships are very good. There is not enough equipment for information and communication technology, such as facilities for computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture.
Business studies	Overall, the quality of provision in business education is good . Results of the vocational courses are close to the national average and students achieve well. Achievement on the GCE courses is satisfactory although results have been below average. Students have very positive attitudes, relationships are very good and teachers are well qualified and effective. Teaching is good but systems for assessment are not yet fully developed.
Leisure and recreation	Overall, the quality of provision in leisure and recreation is satisfactory . Results are below the national average. Teaching is satisfactory. Students gain good knowledge of how the leisure industry works and use technical vocabulary effectively. Number skills are weak and limited access to computers slows progress.
Health and social care	Overall the provision in health and social care is very good . Results are above the national average. Standards on the advanced course are above the national expectations and achievement is very good. Teaching is very good and independent learning is well developed. Assessment is very thorough.
Art and design	Good . Results in 2002 in both AS and A-level examinations were well above the national averages for the preceding year. Students work well and are making good progress as a result of good teaching. Assessing and recording systems lack rigour at present.
Sociology	Good . Results in most years have been above the national average. Good quality teaching results in effective learning and, as a result, standards of attainment at the end of Year 13 are improving once again.
Psychology	Provision is good overall although results are below the national average. However, attainment is improving. The current standard of written and class work is good. Teaching and learning are good. Management, recently expanded to reflect demand, is satisfactory.
English language and literature	Overall, the quality of provision in English is very good . Examination results are well above the national average and achievement is good. The quality of teaching is good.

French	Overall, the quality of provision in French is good . Examination results are above the national average. Teaching is very good. Lessons are well planned and teachers use the foreign language all the time in lessons. Students know they are expected to work hard and learn thoroughly. Assessment procedures are good but teachers are not sufficiently confident in the use of information and communication technology to support their students.
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Work was also sampled in **chemistry**, where teaching and learning are very good and standards are above the nationally expected levels.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Heads of year devote considerable time and energy to providing very good levels of advice and support. Students' behaviour, attendance and punctuality are all closely monitored, as well as their academic progress. There is good liaison about pastoral matters with the partner school and with parents. Some students would like more information about the availability of professional support if they have personal problems.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The sixth form is very well led by an assistant headteacher who liaises successfully with the partner school in the consortium. These arrangements are very effective and ensure that the standards of provision are very good. Procedures for admission, the pastoral system, the breadth of the curriculum and the teaching approaches all combine to ensure equality of opportunity and educational inclusion. Senior staff are well aware of the strengths of teaching and of areas for improvement and staff development is given a high priority. Expenditure is very closely monitored by the school's bursar and the sixth form easily pays for itself. The Joint Sixth Form Executive Management Committee acts very effectively as the strategic planning body.

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"> Teaching is good. They are well challenged and helped to study independently. The courses offered presented a good choice that matches their talents and aspirations. Teachers are accessible for help. Work is thoroughly assessed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They were often not well advised about future options. The school does not respond to their views. They were not treated as responsible young adults.

Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by students although more could be done to encourage independent learning. There is a very good range of advice and guidance available but, at the time the questionnaire was completed, not all students had taken the opportunity to explore it or to benefit from it. The school provides opportunities for students to express their views and these are taken seriously. They are given responsibilities and encouraged to work in the community in ways that are appropriate for young adults. Although there was dissatisfaction expressed in their responses to some questions, students were very positive about their experience in discussions. They are very appreciative of the wide range of opportunities that the school offers and believe the quality of their learning is good.

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

Very high standards of attainment and achievement in Years 7 to 11

1. The attainment on entry of this year's Year 7 was close to the national averages for English and mathematics but below this level in science. Standards on entry overall are close to the national average but they are well below the average for schools with a similar percentage of free school meals. There is some evidence that levels of attainment on entry to Year 7 have fallen over the past few years. Nevertheless, the school has a significant proportion of higher-attaining students who reach higher than average levels. The pattern of results in all age groups indicates that this is the case throughout the school, with a strong and positive effect on the overall average point scores.
2. Attainment in the tests at the end of Year 9 has been consistently above the national averages for girls in English, mathematics and science over the last six years. In 2002, results were well above the national average for boys and girls in English and above the national averages for boys and girls in mathematics and science. Standards were well above those achieved by schools with a similar proportion of free school meals in English and mathematics and better than the results achieved by these schools in science.
3. A comparatively high proportion of students reach higher levels than those expected nationally, confirming that there is a significant percentage of higher-attaining students who make very good progress. This is the case in all three subjects tested, but particularly so in English and science. Calculations based on the scores of last year's Year 9 students when they took their Year 6 tests in 1999 indicate that they have made average progress over the last three years compared with national averages and compared with the progress of other students whose attainment was similar in 1999. The improvement in results from year to year is close to the national pattern, although at higher levels and there has been a marked improvement in science.
4. The proportion of Year 11 students who obtained five or more A* to C grades in the 2002 GCSE examinations was well above the national average, as it had been for the previous five years. The same is true of the proportion obtaining five or more A* to G grades. The proportion of students who obtained one or more A* to G grades in 2001 was very high (100 per cent) but it fell in 2002 to close to the national average. The average GCSE point scores have been well above the national averages and above the averages for girls for the past six years. Although it always remained well above the national average, the school's average point score declined slightly for four years but, in 2002, it rose again. However, the trend over time is still below that seen nationally.
5. When these results are compared with those of other schools whose students achieved similar results in 2000, at the end of Year 9, the average point score was well above average and the proportion of students obtaining five or more A* to C grades was above average. This clearly indicates that students made significantly better progress through Years 10 and 11 than their counterparts in similar schools. By the same comparison, the percentage of A* to G grades was above average. However, the percentage who achieved one grade G or better in 2002 fell to below the average for this group of schools. This was largely because the school has not yet been credited with the grades obtained by a group of students who took their examinations at a local college. Figures produced by the local authority also show clearly that the added value in Years 10 and 11 is significantly better than in other similar schools in the borough.
6. In 2002, attainment in most subjects was significantly better than the national averages for GCSE but results in art were significantly below the national figure. Within the school, the highest percentages of A* to C grades in subjects with five or more entries were in drama, history, design and technology, English literature and English language. The lowest percentages were in art, textiles and music. Students did better in English literature, English language and history than they did in other subjects and the school has calculated that the best individual progress was made in history, French, geography, mathematics, English language and literature, food technology, religious education,

German, science and drama. There were no significant differences between the performances of different ethnic or other groups.

7. In the three years from 1999 to 2001, the average point scores for A-level results were close to the national averages, with particular strengths in geography, English literature, physical education, general studies and French. Although there are, as yet, no confirmed national comparisons, the school's A-level results for 2002 show a marked improvement in the percentage of students obtaining two or more A-levels and in the average point score, as well as improvements in the overall pass rate. The proportion of A and B grades obtained increased to just over 45 per cent, with particularly good performances in mathematics, art, English literature, sociology and French. The lowest A-level percentages were in physics, history, business studies, chemistry, psychology, theology and biology. In the AVCE courses leading to the Advanced Certificate of Vocational Education (AVCE), only two of the 67 entries were ungraded. Although comparatively few obtained the highest grades, students' achievements were good because the criteria for entry were lower than for other areas of study.
8. Sampling of work in Years 7 to 11 shows that overall attainment is well above the nationally expected levels. Standards are higher in Years 7 to 9 than they are in Years 10 and 11. They are particularly good in English, chemistry, physics and dance. The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies have been successfully adopted and they provide good support to progress in most subjects across the school. Students generally achieve very well in Years 7 to 11 and make very good progress. Progress is slightly slower in the sixth form, particularly in Year 12, as students need time to adjust to the different demands and disciplines of sixth form work and many need to acquire new basic skills and knowledge. In addition, the school admits students with a wide spread of attainment in order to offer opportunities to as many as possible. Nevertheless, achievement is good and overall standards are above those expected nationally.
9. Standards of attainment and achievement are carefully monitored and the information is used to set challenging but realistic targets. Most of these have been reached or exceeded in the past three years, particularly the targets for science in Year 9 and those for A* to C grades in the GCSE examinations. Students in Years 9 and 11 are well on the way to meeting the targets set for them in the summer of 2003. Students of all ages who have special educational needs are well supported and most make very good progress towards their personal targets. Students learning English as an additional language are also well supported by their subject teachers and by their peers and make good progress, as do those students identified as being gifted or talented towards the more advanced targets set for them.

Very good quality of teaching and learning

10. The quality of teaching across the school is very good. In Years 7 to 9, more than one in three of the lessons seen were very good or excellent, more than one in four were good or better and only one lesson was unsatisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, all but one of the lessons seen were satisfactory or better and two out of every three were good or better. There was no unsatisfactory teaching in the sixth form and the proportions of good and very good teaching were very close to those in Years 7 to 9. Teaching in Years 7 to 11 was very good in English, dance and personal and social education and good overall in the other subjects sampled. One excellent lesson was seen in drama. One unsatisfactory lesson was seen in information and communication technology and a poor one was seen in French. Neither of these was taught by a first-line specialist; learning objectives were not clear and expectations were too low. In the sixth form, teaching was very good in design and technology and health and social care and good in all the other subjects, except for leisure and recreation, where it was satisfactory. Literacy and numeracy are well taught.
11. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects and very good understanding of how to teach them effectively. In areas such as design and technology, modern languages, business studies and health and social care, teachers not only possess appropriate academic qualifications but they also have a great deal of relevant practical skills and experience. This helps to place the students' learning into a real-life context, making the lessons relevant and exciting. Teachers are well informed about the requirements of the various examination syllabuses. They are generally very well organised and they plan their lessons very well. Very good preparation means that stimulating and relevant

resources and teaching materials are provided. In most lessons, good planning and preparation are supported by very good classroom management and very good use of time and resources. Most lessons are carefully structured and very well paced, with a variety of activities that challenge the full range of students' ability.

12. Lessons generally begin at a brisk pace that is maintained throughout. Teachers have well chosen objectives and communicate them clearly at the beginning of lessons so that students know what to expect and what is expected of them. Teachers have high expectations for learning and students value the standards set and do their best to meet them. Most teachers show genuine enthusiasm for their subjects and this motivates and sometimes inspires the students. New ideas are skilfully introduced as part of a logical sequence so that students gradually build up their skills and understanding. Technical vocabulary and key words are regularly and correctly used and key skills are well taught. Short 'starter' activities are used to revise previous work and to assess quickly the level of students' learning. Often, lesson plans are revised as a result to meet learning needs. A particularly strong feature of teaching is the sequential use of questions leading students to a clearer understanding of new concepts. Teachers know their students very well and modify their questions accordingly to ensure that good progress is made. This stretches students by encouraging them to think for themselves and to justify their answers.
13. Teachers are very good at making day-to-day assessments of their students' knowledge and understanding and they provide good feedback, orally and in writing, so that students can assess their own progress in relation to the requirements of their courses. Work is generally carefully marked so that students understand the assessment criteria and know what they need to do to improve their grades. This is particularly well done on the vocational courses in Years 12 and 13. End-of-unit tests and the use of past examination questions enable students to understand the expectations of the examining bodies and to practise examination techniques. Target-setting has been introduced and teachers and students are beginning to make good use of the concept of added value but the system is not yet fully implemented. Teachers provide very good support, sometimes through e-mail access in the evenings and holidays and this is highly appreciated by the students. Homework is well used to support progress. Students with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language are very well supported so that they often achieve very well. Their work improves so that, in many subjects, they have full access to the highest grades at A-level.
14. When students with special educational needs are supported in lessons, the support is well focused and those with learning difficulties make good progress. Educational support assistants make a positive contribution to students' progress. The teaching of groups that are withdrawn from lessons is frequently very good. Work is carefully targeted to the needs of individual students and planning is thorough so that lessons proceed at a rapid pace. High expectations are conveyed to students and they, in turn, make good use of the time available by working hard and showing a high level of motivation. Teaching support is not sufficient for the number of students with special educational needs. Less experienced teachers sometimes struggle in classes where a number of students have learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties.
15. Relationships in class are very good and teachers have a very good rapport with the students. This underpins the very good management of classes and the productive working atmosphere that are the norm. The skills of the teachers, the support they provide and the very positive attitudes of the students combine to create a very good educational environment. Generally, students of all ages adopt a mature approach to their studies and, by the end of Year 13, most have developed good independent study skills. Teachers value students' oral contributions and, as a result of this, students show insight in discussions, expressing their own ideas confidently as well as listening to and respecting the beliefs and views of others. In a few lessons, teachers talk for too long, feed students too much information and do not give them enough time to develop their own ideas.
16. Students work hard, have very positive attitudes towards their subjects and are very well motivated. In the lessons seen, they made very good progress in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form and good progress in Years 10 and 11. The quality of learning was very good in most lessons. Students listen well, follow instructions and generally take responsibility for their own learning. Sixth form students sometimes lack the confidence to offer suggestions or to contribute to group debate, often preferring

to respond only to direct questions from the teacher. They are very keen and attentive, working hard and making accurate notes, but they are occasionally reluctant to participate in the radical questioning and debate that are important for higher-level learning. Teachers are very good at encouraging younger students to respond but they do not always succeed in doing so with the sixth form. Although higher-attaining sixth form students are very good at tackling new concepts and extend their learning through independent research, others show less individual initiative. These students are not provided with enough opportunities to develop as independent learners.

Students' very good attitudes, values and personal development

17. Students of all ages are happy and secure in the school and they enjoy their lessons. They have very positive, sometimes excellent, attitudes and generally show a real enthusiasm for the activities that are offered inside and outside the classroom. They behave very well in lessons and around the school and they show genuine respect and consideration for the feelings, beliefs and faiths, not only of the staff and students, but also of people in other communities and countries.
18. Relationships amongst students and between students and teachers are very good and this greatly helps to maintain a constructive learning environment. There is very little oppressive behaviour, bullying or racism and any instances that do occur are dealt with very rapidly and effectively. Students new to the school quickly learn from their peers that such attitudes or behaviour are not acceptable. Students are mutually supportive yet they can be constructively critical when asked to comment on other students' work. Most students are confident and highly motivated and they can sustain their interest and concentration for extended periods. They are mature and articulate and they are very courteous towards visitors, staff and other students. Where students are encouraged to work independently and research their studies, they respond very well. However, these opportunities are not offered to them in all subjects.
19. Many older students are keen to take on responsibilities, such as acting as prefects or becoming a member of the very active school or sixth form councils. One group has trained as peer mentors in order to help younger students if they are unhappy or to support their studies and improve their achievements. Students are also very much involved in work in the community and with charities as part of the '*Serviam*' project. A '*Chaplaincy*' group in the sixth form spent a day helping '*Crisis Open Christmas*' clean up a warehouse that was being turned into a temporary shelter for the homeless. Students organise and perform in variety night concerts to raise money for charity.
20. Attendance is satisfactory. Although it is above the national average, it remains slightly below the threshold 92 per cent that is generally recognised as a trigger for concern. There is a very low rate of exclusions.

Inclusion

21. The school has a strong commitment to promoting an inclusive education and works hard to ensure equality of access and opportunity for all students. The school encourages students to express their views and provides them with opportunities to take part in decision-making through the school council and the sixth form council. The school believes that it is important for students to understand some of society's social and moral problems before they become involved in a practical way in helping others or in supporting charities and there is good coverage of this in some lessons. Older students take on some significant responsibilities, contributing to the school community by becoming Eucharistic Ministers or peer mentors or running a support clinic for those who are being bullied or who are unhappy in other ways. The school gives a high priority to ensuring that students recognise the worth of all cultures and that non-Christian students are given the opportunity to feel a sense of pride in their own cultural heritage. The festivals of non-Christian faith groups are celebrated by inclusion in morning prayers and discussions. Some students have made visits to a Hindu gurdwara and have met the local Imam.
22. Every effort is made to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs and wishes of as many students as possible, particularly in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. There are workshops for gifted or talented students in thinking skills, web-site design, newsletter production and an alternative, work-related curriculum and Year 11 programme, taught off site at Merton College, that is targeted at

persistent non-attenders and intended to keep them in school. Provision for students with special educational needs is good. The educational support department provides an appropriate combination of in-class support and withdrawal sessions for individuals and small groups of students who are on the 'school action plus' stage of the special educational needs register. Some at the 'school action' stage receive support in lessons if a learning support teacher is present to support a pupil with a statement of special educational needs. The education support staff work closely with the English department to support literacy development and students' individual education plans have a very strong focus on literacy.

23. Students with special educational needs achieve very good standards when their prior attainment is taken into account. Those with statements of special educational needs, who receive support in class and intensive support in the education support department, make very good progress. In small group support sessions led by support teachers, students make very good progress through work that is very well targeted to their learning needs. Students at the 'school action plus' stage of the special needs register make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans. In 2002, ten students with special educational needs were entered for GCSE examinations in a variety of subjects. One gained a grade B, three gained C grades and all ten obtained at least a D grade and they all achieved at least one pass at GCSE. The percentage of students gaining one or more A* to G grades is well above average for students with special educational needs.
24. The school is strongly committed to continually developing and improving its support systems. This commitment is articulated through a strategic action plan. The plan has many good features, such as clearly defined priorities, tasks, responsible staff, success criteria and strategies for monitoring and evaluation. The plan aims to raise achievement and increase value-added contribution for all students with special educational needs. Appropriate priorities and tasks focus sharply on standards, teaching, learning, management and learning resources.
25. Compared with other outer London boroughs, the school has a comparatively low proportion of students learning English as an additional language and a very small percentage who are in the early stages of language acquisition. These latter students receive one-to-one support, mainly in class, from a part-time teacher. The others make good progress because of the good support they receive from subject teachers and from their friends and because of their own very positive attitudes. A deputy headteacher has recently taken responsibility for this provision and has already established a system for monitoring students' progress in terms of the outcomes of National Curriculum tests, GCSE and advanced courses. An induction system is being planned and the school is considering linking new students with a 'buddy' who would provide them with support and help them settle into their surroundings. The co-ordinator for special educational needs manages the provision. These arrangements are satisfactory although the school's policy does not provide very much detail about how they should be developed.

Decisive leadership and effective management

26. The headteacher's very good leadership has ensured that the school continues to improve from an already very strong position. The key issues identified at the last inspection have all been effectively and successfully tackled. Schemes of work have been updated for all subjects and systems of assessment and monitoring have been established for the monitoring and assessment of students' progress. Standards are continuing to rise as a result of determined action and well focused policies and practice, such as the introduction of booster classes, close monitoring of progress and target-setting, coursework clinics, revision clinics, mentoring by older students, study skills being taught in the personal and social education programme and parental support. Professional development has been concentrated on meeting the principal targets in the school's improvement plan, adapting to the demands of the new AS-level examinations and the introduction of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies into Years 7 to 9.
27. In two areas where performance unexpectedly declined, there was a rigorous scrutiny of the causes, external consultants were called in to present their reports, an action plan was drawn up and progress in these areas is now being systematically monitored by one of the deputy headteachers. Decisive action has been taken to broaden the curriculum, particularly for Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form and to make it more accessible. Other priorities in the school improvement plan have been pursued

with equal determination. In particular, extensive and varied programmes have been introduced to develop the pastoral and spiritual elements of the school's provision. As important, in the view of senior staff, has been the change in the school's management culture, which is now much more consultative, providing opportunities for staff at all levels, governors, students and parents to play their part in setting targets for development. As a result of this, staff are united in their very strong commitment to the school's continuing success and the school's aims and values are very clearly reflected in all aspects of its life and work.

28. The recently formed senior management team is made up of very experienced teachers who each have a carefully tailored blend of responsibilities for the line management of individual faculties and departments and for the implementation of school-wide policies and developments. They have already formed an effective management team that provides very good support to the headteacher. The sixth form is very well managed, the faculties and departments are well managed, the year heads carry out their duties very conscientiously and well and the special educational needs co-ordinator provides highly effective leadership. All departments produce development plans that address issues for improvement in their subjects and in the school development plan. These are thoroughly researched and well produced documents and members of the senior management team review progress towards the targets they identify with heads of departments at least once a term. If targets are not being met, then remedial action is taken without delay. Formal and informal communications are very effective. The headteacher holds a ten-minute briefing for all staff every day and the senior management team meet for a similar period daily, as well as holding more formal weekly meetings. There are regular and business-like faculty and year group meetings.
29. The governors help to ensure that the school meets all the statutory requirements. They are very well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses through the detailed reports from the headteacher and from the regular presentations given to them by members of staff about particular aspects of the school's work. They make an important contribution to the planning and management of the sixth form consortium. They are developing a system whereby individual governors make planned visits to the school to link with departmental or year heads. Governors have established a programme of training to ensure that they are up-to-date with the range and nature of their responsibilities. They are fully involved in the cycle of preparation for the school improvement plan and play an important role in guiding the school forward. For example, they have supported the senior management in the series of radical changes imposed by the change in the age of entry and through difficult decisions about the reduction in the number of teachers. They have played an important part in the fund-raising and planning required for the extensive building programme. Each year, governors determine the main priorities for development, such as the very successful propagation of the 'Ursuline' ethos throughout the whole school.
30. The system of planning for school improvement is based on an annual cycle of reviews and consultations that involve all staff and governors as well as students and parents, at appropriate times. Priorities emerging from the previous inspection have been met and new priorities are identified by the regular work of the senior management group and the governors as well as by the comprehensive 'Joint Annual Review' conducted by the school in partnership with the local authority. This is a very effective system that ensures that the targets identified are the most important issues for school improvement and that governors have an opportunity to rank the targets in order of priority. Financial planning is very closely based on these priorities. The management of the budget and monitoring of expenditure are carried out extremely efficiently by the school's bursar and his staff and the financial position is regularly reviewed by the senior management group, the chair of the governors' finance committee and by the full governing body. The bursar stringently applies the principles of best value and ensures that the school benefits as much as possible from the funds available and that specific grants are properly used.
31. The governors and the senior management team closely monitor the progress towards the targets in the school improvement plan and the senior managers also monitor progress made within faculties and departments. This ensures that the school moves efficiently towards its objectives. Teaching is monitored as part of the very effective performance management programme. Although other kinds of focused monitoring are not systematically planned, heads of faculties and departments have a good understanding of the areas for development in teaching and staff development is given a high priority. Where there are concerns about the quality of teaching, intensive programmes of observation and

support are established that have proved to be very beneficial. All staff are involved in the performance management programme and this, in turn, is linked to the well managed programme of staff development. There are clear, well-documented and highly effective induction programmes for newly qualified teachers who are provided with good support by their faculty, the school and the local authority and all teachers new to the school take part in an induction programme. Professional development days are well planned and have a focus relating to the priorities in the school improvement plan. The school has a sufficient number of well-qualified staff. The match of staffing levels, qualifications and experience to the subjects taught is good across the school. The faculty structure has provided effective lines of responsibility and accountability. This structure, with the development of well planned schemes of work, strongly supports the curriculum and the teaching and learning priorities of the school improvement plan.

32. A large-scale programme of building and refurbishment has so far added two large new teaching blocks in the last three years as well as providing an extension to the dining hall, a sixth form common room, three new laboratories, a new parents' waiting area and new central offices and modernised the staff room. Still to come are a sports centre, a learning resource centre, two new rooms for business education and a further extension to the dining hall. When these developments are complete, the school will have gone a long way towards improving the present situation. At the moment, however, there are insufficient sports facilities and no showers, the library and resource area is inadequate and most of the books are unavoidably packed up while the building is being completed. The girls' toilets are sometimes left in a dirty condition. Unsatisfactory accommodation significantly affects standards in technology, where there are no appropriate facilities for food technology or textiles. The school has no spare capacity to meet the aspirations of its students by expanding the sixth form curriculum further on its present site.
33. The provision of learning resources is satisfactory although there are variations between subjects. Despite the very considerable investment made in information and communication technology over the last 18 months and the very good facilities that have been created in some areas, access to computers is still unsatisfactory in biology and modern foreign languages and limited in mathematics. Students' work in art and design is limited by the lack of access to computerised programs and modern photographic equipment. There are no resources for computer-aided design or manufacturing, limiting the range of experience and the standards that could be achieved in technology. In some subjects, for example physics and sociology, the provision of books is good, but in most subjects it is just satisfactory.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Punctuality

34. A small but significant proportion of students arrive late in the mornings. This is often due to the extended journeys that many have to undertake to reach school, difficulties with public transport and the dense traffic congestion that occurs in the area every weekday morning. Nonetheless, such lateness disrupts the start of lessons and valuable time is lost. Some sixth form students are late when they have to travel from the other school in the consortium.

Encouragement for independent learning in the sixth form

35. Some sixth form students lack the confidence to make suggestions or to contribute to class debates. Although they are very keen and attentive and work hard, they are occasionally reluctant to participate in the radical questioning and debate that are important for higher-level learning. Higher-attaining sixth form students are very good at tackling new concepts and extend their learning through independent research but others show less individual initiative. Teachers are not providing these students with enough opportunities, stimulus or support for them to develop as independent learners.

Accommodation to allow further development of sixth form provision

36. Despite the intensive and imaginative building programme, all the available teaching space is now in regular use. This effectively prevents any further developments in the provision for the sixth form. The

school has recognised this and is actively seeking ways and means to provide more accommodation so that it may make even better provision for the needs of its sixth-form students.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

37. There are no major areas for improvement but, in order to raise standards still higher, the school's senior management and governors need to:

- Improve levels of punctuality for all age groups in the mornings and for sixth formers in transit from the other school.

Sixth form

- Provide more stimulus and support for the development of independent learning.
- Continue to research ways and means of providing additional accommodation to allow even better provision to be made for the needs and aspirations of sixth-form students.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	41
	Sixth form	60
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	1	12	17	9	1	1	0
Percentage	2	30	42	22	2	2	0
Sixth form							
Number	0	20	25	15	0	0	0
Percentage	0	33	42	25	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.

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	975	263
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	87	10

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	7	1
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	85	2

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	168

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	38

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.0
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.1
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	0	209	209

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	170	153	160
	Total	170	153	160
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	81 (92)	73 (75)	77 (71)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	43 (65)	53 (52)	39 (43)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	176	120	158
	Total	176	120	158
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (81)	58 (72)	76 (72)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	45 (38)	37 (47)	31 (42)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	0	180	180

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* - C	5 or more grades A* - G	1 or more grades A* - G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	126	171	174
	Total	126	171	174
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	70 (64)	95 (96)	97 (100)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	47.6 (44.4)
	National	39.8 (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 students who achieved all those they studied	School	n/a	n/a
	National		n/a

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

NB: figures for 2001 are entered

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	n/a	101	101
	Average point score per candidate	n/a	15.8	15.8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4

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

Ethnic background of students

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 students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
676	12	1
14	0	0
84	0	0
6	2	0
2	2	0
1	0	0
21	0	0
28	0	0
25	0	0
0	0	0
111	0	0
42	16	2
75	1	0
26	0	0
5	0	0
69	0	0
53	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	74.3
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.7

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	262

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	89.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	27.3
Key Stage 4	23.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	3,298,373
Total expenditure	3,336,927
Expenditure per pupil	3,340
Balance brought forward from previous year	122,066
Balance carried forward to next year	83,512

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	25.1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	32.6

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,238
Number of questionnaires returned	140

11.3 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.	58	36	4	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	59	37	2	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	39	49	3	3	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	43	43	10	2	2
The teaching is good.	51	41	3	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	45	42	6	3	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	61	33	3	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	75	23	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	44	43	4	2	4
The school is well led and managed.	47	43	4	2	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	53	39	2	2	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	41	40	7	4	8

Other issues raised by parents

Parents expressed concern about the arrangements for entering and leaving the school campus and for transport at the end of the school day.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

38. Owing to the regrading of the 2002 A-level results, no national comparisons for that year are yet available. In 1999 and 2000, the school's average point score for A-level results was close to the national average. In 2001, although the basis for calculation was changed, the average point score was still close to the national average. The 2001 results showed that students made best progress and did best when compared with national figures in geography, English literature, physical education, general studies and French. The least successful subjects, compared with national averages, were art and design, A-level business studies and physics. The school calculates that individual students made the best progress in English language and literature, theology, art and drama.
39. The school's results for 2002 showed a marked improvement in the percentage of students obtaining two or more A-levels and in the average point score, as well as improvements in the overall pass rate. The proportion of A and B grades obtained increased to just over 45 per cent. The highest A-level percentages of A and B grades in subjects with five or more entries were in mathematics, art, English literature, sociology and French. The lowest A-level percentages were in physics, history, business studies, chemistry, psychology, theology and biology. In the AVCE courses, only two of the 67 entries were ungraded. On the other hand, only 16 per cent obtained A or B grades and the majority obtained grades D or E. This is largely because the school's criteria for entering the course are not as demanding as those for A or AS-level courses and less academic students tend to be enrolled.
40. The school's examination results reflect the fact that it aims to give opportunities to as many students as possible and entry requirements for some courses in the sixth form are lower than they are in many schools. Nevertheless, standards of work seen during the inspection are well above those expected nationally in English language and literature and above national standards in mathematics, design and technology, the advanced vocational course in health and social care, sociology, psychology and French. Standards are in line with course requirements in biology, physics, art and design, A-level business studies, leisure and tourism and intermediate health and social care. Standards are below the expected levels in the vocational business courses.
41. Higher-attaining students generally make very good progress and achieve above average standards but a significant proportion of students find the transition to sixth form work difficult. The approaches adopted towards teaching in Years 7 to 11 are very structured and only the highest-attaining students are fully prepared for the comparative academic freedom of the sixth form. Although most students have been enabled to obtain reasonably good grades in the GCSE examinations, they have not all developed the necessary skills and confidence in independent research. In some subjects, such as mathematics, they lack some conceptual, as well as technical skills required for A-level studies. Furthermore, the 35 per cent who leave at the end of Year 11 includes some students who obtained very high grades in the GCSE examinations and then opted to go elsewhere for post-16 studies. For these reasons, although the quality of teaching and learning is very good, overall and students' attitudes are very positive, the achievement of most students is good, rather than very good. Students with special educational needs make very good progress and students learning English as an additional language and those identified as gifted and talented make good progress.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

42. Students are confident, highly motivated and sustain their interest and concentration for extended periods. The great majority of them are mature, courteous and articulate. Students interact very well with teachers and with one another. They are mutually supportive yet critical in a constructive way when asked to comment on others' work. They listen with respect to the opinions and beliefs of others and this greatly adds to the quality of the learning atmosphere. Relationships are very good at every level. In the great majority of lessons, their attitudes are very good and sometimes excellent.

Where the teaching is best and students are encouraged to work independently and research their studies, they respond very well. However, these opportunities are not offered to them in all subjects.

43. Behaviour is very good in lessons and around the school. Many students have strong perceptions of their role in school and are keen to take responsibility. For example, one group trained as peer mentors, helps younger students to deal with bullying or supports their studies in order to improve their achievements. The sixth form chaplaincy team spent a day helping 'Crisis Open Christmas' clean up a warehouse that was being turned into a temporary shelter for the homeless. There is an active student council representing students' interests, needs and concerns. Students organise and perform in variety night concerts to raise money for charity. These and many other opportunities support their good personal development.
44. Students' views on the school are dealt with in a later section of the report. Attendance is satisfactory and is above the national average. However, students sometimes arrive late to lessons when transferring from the other site.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

45. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is very good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching in the lessons seen. Teaching was good or better in almost one in every four lessons and very good or better in one lesson in every three. Teaching is very good in design and technology and health and social care and good in all the other subjects, except for leisure and recreation, where it is satisfactory.
46. Teachers know their subjects very well and understand how to teach them, anticipating where difficulties may arise and adapting their approaches accordingly. In areas such as design and technology, modern languages, business studies and health and social care, teachers not only possess appropriate academic qualifications but they also have a great deal of practical skills and experience. This enables them to provide realistic tasks and make the lessons relevant and exciting. For example, in design and technology, one student is planning a warehouse conversion for student accommodation, another is working on a chair for back suffers, whilst another is trying to solve a storage problem for a local shop. However, in biology, issues of topical interest are not used sufficiently well, particularly to challenge the higher-attaining students. Teachers are well informed about the requirements of the various examination syllabuses and ensure that their students understand them.
47. Teachers organise and plan their lessons very well, ensuring that stimulating and relevant resources and teaching materials are provided. In most lessons, they demonstrate very good classroom management and use time and resources well. Most lessons are carefully structured and very well paced, with a variety of activities that challenge the full range of students' ability. Teachers have well chosen objectives and communicate them clearly at the beginning of lessons so that students know what to expect and what is expected of them. Teachers have high expectations for learning and students value the standards set and do their best to meet them.
48. Most teachers communicate a real enthusiasm for their subjects that motivates and sometimes inspires the students. New ideas are skilfully introduced in subjects such as mathematics and physics so that students gradually build up their skills and understanding. Technical vocabulary and key words are regularly and correctly used and the key skills are well taught. A particularly strong feature of teaching is the use of sequences of questions leading students to a clearer understanding of new concepts. Teachers know their students very well and modify their questions accordingly to ensure that good progress is made. This challenges students to think for themselves and to justify their answers. In sociology and psychology, they encourage students to draw on their own experiences to produce ideas about issues such as morality and crime.
49. Teachers make very good use of day-to-day assessment. They provide good feedback, orally and in writing, so that students can assess their own progress. Work is generally carefully marked so that students understand the assessment criteria and know what they need to do to improve their grades. This is particularly well done on the vocational courses. End-of-unit tests and the use of past examination questions enable students to understand the expectations of the examining bodies and

to practise examination techniques. Target-setting has been introduced and teachers and students are beginning to think in terms of added value but the system is not yet fully implemented. Students are very appreciative of the very good support they receive from teachers that sometimes even extends to e-mail access in the evenings and school holidays. Homework is well used to support progress. Students with special educational needs and those learning English as an additional language are very well supported so that they often achieve very well. Their work improves so that, in many subjects, they have full access to the highest grades at A-level. No specialist support is available for students learning English as an additional language although some do have language difficulties that affect their choice of courses.

50. Relationships are very good and teachers have a very good rapport with the students. This underpins the very good management of classes and the productive working atmosphere that are the norm. The skills of the teachers, the support they provide and the very positive attitudes of the students combine to create a very good educational environment. By the end of Year 13, most students have developed good independent study skills. Teachers value students' oral contributions and, as a result of this, students show insight in discussions, expressing their own ideas confidently as well as listening and respecting the beliefs and views of others. However, in a few lessons, teachers talk for too long, feed students too much information and do not give them enough time to develop their own ideas.
51. Learning is very good in most lessons. Students work hard and have very positive attitudes towards the subject. They are very well motivated and make good progress. Students listen well, follow instructions and generally take responsibility for their own learning. However, some students lack the confidence to offer suggestions or to contribute to group debate, often preferring to respond only to direct questions. They are very keen and attentive, work hard and make accurate notes, but they are occasionally reluctant to participate in the radical questioning and debate that are important for higher-level learning. Although higher-attaining sixth form students are very good at tackling new concepts and extend their learning through independent research, others show less individual initiative. These students are not provided with enough opportunities to develop as independent learners.

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

52. The quality and range of opportunities offered to students in the sixth form are very good. The sixth form curriculum offers a very broad and balanced academic programme of 33 AS-level and 27 A-level courses that are well suited to the aspirations and potential of the students. In addition, vocational courses are offered in business, health and social care and leisure and recreation. The school works hard to ensure that the sixth form courses are well organised, economical, viable and cost-effective. The governors have recently supported the appointment of additional well qualified and experienced staff to reduce the size of teaching groups in some subjects, such as psychology and sociology.
53. Highly effective, co-operative and mutually beneficial arrangements exist between the school and the neighbouring Wimbledon College. The schools collaborate successfully to offer an excellent range of A-level, AS-Level and vocational courses to a wide ability range. Minimum entry requirements for both institutions are appropriate. However, exceptions are made as the school tries to reconcile the respective requirements for subjects, including key skills, with the development of students' personal interests and responsibilities. Senior staff are constantly evaluating students' aptitude and progress and they are always ready to modify and, if necessary, to extend opportunities and to support students in their individual choices. The statutory requirement for religious education is met. There is a compulsory extra-curricular enrichment programme from which students can choose two six-week courses from Yoga, survival cookery, dance, sport, film studies or first aid.
54. The school places great emphasis on informing Year 11 students about the sixth form and preparing them for entry. Students are counselled about the most appropriate courses and the essentials of sixth form study as part of the careers programme. There is also an information evening to which students and their parents are invited. In addition, members of the senior management team interview every prospective sixth form student. At these interviews, the benefits and responsibilities of sixth form study are discussed and students are also given advice on possible career paths and higher-

education opportunities. Teaching departments spend considerable time developing, writing and reviewing course outlines and schemes of work in order to reflect changing national requirements.

55. All students follow well planned and organised AS-level courses in either general studies, theology or critical thinking in which they are able to develop understanding and sensitivity to various social and moral issues. Key skills are taught through AS and A-level subjects as well as through general studies. For example, students' communication skills are developed so that they read and synthesise information and organise their writing. Numeracy and graphical skills are developed well in the sciences and geography. However, no external certification is sought. Provision for information and communication technology has improved considerably. Key skills in this area are offered to all students in Year 12 while the A-level and Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses in Year 13 are taught at Wimbledon College. However, there is a need for still further development so that improved skills can be used to support teaching and learning in other subjects.
56. The programme of careers education and guidance for the sixth form is good. Provision starts prior to students joining the sixth form and continues during Years 12 and 13. There is written material for students and sixth form tutors about gaining access to higher education and the school organises higher education forums for students and parents. The policy makes it clear that students should have opportunities for interviews with careers advisers from outside the school but sixth formers themselves feel that these are limited.
57. The provision for extra-curricular activities is good and students are encouraged to take part in a wide range of sporting, musical and dramatic activities. All students applying to Oxford and Cambridge universities are given extra support with their application forms and personal statements and with interview techniques. There are very good opportunities to participate in the school's debating society, public speaking competitions, theatre and concert trips, pilgrimages, the orchestra, choir, instrumental ensembles and theatre productions. In addition, students pursue interesting and challenging activities outside school, such as work-shadowing, peer-mentoring, community work and chaplaincy work, as well as organising clubs and social events within school. The extensive curricular provision and the number of AS-level courses chosen by students have curtailed the amount of time available for private study and extra-curricular activities. Nevertheless, many students accept school-wide responsibilities, such as being prefects and form representatives at the sixth form council.
58. The school makes very good provision for students' personal, social and health education. In Year 12, the programmes focus appropriately on study skills, target-setting and preparation for work-shadowing. The Year 13 programme continues and complements the work of Year 12 while recognising the need to prepare students for higher education and careers. Students discuss issues in relation to confidence and responsibility, relationships and differences, health education, sex education, drugs awareness, careers and citizenship. The school encourages students to express their opinions about the content of the programme and through the sixth form council, it provides them with opportunities to take part in decision-making. In tutorials, they are given good opportunities to discuss topics, such as time-management, revision and study skills and interview techniques. Students have benefited from talks given by many visiting speakers from a wide variety of organisations on a variety of topics including, crime prevention, drug abuse, health and sex education.
59. The provision for sixth form students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. There is a very good range of frequently imaginative opportunities for the personal development of all students and there is an especially close link between their moral and social development. This arises from an expectation that students should understand as fully as possible some of the problems and needs in the society around them in order to fulfil the Ursuline ethos of '*Serviam*' – '*I will serve*'.
60. Much of the very good provision for the spiritual development of students is rooted firmly in the practice of their religion but it reaches considerably beyond that. All sixth form students have the opportunity to go on an annual retreat where there are extensive opportunities for reflection on issues, such as relationships and responsibilities, of central importance to their lives. There are regular opportunities for meditation on a range of topics in the chapel and the reflective and thoughtful atmosphere is enhanced by the use of candles and music. Their subject teachers give them very

good opportunities to reflect on issues beyond the strict requirements of the syllabus and in this way they deepen their understanding. For example, students studying the literature of the First World War visited the battlefields and read some of their texts in their original setting. These students were surprised by the way in which their emotional response to this experience heightened their understanding.

61. Students are given very good opportunities to understand and form their own views on moral issues and dilemmas. The school believes that it is important for students to understand some of the social and moral problems that arise in society before they become involved in a practical way in helping others or in supporting charities and there is good coverage of this in some lessons. For example, sociology students have the opportunity to consider the ethics of euthanasia and suicide bombing by reading and discussing media coverage of the subjects. Students of health and social care discuss the moral aspects of the distribution of funds and the needs of single-parent families. Those studying art discuss the moral aspects of some of their work, such as the theme of the wastage of war, linking this to the ideas expressed in war poetry.
62. The provision for social development is very good. Sixth form students are encouraged to understand the needs of society through work in the school. They take on some significant responsibilities in school and, in this way, contribute to the society in which they work. Some students become Eucharistic Ministers, taking a role in providing for the spiritual welfare of younger students and some have trained as peer mentors, offering support to younger students who are encountering problems within school. In the wider society, students have the opportunity to become seriously involved in the work of major charities by, for example, helping to set up a shelter for the homeless at Christmas.
63. Provision for students' cultural development, by giving them a sense of understanding and respect for all cultures, is very good. The school is very careful that, alongside its strongly Catholic ethos, students recognise the worth of all cultures and that non-Christian students are given the opportunity to feel a sense of pride in their own cultural heritage. Students from a range of cultural heritages attend Mass and, if they wish, receive a blessing from the celebrant. The festivals of non-Christian faith groups are celebrated by inclusion in morning prayers and discussions. As well as the many developmental experiences offered through the formal curriculum and the many extra-curricular activities, the school organises a range of visits to places of cultural interest. For example, all students are offered the opportunity to join theatre trips and those studying English have benefited from visits to school by theatre in education groups. Some students have made visits to a Hindu gurdwara and have met the local Imam.

HOW WELL DOES THE SIXTH FORM CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

64. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and supporting students' attainment and progress. These are consistently implemented by all staff and their effectiveness contributes significantly to the good standards students achieve. Regular termly assessment of each student's current performance against her examination targets ensures any underachievement is quickly detected so that appropriate action can be taken. Where underachievement is across a range of subjects and linked to other difficulties, such as attendance, the head of sixth form and heads of year quickly intervene to provide any specific support and guidance needed.
65. Students are clearly aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Subject teachers provide good feedback to students on their work. For example, in English, written comments on essays give specific guidance, in mathematics, students are provided with model answers; and in psychology, students understand how their work is marked against examination grade criteria. Self-assessment is a developing area. In a Year 13 French lesson, students assessed each other's presentations on the marketing of a French food product, commenting on the quality of the spoken language. As a result of this successful activity, each student was encouraged to reflect on what she could do to improve her own work.
66. A deputy head leads the assessment process very effectively. The new computer data-base, developed in conjunction with the sixth form partner school, is beginning to provide quick access to all

the information available on an individual student. It covers not only attainment and academic progress but also effort and it identifies any personal support required. Heads of department have a lot of information available to them on past performance in their subject as well as the potential performance of current students. Not all are yet fully confident in using this data to inform their planning and to refine students' targets. This, with self-assessment, has been rightly identified as an area for further development.

Advice, support and guidance

67. The pastoral ethos of the sixth-form community is very strong. Senior staff, who are well supported by the tutors, devote considerable time and effort to providing students with good guidance. The arrangements to help students settle in to the sixth form are well planned and help them choose the right course. After joining, there is a well-structured programme of support and guidance. This helps students to keep on track with their work and identifies any problems that may occur. It allows students to change courses if their initial decisions are not working out in practice. However, there is insufficient support for the lower-attaining mathematics students during their transition in Year 12.
68. Students are very well advised on the suitability of Year 13 courses in the light of their achievement in Year 12. Students get very good and timely advice on higher education applications and the procedures for applications to universities are well structured. Students have access to a range of professional support or counselling if they have personal problems but some say that they would like more information on the availability of these advisers and agencies.
69. There is very close monitoring of behaviour, attendance and punctuality and effective liaison with parents if problems arise. Students recognise the value of daily attendance and good work habits although some think the level of supervision is too high.

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

70. Less than half the students in the sixth form completed the students' questionnaire. Although there was some dissatisfaction expressed in their responses to some questions, in discussions they were very positive about their experiences overall in the sixth form. They are very appreciative of the wide range of opportunities that the school offers and believe the quality of their learning is good. However, a small minority of students perceive some subjects as difficult and challenging and they lose heart quickly.
71. Parents feel very positive about the sixth form. The school has constant dialogue with them throughout the time their daughters are there. It provides very good information about the courses that are available. The reports to parents are very good. There are two interim grade reviews and one full report. These give clear specific targets for each subject. There is very good provision for parents to meet teachers formally to learn about their daughter's progress and the process of application for higher education.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

72. The sixth form benefits from the school's overall very good leadership and management. It is very well led by an assistant headteacher who is also a member of the senior management team. She directly manages the teacher responsible for careers education and guidance, the heads of Years 12 and 13 and the assistant to the sixth form, all of whom she meets each week to monitor developments in the action plan and students' progress. With the support and guidance of the senior management team and the governors, she is also responsible for the successful liaison with the partner school in the consortium and meets her counterpart at that school each week. These arrangements are all very effective and ensure that the standards of provision are very good. Procedures for admission, the pastoral system, the breadth of the curriculum and the teaching approaches adopted all combine to ensure equality of opportunity and educational inclusion.

73. The head of the sixth form does not have direct responsibility for monitoring the quality of teaching. As in the main school, arrangements for doing this are in the hands of the senior management team and heads of faculties and departments. Although monitoring is chiefly based on the cycle of performance management, senior staff are well aware of areas where improvement may be needed and effective action, including further training, is taken. Expenditure is very closely monitored by the school's bursar and the financial position of the sixth form is very healthy, to the extent that it easily pays for itself. The principles of best value are carefully observed. These arrangements work very well.
74. Responsibilities are shared as equally as possible between the two schools and work is co-ordinated by the heads of the two sixth forms and a Joint Sixth Form Executive Management Committee. This body, on which the governors are strongly represented, meets once a term to discuss policy issues, the development of the sixth form consortium, the progress of the joint improvement plan, the courses offered, standards of achievement and financing of the consortium. These arrangements work very well, maximising choice and making the whole provision efficient, economical and effective. The joint action plan for the consortium in 2002-3 has many good features, identifying clearly defined tasks, responsible staff and strategies for curricular development. Appropriate priorities and tasks focus sharply on standards, teaching, learning and management issues. Courses are carefully located to allow students to follow interesting and varied combinations of subjects and to minimise the amount of travel between the two sites.
75. The governors fully meet all their responsibilities for the sixth form. Their academic committee, consisting of senior governors, the senior management team and staff, systematically monitors both curricular provision and performance. It is well informed about the strengths of the curriculum and future priorities. Heads of faculties make frequent presentations to highlight the achievements in their respective subjects. The committee has given good support to the strategic development of the school's sixth form. It does a great deal of productive work in support of initiatives designed to raise standards and improve the quality of education and it helps to ensure that the targets for development are securely based on educational priorities.
76. The school has a sufficient number of well-qualified staff and there is a good match of staffing levels, qualifications and experience to the subjects taught in the sixth form. Staff development is seen as a high priority. In-service training is well managed and is linked closely to performance management. All teachers receive induction and newly qualified teachers are offered the support of mentors.
77. The school's extensive programme of building and refurbishment has included two new teaching blocks for English, design and technology, special educational needs, health and social care and the humanities. Additionally, the school has completed an extension to the dining hall, a sixth form common room and three new laboratories. However, there are insufficient sports facilities and no showers. Unsatisfactory accommodation significantly affects standards in technology, where there are no appropriate facilities for food technology or textiles or for computer-aided design. The school has no spare capacity to expand the sixth form curriculum further on its present site and is planning further building.
78. Resources for the sixth form are satisfactory but there are some variations between subjects. For example, despite the very considerable investment in information and communication technology over the last 18 months and the very good facilities that have been created in some areas, access to computers is inadequate in biology and modern foreign languages and limited in mathematics. Students' work in art and design is limited by the lack of access to computerised programs and modern photographic equipment. There are no resources for computer-aided design or manufacturing, limiting the range of experience and the standards that could be achieved in technology.
79. The staff are all very strongly committed to the success of the students and the sixth form is very well placed to develop further, provided that it can resolve the problems of accommodation.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. Please note: no national figures are yet 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	21	80.9		42.9		36.7	
Biology	31	93.5		29.0		35.8	
Chemistry	21	90.5		38.1		32.9	
Physics	11	100.0		36.4		40.9	
Design and technology (food)	11	91.0		18.0		30.0	
Design and technology (PD)	4	75.0		25.0		30.0	
Business studies	19	73.7		15.8		26.8	
Information and communication technology	11	90.9		45.5		40.0	
Physical education	7	100.0		42.9		45.7	
Art	13	100		61.5		50.0	
Drama and theatre studies	12	100.0		83.0		54.2	
Classical civilisation	13	92.3		53.8		38.5	
Critical thinking	25	92.0		12.0		32.4	
Geography	9	88.9		11.1		30.0	
History	12	100.0		83.3		52.5	
Theology	8	100.0		87.5		50.0	
Psychology	22	95.5		45.5		42.3	
Sociology	34	73.5		20.6		25.9	
English language	8	100.0		37.5		45.0	
English literature	52	100.0		42.3		42.7	
French	16	81.3		12.5		31.3	
German	5	100.0		20.0		34.0	
Spanish	1	100.0		100.0		60.0	

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	7	100.0		85.7		100.0	
Further mathematics	2	100.0		50.0		90.0	
Biology	20	95.0		30.0		77.1	
Chemistry	12	91.7		25.0		61.7	
Physics	7	100.0		0.0		68.6	
Business studies	7	100.0		14.3		73.3	
Business AVCE	8	87.5		0.0		102.5	
Economics	1	100.0		100.0		100.0	
Information and communication technology	2	100.0		0.0		70.0	
Information and communication technology AVCE	1	100.0		0.0		40.0	
Physical education	2	100.0		100.0		110.0	
Leisure and recreation AVCE	1	100.0		0.0		60.0	
Health and social care AVCE	12	100.0		8.3		66.7	
Art	12	100.0		75.0		93.3	
Music	2	100.0		50.0		100.0	
Drama and theatre studies	3	100.0		0.0		73.3	
Geography	7	85.7		42.9		71.4	
History	5	100.0		0.0		72.0	
Theology	5	100.0		80.0		108.0	
Government and politics	2	100.0		100.0		100.0	
Psychology	17	100.0		29.4		80.0	
Sociology	23	100.0		52.2		93.9	
English language	9	100.0		44.4		91.1	
English literature	38	100.0		60.5		95.8	
French	6	100.0		50.0		93.3	

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business GNVQ	6	83.3		33.3		0.0	

Health and social care GNVQ	9	100.0		55.6		22.2	
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SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The school offers courses at A and AS-levels in mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics. The focus of the inspection was on mathematics, physics and biology but students' work in **chemistry** was also sampled. In Year 13, students are achieving well in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. In lessons seen, most students are clearly making advances in their knowledge and understanding as a result of effective teaching. The teachers are in command of the material being taught and confidently take the classes through a sequence of instructions, questioning and applications to improve their learning. There are good opportunities to plan and design experiments and test hypotheses. This was evident, for example, in a lesson on 'redox equilibria', where students were investigating electro-chemical cells and potential difference. Students showed confidence in setting up appropriate investigations, made accurate observations and interpreted experimental data correctly. The teaching built successfully on existing knowledge to develop the students' understanding of oxidation and reduction, enabling them to write half-equations representing these processes. Students' folders show that they can apply their knowledge and understanding to solve problems. The quality of their planning and implementation of investigations, their analysis of results and the evaluation involved in such work are all above average levels.

Mathematics

Overall the quality of provision in mathematics is **good**, with the clear potential for it to be very good.

Strengths

- Students who complete the two-year advanced course achieve very well, with the highest attainers gaining the top A-level grades.
- Teachers know the subject very well and have good expertise in it.
- The organisation of the advanced mathematics courses is good.
- Leadership and management of sixth form work are very good.
- Students are kept well informed about their attainment and progress and receive good guidance on how to improve.
- Most students work hard and this contributes significantly to their success.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching strategies do not always encourage students to predict and hypothesise results readily or to explain the reasoning behind their answers.
- Some students in Year 12 find the work difficult because there is not a well-planned programme of support for those who need it when they start the course.

80. The composite A-level results for the last three years are above the national three-year average. In summer 2000, results were well above the national average. In 2001, although the pass rate was good, fewer students obtained the highest grades and the overall results were close to the national average for that year. Although national comparisons are not yet available, provisional figures indicate results for summer 2002 are very good, with a very high proportion of A and B grades. Two girls achieved passes in the demanding 'further mathematics' course; a very creditable achievement. The students who complete the two-year A-level course achieve very well, with the highest-attaining girls gaining very good grades. However, since the introduction of 'Curriculum 2000' the number of students completing the two-year course has fallen. This is because a small but significant number of students have found the new AS-level examination at the end of Year 12 quite demanding. They have obtained low grades in the examination and not continued into the second year. Nevertheless, the school's AS results in 2001 and 2002 were better than for most schools nationally. Analysis shows that the higher-attaining students reach or exceed their targets, whilst most lower-attaining students just manage to reach theirs.

81. The standards of students currently in Year 13 are above those expected nationally for the A-level course, with the best girls exhibiting very high levels of knowledge and understanding. The students are achieving well and are on course to achieve their target grades or better. They manipulate algebraic expressions very well, an important skill in all topic areas if the best grades are to be achieved. In mechanics, they explain with good understanding and reference to appropriate mathematical formulae, why a ball rebounding from a wall has a speed that is less than its approach speed. Their knowledge of the behaviour of functions and of their differentiation and integration is secure.
82. For Year 12 students, standards are in line with those expected for the AS-level course. The higher-attaining students make good progress and achieve above average standards but a small number of girls find the work more difficult. They are not making sufficient progress to gain the passes they wish for in the summer. They find the transition from GCSE level difficult and would benefit from specific support with basic skills such as algebraic manipulation and the properties of straight-line graphs. Girls from a wide range of ethnic groups study mathematics and there are high achievers within each ethnic group. The girls who do not have English as their first language make good progress because they are well supported by their teachers and by other students. However, in Year 13 they tend to opt for the mechanics option as they find the interpretation of questions in statistics more linguistically demanding.
83. The quality of teaching is good, with some significant strengths. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and plan their lessons well. The purpose of the lesson is communicated clearly and activities are structured well. New ideas are appropriately sequenced. For example, in a lesson on partial fractions, each type was addressed and practised in turn. Students make the best progress when the teacher's questioning probes their understanding and asks them to explain what is happening and the reason why. In a lesson on the motion of connected particles, this led to an interesting debate on whether the opposing forces in a string connecting two different weights were the same or different. Such probing of the students' thinking led to good reasoning in later problems, accurate diagrams and successful outcomes to the work set.
84. The good level of debate and the confidence of students to offer suggestions and solutions are not so evident in all sixth form lessons. The students work hard, they take accurate notes and most complete the tasks set, but they do not contribute to the learning process to the same extent. Teachers do not use the range of good teaching skills they show with younger students to encourage a greater response in lessons. Younger students are much more actively involved in their learning through group activities and quick-fire questioning that requires an instant response from all. Where teachers use some of these approaches in the sixth form, the students' contributions improve. For example, the use of short 'starter' activities to revise previous work enables teachers to assess quickly the level of students' learning and adjust lessons to meet their learning needs. In a lesson on lines of regression, the teacher did a quick recapitulation at the beginning on the equations of straight lines to support the work she planned to do.
85. Although the department does not yet have good access to computers, the teachers are aware of the need to provide opportunities for students to develop and use skills in information and communication technology. The use of an interactive white board and the small number of computers that are available in the department introduces the students to appropriate software to support their mathematical understanding. This enables them to explore further in their own time. Graphical calculators are used appropriately and, in a statistics lesson, students confidently used the statistical functions on their calculators.
86. Results on the GCSE retake course have varied over the last few years from over half the students gaining a grade C to a very few. A significant number of students retake GCSE mathematics in the sixth form to obtain at least the C grade which is required for university entrance. These girls are making sound progress although some have relatively weak skills in numeracy. Other students on advanced courses show good skills in numeracy. In science, they manipulate formulae competently and draw and interpret graphs accurately. In business studies, they have no difficulties in working on cash-flow problems. Students on GNVQ courses need more support and the health and social care course in particular provides good opportunities for students to improve and use their numeracy skills.

87. The head of department leads the development of sixth form work very well. There is very good support and encouragement for new staff and the teachers discuss and share ideas for improving teaching further. More opportunities for the head of department to observe lessons and for staff to watch each other teach would help to develop the department's teaching styles. The students' attainment and progress are well monitored and students who are not achieving their targets are identified. Staff provide good guidance on examination techniques and feedback from end-of-unit tests helps students to correct any misunderstandings. Model answers are particularly useful for future reference and revision. Following the lower than expected grades obtained in the new AS-level examinations in summer 2001, the organisation of the course and the timing of the modules were rethought. This now provides better support for learning and offers good opportunities for students in Year 13 to improve their AS-level grades. However, in Year 12, there is no induction programme for weaker students or for those who join the course with gaps in their learning and some of these students struggle.
88. Since the last inspection, progress has been good. All new post-16 initiatives have been well implemented and high standards have been maintained. The atmosphere in the department is positive and constructive. Nevertheless, the department needs to continue encouraging students to explain the mathematical reasons for the techniques that they use - an area identified for improvement at the time of the last inspection.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Teachers use their good knowledge of the subject effectively.
- All elements of the course are taught with enthusiasm and interest.
- Students have good attitudes to their learning.

Areas for improvement

- The full use of information and communication technology in the processing and analysis of data and making predictions through computer modelling.
- The development of students' skills of enquiry through designing experiments to investigate their own hypotheses.

89. Evidence for this inspection has been drawn from scrutiny of daily and long-term teaching plans, the work of the students, inspection of lessons in Years 12 and 13 and interviews with teachers and students. This subject has not been previously inspected. No comparisons in standards can be made but records show that standards of work have improved over the last four years.
90. Standards in this subject are in line with course requirements. The number of A-level students passing with the highest grades is improving although, over the last four years, it has been below the national average. However, in the same period, more students passed with grade E or better than the national average. From the work seen in the current Year 13, a good percentage of students are now working to standards that attract the highest pass grades.
91. Written work shows that students have a good command of all the elements of the course, ranging through cell biology, zoology and plant physiology. Diagrams from invitro and invivo observations are prepared to a good standard. Students show confidence in using microscopes and more advanced equipment for monitoring and analysis. They can interpret data from field observations, showing an in-depth understanding of the accuracy and relevance of the data gathered. The majority of students in Year 13 fully understand the process of energy transfer within the mammalian cell and compare this to energy conversion in the plant cell. On a macro-scale they can discuss this conversion of energy in terms of the interdependence of all forms of life on earth.
92. Students in Year 12 very confidently dissected the heart of a sheep, drew accurate sketches of their observations and then used anatomical diagrams to label their own drawings. In Year 13, students worked out the possible F1 (first generation) and F2 (second generation) hybrids from two phenotypes. They applied the same rules of genetics to the cross-fertilisation of peas and to the

mating of two types of fruit flies. They correctly deduced that, in both examples, the same ratio of different phenotypes would result.

93. The quality of teaching is good overall and frequently it is very good. In many lessons, there are high expectations for learning. Very good teaching was seen in a Year 12 group studying biochemistry. The teacher had an obvious enthusiasm for the subject that motivated and inspired the students and made the lesson enjoyable for all. Students were very confident in tackling a range of new concepts, building upon very good previous learning about the chemical bonding involved in the formation of organic molecules. In this lesson, they easily explained how a peptide bond is formed. Where the teaching is no better than satisfactory, the lessons lack a degree of intellectual challenge. Illustrations of topical interest and current research are not used sufficiently well, particularly to challenge the higher-attaining students.
94. The synergy between the teachers' skills and enthusiasm and the students' interest leads to good learning and progress in this subject. Students of all abilities are very well supported as individuals. Their work is completed with care and attention to accuracy and detail. Students often extend their learning through additional individual research.
95. The course is organised effectively but there are some areas for improvement. Theoretical elements of the course are organised well and are set to appropriate standards. The students' practical experience is insufficient to challenge scientific thinking further or to support the development of skills in experimental enquiry, data-analysis and interpretation. In particular, students are not encouraged to devise experiments that would test their own hypotheses. Information and communication technology is not used sufficiently to improve the students' understanding of this subject. For example, it is seldom used to process and interpret data or to monitor experiments by direct sampling through sensors. Some groups in Year 12 have well over 20 students. This disadvantages all students because they cannot derive as much benefit as they could in a small group tutorial. Furthermore, in such large groups, the learning of higher-attaining students is limited by the reduced time available for them to explore wider issues with the teacher.
96. The students' work is monitored regularly and well. Helpful and supportive comments are given which enable the students to identify their weaknesses and improve further. The students feel that they are well informed about the progress they are making with their work. Support for continued learning out of formal lessons is good.
97. A newly appointed head of subject leads the department with enthusiasm and skill to a very good standard. Recently introduced initiatives should lead to further improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Post-16 provision for this subject is managed to a good standard. The teachers work well as a team to ensure continuity in learning. A team of technicians provide good support for learning through the maintenance and management of the more advanced equipment required for these courses.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Well informed and competent teaching ensures good explanation of concepts and skills.
- Good monitoring of progress helps students to improve their standards.
- Students' positive attitudes to work make a significant contribution to their learning.
- Practical work is taught in a structured way and students have good investigative skills.
- The leadership of the subject is good. Good teamwork ensures effective monitoring of students' work and progress.

Areas for improvement

- Standards at GCE A-level are not as high as they could be.
- There are insufficient opportunities for the development of independent learning skills.
- More demanding tasks are needed to challenge higher-attaining students.
- There is insufficient equipment to support class investigations.

- Insufficient use is made of information and communication technology to support teaching and learning.

98. The examination results in physics have varied over recent years. In 2000, they were in line with the national average. The standards achieved by students in the A-level examinations in 2001 were below the average for all schools and for similar schools. Provisional results for 2002 have remained at the same level. All students achieved a pass grade between A and E but the percentage gaining higher grades A and B was low and the average point score was below the national average for 2001. AS-level results for 2002 have improved significantly and are close to the national average for 2001. In relation to their GCSE grades, students achieved well at AS-level in 2002 but their achievement was unsatisfactory at A-level.
99. In Year 12, students are achieving standards that are in line with the national average. A high proportion of them are on course to gain A to E grades. Students make good progress and their achievement is good relative to their prior attainment. Carefully structured teaching builds successfully upon their GCSE work, enabling students to develop a good understanding of key concepts in physics. Average-attaining students make steady progress, extending their knowledge and skills and developing their ability to use them in solving standard problems. Most higher-attaining students demonstrate a good grasp of concepts such as power, energy, mechanics and radioactivity. Achievement is particularly good when students are challenged to consolidate previous understanding by applying it in a new situation. Students' experimental skills are developed in a structured way. For example, in a Year 12 lesson where students were investigating the behaviour of gases and Boyle's Law, the teacher clarified students' thinking by using skilful questioning and providing confident explanations. Students carried out practical work competently and safely and demonstrated a sound grasp of theoretical models to interpret experimental data accurately. More generally, higher-attaining students are not challenged sufficiently and do not succeed in achieving higher grades.
100. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of samples of students' work confirm that, in Year 13, standards are average and achievement is good. Most students show a good understanding of concepts such as fields and forces, photo-electric effect, waves and circular motion. Students are gaining some of the essential characteristics of a physicist, such as concern for accurate data, disciplined thought, attention to safe working and a willingness to consider alternative explanations. In a few lessons, higher-attaining students are not set demanding tasks and, though their achievement is satisfactory, they are not achieving their full potential. The department is self-critical; it has examined all the factors contributing to students' underachievement and has taken sensible steps to arrest the decline. These include the introduction of three separate GCSE science courses for higher-attaining students in Year 10.
101. The quality of teaching 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. Despite limited equipment, a good amount of practical work is attempted to support and consolidate the understanding of theoretical concepts. The initiative to improve literacy skills is beginning to have a positive impact on sixth form physics work where teachers stress the meanings of key words. However, there is a need for the greater involvement of students in discussion and debate.
102. The regular completion of homework is a key feature supporting good progress. End-of-unit tests and the use of past examination questions help students to understand examination criteria. Assessment of students' academic performance is usually 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. Short-term target-setting has not yet been developed fully to challenge students and to determine value-added achievement.
103. 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. Written work, tests and examination results show that the majority are able to recall and apply knowledge to solve numerical problems in mechanics, electricity fields and forces.

They use graphical skills competently to interpret experimental data. Most show confidence in applying mathematical models to explain practical work in physics. They need more opportunities for independent work and personal enquiry.

104. The curriculum is broad and balanced and, because of the recent unsatisfactory performance at A-level, the school has reviewed its science provision in Years 10 and 11. Students are given the opportunity to enrich their experience through visits to places of scientific interest. For example, in order to support the 'medical physics' optional unit, all Year 12 students visit the Royal Marsden Hospital. There, they have the opportunity to see modern medical physics equipment and techniques, including X-rays, nuclear medicine and medical imaging and to talk to the experts and researchers involved. There are well-qualified and experienced staff and good textbooks, but there is insufficient equipment to support some class investigations. Some use is made of information and communication technology but there is scope to extend its applications to add interest and to broaden the range of teaching strategies. Technician support is excellent but not enough for the amount of practical work attempted in the department.
105. Leadership is good and the subject is managed well. There has been good improvement since the last inspection and all matters raised then have been tackled successfully. There is clear commitment and determination to raise standards as the first priority. An appropriate development plan has been drawn up and detailed schemes of work are in place. However, the schemes of work do not highlight opportunities for developing the spiritual and cultural aspects of the subject or for including wider applications of information and communication technology to support teaching and learning. Procedures for recording and analysing assessment data have improved considerably since the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The department offers courses at AS-level in food technology and in product design. Only the product design course was inspected.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- The teaching is very good, enthusiastic and informative.
- Relationships between teachers and their students are excellent.
- Very good leadership supports the development of the subject well.

Areas for improvement

- A wider choice of materials is needed at A-level.
- More high-level information and communication technology equipment is needed, including facilities for computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture.

106. Since the last inspection, the school has offered a course in product design for A-level design and technology in almost every year. However, in 2002, six students were entered for the AS-level examination. Two of these gained A grades and one a B grade, while two others obtained a pass grade and one failed. The pass rate of 84 per cent was in line with the previous year's national figures and better than the school's A-level performance in earlier years. This achievement is good when students' prior attainment is taken into account. The department takes in students of all abilities, some with only C grades or lower in the GCSE examinations and, in this context, students do well.
107. In A-level lessons, standards of achievement are above the expected levels, with design and practical work steadily improving as students move from GCSE to AS-level and then on to A-level. There are no AS-level classes this year. The effectiveness of the designing skills improves because the focused use of industrial visits and prepared materials allows students to put their learning and problem-solving into real-world contexts. Students use a good range of techniques in both designing and making but, although they use information and communication technology in some of their work,

they have no access to computer-aided design or manufacture. This is a weakness that limits the development of more sophisticated understanding and the production of more complex designs.

108. The subject is taught by a highly skilled and experienced practitioner and the quality of teaching is very good. Vitality and well considered strategies are brought to bear to challenge and enthuse students. The relationships are excellent and this allows students to accept and give criticism without rancour. Lessons are very well prepared and learning is supported by very good teaching materials. Two students act as departmental prefects, helping the teacher with preparation and supporting the younger students. This is an excellent opportunity for sixth formers to take on responsibility in the school.
109. Learning is very good in lessons. The fast pace and thoughtful approaches employed by the teacher, together with the high level of support, allow all students to produce work of quality. The constant review of coursework helps to raise standards of attainment, but without excessive direction by the teacher. Lower-attaining students are so well supported that they feel able to tackle complex work and achieve very well. Their work steadily improves so that, on the A-level course, they can take on tasks that allow them full access to the highest grades. All students seek help from their teacher knowing that they will receive effective support and engage in productive dialogue. Students listen well, follow instructions and take responsibility for their own learning. This enables them to produce work of good quality. They are keen to look at and address social issues in their work. For example, one student is looking at a warehouse conversion for student accommodation, another is designing a chair for back pain sufferers and another is working on a storage problem for a local shop.
110. The new accommodation for work with resistant materials is good and all the elements of the department are now based together. These are improvements since the last inspection but the textiles and food areas have not yet been upgraded. This is part of the schools' development plan. The environment is made exciting by good displays of interesting work by the students and the teaching and non-teaching staff. There is now an effective part-time technician who ensures that materials are well prepared. The management of design and technology is very good and the departmental development plan is very clear. New members of staff are carefully inducted into the work of the department.
111. There has been a good improvement in planning and organising the course which is now run in conjunction with a neighbouring boys' school. Since the last inspection, more effective use is made of resources, indicating good progress. Design and technology offers students the opportunity to work on a practical design-based course that matches their capability and allows them to achieve well.

BUSINESS

The full range of business education courses offered by the school was inspected, including the A-level course and the three levels of the vocational business range: the course leading to the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education and the GNVQ Intermediate and Foundation courses. The department also offers a course at AS-level in economics. This was not inspected or sampled.

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

Strengths

- Examination results on the vocational courses show good achievement.
- Students have very positive attitudes to the subject and relationships are very good.
- Teachers are well qualified and experienced and the quality of teaching is good.
- Teachers provide very good support for students' learning.
- Staff and students make effective use of information and communication technology.
- The school offers a very good range of curricular provision.
- There is a very comprehensive range of visits to industry locally and across Europe.

Areas for improvement

- Raise the standards of attainment in the AS and A-level courses still higher.
- Develop a consistent approach to pace and challenge across all lessons.

- Strengthen some of the teachers' planning and improve their use of lesson time.
- Develop the effectiveness of assessment in the GCE courses.

112. In 2001, all the students on the GNVQ advanced course achieved at least a pass grade and the standards were in line with the national average. In 2002, the new double AVCE course was taught and students in Years 12 and 13 achieved better grades than might have been expected from their initial entry levels. Although no national comparisons are yet available, it is clear that these results represent good achievement. For the last three years, students have consistently achieved well at this level. Over the same period, students on the GNVQ Intermediate courses have reached and often exceeded the grades predicted for them. Standards in 2001 were in line with the national average and a similar standard was reached in 2002. Students on the GNVQ Foundation course have achieved well over the last three years, with several of them going on successfully to the Intermediate course. Standards of attainment in the lessons seen on the vocational courses were below those expected nationally. However, a wider scrutiny of students' written work showed significantly higher standards, above the expected levels.
113. Standards in the 2001 A-level examination were below the national average but this reflected students' prior attainment and therefore represents satisfactory achievement. The percentage achieving an A or B grade in 2002 increased but it was still below the national average, although all candidates secured a pass grade - a slight improvement on previous standards. The AS-level results, in both years, show a small negative value-added figure, indicating unsatisfactory progress. Overall, however, the results of the last two years indicate satisfactory achievement. The scrutiny of work indicates that the current cohorts are prepared well for the examinations and that their understanding of theory and application is good. Standards in both years are now higher than in the last two years and are close to the national averages. In Year 12, students have a good understanding of price elasticity and Year 13 students show a very good understanding of promotional and pricing strategies. The standards of work in the portfolios and the level of understanding observed suggest that standards are rising and attainment on the A-level course is close to national standards.
114. Students learn well because the teaching is good. The teachers are well qualified academically and have good commercial experience that enriches the students' learning. The teachers provide very good support, with constant e-mail access and this is highly appreciated by the students. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject and are very well motivated. This and the very good relationships between students and staff help to underpin students' learning. In the best lessons, the pace is fast and challenging and the students are encouraged and supported to become effective independent learners. However, in a few lessons, there is a tendency for the teacher to give overlong introductions, resulting in students not being challenged sufficiently. In these lessons, planning and time management could be more effective. The strong features of most lessons, such as co-operative working, effective research by students and the good use of a range of learning resources, are not evident in all lessons.
115. Students have a mature approach to their studies and, by the end of Year 13, they have developed good skills in independent study. They show confidence in their use of information and communication technology and their portfolios contain very good examples of the use of evidence bases and the application of a range of different statistical and graphical methods. They have very good access to resources for information and communication technology. The monitoring and assessment of students' work in the vocational courses are meticulous and underpin the good progress made. In the A-level courses, marking is regular but comments are more supportive than diagnostic. There is room to improve the A-level assessment procedures so that students have a clearer idea of what they need to do to improve their progress, particularly in Year 12. The strength of the department lies in the very good relationships and in the students' faith in their teachers' support.
116. The leadership and management of the faculty are good. A very wide range of curriculum opportunities has been systematically developed and changes in the many courses have been successfully introduced. The head of faculty has skilfully developed her team of teachers and this has contributed to the rising standards. There is a separate head of the A-level courses and he has developed a very wide range of industrial visits locally, regionally and internationally. This programme has made a very strong contribution, both to the interest of the students and to the relevance of their learning. The schemes of work have been thoroughly revised. Access to information and

communication technology, the overall quality of the teaching and the provision of resources have all improved since the last inspection. Recruitment to the different vocational courses is increasing and retention is very high, with a minimal drop-out rate. There is a very good match between these courses and the students' aspirations and satisfaction levels are very high. Most of the students on the AVCE course continue their business studies at university. Taking all of these developments into account, the subject has made good progress since the previous inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The school offers courses in this subject at AS and A-levels as well as a course leading to the Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE). None of this work was inspected or sampled.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The school offers courses in physical education at AS and A levels and a course in leisure and recreation leading to the AVCE award. Only the AVCE course was inspected.

Leisure and recreation

Overall, the quality of provision in leisure and recreation is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Students gain good knowledge of how the leisure industry works and use technical vocabulary effectively.
- They benefit from practical learning methods and planning to meet deadlines.

Areas for improvement

- Number skills are weak and occasionally the teaching does not let students benefit from planned opportunities to calculate and use number.
- Limited access to computers in class slows progress.

117. Examination results in 2002 were below the previous year's national average. Standards of current students are average overall, but a few work below that level. Many enter the course with modest prior attainment and without a C grade in mathematics or English. Several do better than predicted from this prior attainment, however and their achievement is good. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds achieve in line with their overall ability but a tiny minority from Afro-Caribbean backgrounds contribute little in class.
118. Students have good knowledge of the influence of fitness and diet and of health and safety legislation related to the leisure industry. They are aware of issues relating to marketing and customer care and can discuss and refer to factors such as employment rates and finance when working on case studies. They interpret graphs and data well, although analysis is often superficial in the work of average and lower attainers and their skills in number are often weak. The considerable help and guidance from teachers and the students' wide reading help them develop a good technical vocabulary and improve their writing and oral skills. They prepare appropriate questions for their research and develop enough confidence to speak to employers.
119. Students enjoy the practical approaches to learning and benefit from work experience and visits to local employers that put their learning into context. They have good attitudes in lessons and work well individually and collaboratively, but their interest slackens when lessons are unsupervised. When they have access to computers, they use information and communication technology effectively to research topics and to present their work.
120. Teaching is satisfactory and teachers generally have good knowledge of their subject. Relationships and class management are good. Better teaching is well prepared and paced to match students' needs and tasks and activities are varied to maintain interest. Good individual monitoring and support result in most students achieving the lesson's aims. When the teaching is satisfactory, the pace is rather slow, expectations are not high enough and students are not always required to use correct terms or skills in number. For example, in a short task to develop numeracy, students were told how

to do the calculations and then one student used a calculator and gave the others the results. Work is carefully marked, students understand the assessment criteria and know what they need to do to improve their grade.

121. The courses are well led and generally well managed but have no fixed base. The allocation of several leisure and recreation lessons to rooms without computers limits students' progress as they lose time handwriting spreadsheets and reports which they have to word-process later when they are in a room with computers. This practice should be reviewed. Records and assessment are good. Staff turnover in leisure and recreation has been high and the teachers' major commitments are to other subjects. These factors occasionally result in less confident teaching. Standards of attainment and of teaching are similar to those seen at the last inspection but access to computers has improved.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The school offers courses in this area leading to the Intermediate GNVQ and the AVCE awards. Both courses were inspected.

Overall the provision in health and social care is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards on the advanced course are above the national average and achievement is very good.
- Teaching is very good with some excellent features.
- Students' attitudes to their work are very good.
- Independent learning is well developed.
- Assessment is particularly thorough.
- Lesson planning is very good.

Areas for improvement

- There are no significant weaknesses.

122. Numbers following the courses are good and, in recent years, all students have gained passes, with good proportions of merits and a few distinctions. In 2002, all 15 students following the AVCE course were graded, with one achieving a grade A.
123. Overall standards on advanced courses are above those expected nationally, as at the time of the last inspection. Progress and achievement are good. Almost all students meet and many exceed the grades predicted from their GCSE performance. Students from a variety of minority ethnic backgrounds, including a very small minority learning English as a second language, achieve well. Students have good knowledge of the subject and use it well in their case study work, for example when reviewing the development of children, or providing guidance on diet for people with diabetes. They are aware of the financial implications of major health-related legislation and how they affect decisions.
124. Standards on the Intermediate GNVQ course are broadly average. Students enter with quite modest grades, several without a pass grade in GCSE English or mathematics. Achievement is very good and almost all students are on track to gain a pass or merit. They have gained good knowledge of the subject and use technical vocabulary quite well but their analytic skills are weak. They are, however, well able to put forward and support their views.
125. Students benefit from the practical nature of the courses. They develop good oral confidence through carrying out telephone assignments and participating in discussion. Most summarise articles well in

their own words and are proficient users of computers for research and to improve the presentation of their work. They enjoy carrying out research and their moral and cultural awareness is heightened when they consider the effect of finance and cultural backgrounds on health. They listen carefully to each other, respect each other's views and work well individually and collaboratively.

126. Teaching is very good overall and has several excellent features. Students appreciate and benefit from the teachers' consistently high expectations and good knowledge of the subject. Teachers' excellent questioning and prompting ensures progress, especially as they know the students' individual needs well. They make good and regular use of technical vocabulary, giving students the confidence to use it themselves. Good classroom management is based on very thorough planning and preparation and very good use of time and resources. Teachers assess work very accurately and explain orally and on assignments exactly how students can improve their grade.
127. The courses are well led and managed. Health and social care is well established in the school and has stable staffing. Students can begin the subject in Year 10. Courses are well planned with good attention to promoting key skills. Well-selected work experience and good links with care providers support learning well. Good standards have been maintained since the last inspection and the use of information and communication technology has been improved.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The school offers courses at AS and A-levels in art and design and in drama and theatre studies and a course at A level in music. Only the art and design courses were inspected.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- A-level results are improving and those for 2002 were well above the previous year's national average.
- Lesson planning is good and teachers are well-prepared.
- Teachers possess good knowledge of the subject and are well-informed.
- Students work well to acquire new knowledge and improve their understanding.
- The subject is well led and all staff are involved in decisions about the course.

Areas for improvement

- Assessing and recording systems lack rigour.
- The narrowness of the curriculum means that students work with a limited range of media and materials.
- Insufficient use is made of modern technology.
- Objective data are not used enough to inform target-setting.

128. The AS-level examination results for 2001 were well above the national average but the results in the A-level examinations for the same year were well below the national average. In 2002, the AS-level results were well above the previous year's national average and there was significant improvement in the A-level results, which were also well above the national average for 2001.
129. The overall standard of work that is currently being produced is broadly in line with national expectations, but a significant number of students are producing work of a standard that is well above. In lessons, most students are enthusiastic about the set tasks and demonstrate that they have acquired the capacity to extend work over time. They participate fully in discussions with the teacher and with others in the group. This process helps them develop ideas and concepts and also improves their capacity to evaluate their own work and that of other artists, craftspeople and designers. Achievement is good.
130. Year 12 students demonstrate through their work in class and also in their visual diaries that they are beginning to sustain concentration and interest in the given tasks over longer periods of time. Most

are working well to acquire new knowledge and appropriate technical skills that are essential if they are to communicate their own ideas, concepts, attitudes and beliefs to others. Time management and the pace of working leaves room for improvement however. The majority demonstrate good control over basic drawing and painting skills and make effective use of line, tone and colour in their work. Most make very good use of their visual diaries as effective means of collecting and storing visual information. Some students on the textiles course have interesting personal work in their diaries that consists of images created by combining various fabrics and materials in an exciting manner.

131. Students in Year 13 make good progress. They have acquired the self-confidence to participate fully in discussion with the teacher and others in the group. In one lesson, students were observed discussing the relationship between fashion and identity. In the follow-up lesson, these students were seen to explore ideas and experiment with a range of materials and fabrics that reflected their growing self-confidence. In their visual diaries, many have succeeded in producing experimental pieces of work that make use of card, cloth, tissue paper and brown paper. Others have produced exciting collages by combining text and images. One student has completed an excellent extended investigation into the paintings of Wassily Kandinsky. Through her written commentary, she has demonstrated not only real understanding of his work but great sympathy for the spiritual qualities found in his paintings.
132. Teaching ranges from satisfactory to good and is good overall. Teachers are well-informed and show familiarity with the requirements of the examination syllabuses. Planning is good and teachers come to lessons well-prepared. Their line of questioning at the start of lessons is good and draws interesting responses from the students. This dialogue ensures that students are obliged to think for themselves, to present their own points of view and to act independently. Clear objectives are set for students at the start of each lesson and, as a consequence, they know what they are expected to do. Most tasks challenge the students, intellectually and creatively. However, there are too few opportunities for students to develop their ideas, concepts and technical skills in a design context through the use of photography or information and communication technology. Students make little use of computers, digital cameras, scanners or printers in developing ideas and producing final images.
133. Leadership and management are good. In spite of some concerns about results in the 2001 examinations the head of department was pleased with the significant improvement in results in 2002. She has good working relationships with the rest of her team and provides good leadership to the newly-appointed members of staff. Management is good. There is ample documentation that provides background information about the department. Systems for assessing, tracking and recording progress are satisfactory but they need clearer criteria for assessing and grading students' work. This should ensure that feedback becomes much more focused on the needs of the individual student and that target-setting is much more detailed and accurate. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

HUMANITIES

The school offers courses at AS and A levels in geography, history, psychology, sociology and theology and courses at AS level in classical civilisation and critical thinking. Only the psychology and sociology courses were inspected or sampled.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good, resulting in effective learning and very good progress in lessons.
- Standards of work in Year 13 are good and students' achievements are very good.
- Students' attitudes to the subject are very good, resulting in a positive learning atmosphere in lessons.
- Sociology makes a very good contribution to students' personal development and to the quality of relationships.

Areas for improvement

- Formal, subject-based monitoring of teaching to develop and share good practice.
- The monitoring and analysis of assessment data in order to identify areas for improvement and to inform curricular planning.

134. Sociology continues to be a popular subject, with minimal drop-out rates in Year 12 and those who continue studying the subject in Year 13 complete the course. Between 1998 and 2000, the proportion of students attaining A and B grade passes in the A-level course was above or well above the national average. Although results declined in 2001, they were, nevertheless, broadly in line with the national average. Provisional results for 2002 show that all the students obtained at least a pass grade, with a larger proportion than in previous years obtaining higher grades. This represents very good achievement, since none had studied sociology prior to joining the sixth form. In 2001, sociology was the third most popular choice of subject at AS-level, with a third of the students attaining A and B grade passes. Provisional results for 2002 show that this proportion has declined but issues to do with the marking of the coursework unit are thought to have been the cause.
135. Standards of work in Year 13 are good and achievement is very good. Students have a good understanding of the different theoretical approaches used as well as of the findings of empirical research carried out by both established and contemporary sociologists. They also show good developing understanding of the links between the study of crime and deviance and the other units of work they study. Well-argued and structured essays are indicative of students' good writing skills and their analysis of statistical evidence is good. They are also competent in the use of information and communication technology to help them with their research for essays and their coursework. Year 12 students have made a good start to the AS course and are developing good knowledge and understanding of theoretical perspectives on education and the family and households.
136. Overall, the teaching of sociology is good, resulting in effective learning. Crisp starts to lessons ensure that all students are quickly on task. Well-planned, paced and structured lessons, with a variety of activities, challenge the full range of ability well. Very good working relationships between teachers and students and students' very positive attitudes help to promote a very good learning atmosphere in lessons. Teachers ensure students are actively involved in their own learning through the effective use of paired or small-group tasks though, on occasions, their contributions are too dominant. Good quality schemes of work guide teacher's planning so that the demands of the syllabus are fully met.
137. The teachers' enthusiasm, experience and very good understanding of the subject matter successfully motivate students in lessons. They make relevant references to appropriate sociological research and different theoretical perspectives, deepening students' knowledge and understanding further and developing their sociological thinking. However, teachers occasionally miss opportunities to remind students about examples of research when discussing links between the study of crime and deviance and the other units studied. High quality questioning by teachers stretches students' intellectual capacities and engages them in discussion, drawing on their own experiences as well as on the sociological perspectives they have learned. In Year 13 lessons, for example, this resulted in some thought-provoking discussions around the issue of crime and deviance.
138. Teachers value students oral contributions and, as a result of this, students show insight in discussions, expressing their own ideas confidently as well as listening and respecting the beliefs and views of others. At the end of lessons, there is sometimes insufficient time for teachers to explore the students' perceptions of what they have learned and consolidate their knowledge and understanding further. Although students' work is consistently marked, the quality of the marking is variable. For example, students are not always made aware of what they need to do to improve the quality of their work.
139. Students receive very good quality support and guidance for their work, including e-mail access to their teachers out of school time. There are satisfactory procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress but the monitoring and analysis of data to identify areas for improvement and to inform future planning are less satisfactory. There is no formal timetabled provision for the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning in order to develop and share good practice. The head of department provides effective leadership and has taken appropriate action to address the

issue of the marking of coursework in Year 12 in order to raise standards even further. Sociology was not inspected in depth at the last inspection.

Psychology

Overall the provision in psychology is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards of work are above average and students' files are well ordered.
- Improving results at AS-level in 2002.
- Well planned and taught schemes of work and lessons.
- Supportive teachers and assessment procedures.
- Production of resource packs for course modules.
- Students' capacity to absorb, analyse and respond to the content of the course.

Areas for improvement

- Strategies to provide more challenging lessons and to develop the use of extension materials to increase the proportion of higher grades.
- The development of assessment and self-assessment into a single system incorporating specific improvement targets for each piece of assessed work.
- Widening the range of data used for tracking the progress of individuals and groups.
- Students' study skills, particularly in presentation, reading and information and communication technology.

140. Altogether, 90 students are following the courses offered, a third of whom are from the partner boys' school. Classes in the autumn were very large, reflecting the popularity of the subject, which now has the highest numbers of all subjects taught in the sixth form. An additional teacher has been appointed so that class sizes are now down to between 11 and 18 students.
141. In 2001, A-level results were below the national average but they were in line with or marginally above predictions based on students' previous performance. The unconfirmed results for 2002 show an improvement, with all of the students gaining at least a pass grade. However, the proportion of A and B grades is below the average across the subjects in the school and below the available national figures. The 2002 AS-level figures show an upward trend, with girls outperforming boys at the higher grades. There had been no significant difference between the performance of male and female students before then.
142. The work seen shows further improvement. Standards are above the expected levels and students achieve well. Students demonstrate their ability to understand and analyse video-taped or printed materials and to report coherently on them. For example, two classes in Year 12 worked well to prepare information on historical attitudes to madness and its treatment, which they presented as spidergrams or lists and on the shortcomings of medical and psychoanalytic approaches to abnormality, which were presented orally. The best written work shows adequate research and the ability to analyse as well as summarise. Less satisfactory work lacks detail or fails to address all aspects of the topic. All written work is of at least pass standard. Information and communication technology is used mainly for word-processing and opportunities are missed for students to use it to present charts, graphs and tables or for assessed coursework. Marking is thorough and supportive.
143. Teaching and learning overall are good. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject. They provide very clear objectives for lessons and link them to previous and future work, regularly checking that students understand the former. Lessons are well paced and structured, containing a variety of appropriate learning tasks that maintain students' involvement and interest. In a Year 13 class, two short questionnaires were used to focus discussion on definitions of adolescence and to compare the experience of the class with theories derived from research. Staff prepare and refer to written resources to back up and extend materials used in class. Little reference is made to resources outside the classroom, including the Internet. In most cases, teachers' questioning challenges students to expand and justify answers and their understanding of technical terms is regularly checked.

144. Students, when prompted, show a good knowledge of the subject. They show good interest and concentrate well. Relationships between students and staff are good, enabling teachers to manage their classes very well. Students do not always take the initiative in volunteering information, asking questions or challenging the information they are given but they listen well and recall what they have heard. Their notes are restricted to what is supplied by the teacher, unless they are prompted to add to them. They can explain the work they have done competently but they lack skill and confidence in talking to the class as a whole and in reading clearly and with expression.
145. Management is satisfactory. The departmental file sets out clear objectives for teaching and learning and for the development of the subject. Planning is thorough and the monitoring of teaching, learning and curriculum development is becoming more so. The new head of department has not had sufficient time in post to implement change. Attention is being given to opportunities for self-and peer-assessment by students and to the development of target-setting. There is one base room with adequate resources but other lessons take place in a variety of rooms, not all of which are suitable in size, layout or equipment for the subject. Communication, liaison and support within the faculty are good. There are occasional opportunities for liaison with staff in the partner school within the joint sixth form arrangements.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The school offers courses at AS and A-levels in English language, English literature and French and AS-level courses in German and Spanish. The English language and literature and French courses were inspected.

English

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

Strengths

- Attainment is well above the national average and achievement is good.
- The quality of teaching is good with some significant strengths.
- There are good procedures for identifying and supporting students who require additional help.
- Students are given good advice on examination requirements and techniques.

Areas for improvement

- A wider range of support and encouragement for students to participate as fully as they are able in lessons.

146. In 2001, the results of the A-level examination in English literature were well above both the national average and the average for girls. Furthermore, the percentage of grades A and B was above both the national average and the national average for girls and every student obtained a pass grade or better. In 2002, there was a considerable increase in the percentage of A and B grades, to a level well above the national average for 2001, the most recent year for which comparative national information is available and there were no grades below a D. Over the previous four years, there has been a fairly steady and significant rise in the percentage of grades A and B and a decrease in the lower grades. This represents good progress since the previous inspection.
147. In 2002, the first results for English language A-level, which has recently been introduced by the school, became available. The percentage of A and B grades was considerably above the previous year's national average and above the national average for females and all students obtained a grade C or better. In 2002, AS-level students obtained a high percentage of grades A to C in both subjects.

148. Attainment in the current Year 13 is well above what is seen nationally for students at this stage and the majority of these students are on course to obtain A-level results that are well above the national average. Students enter the course with prior attainment which is generally well above the national average and they achieve well to maintain these very good results at A-level. Their achievement is good in their understanding of a wide range of demanding texts and supplementary materials. They organise the range of materials very well and make efficient use of them to inform their close textual analysis. All students make particularly good progress in the meticulous preparation for written assignments, especially their coursework unit. In English language, students make good progress in understanding and using a wide range of complex new material, techniques and vocabulary.
149. The quality of teaching is good overall and this represents good improvement since the previous inspection. Strong features of teaching include teachers' very high expectations and the good planning of lessons, which offer good resources and a range of learning opportunities. Lessons have clear objectives and students know what to expect and what is expected of them. All teachers make good use of questioning to probe students' understanding and they respond well by thinking hard and extending their knowledge and understanding. However, students show some reluctance to exchange ideas with each other. Discussion is not sufficiently used to support learning and students often restrict themselves to answering questions posed by the teacher. Teachers offer students very good advice on examination requirements and techniques and good advice is given, through marking, on what is needed to improve the quality of the work. Teachers also provide a good range of supplementary reading material, especially of extracts from the work of literary critics, in order to enable students to form balanced and well-informed views of their texts.
150. The leadership and management of the subject are good, with some significant strengths. The head of department has made a good start on updating and resourcing the schemes of work to meet new requirements. She monitors the coverage of the syllabus in each teaching group and has a good grasp of how this is progressing. The decision to introduce the English language course at A-level was well conceived to meet the diverse needs of students and has been carried out efficiently. There are thorough procedures for identifying and supporting students who are not reaching their potential. The department is generally well resourced and many resources for additional reading are provided through the personal initiative of teachers. Good use is made of assessment information to identify students with potential problems and to monitor current progress. Visits to the theatre and other places of interest and visitors to the school enrich students' experience of the subject.

French

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

Strengths

- Lessons are well planned and teachers constantly use the foreign language in lessons.
- Teachers have established a hard-working ethos and students know they are expected to work hard and learn thoroughly.
- Assessment procedures are very good and students know the standards they have achieved and what they need to do to improve.
- There are many, very good opportunities for students to develop socially and culturally.

Areas for improvement

- Develop teachers' skills in information and communication technology so that they can enable students to make better use of it in lessons.
- Identify strategies for ensuring that students reach their potential and include them in the departmental improvement plan.
- Improve the quality of printed learning resources produced by the school.

151. Standards in French A-level have been above the national average since 1999 and were good in 2002, when six of the nine candidates obtained grades A or B and the others obtained a C grade. The numbers choosing to take French have fluctuated but, in both of the last two years, the majority of students have chosen to continue with their language after completing the AS examination.

Standards of work in the current Years 12 and 13 are above those expected nationally for the courses being followed.

152. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers are well prepared, very good at their subject and respond well to the needs of their students. They have very high expectations. A good range of skills is practised in lessons and students regard the topics, including literature, cinema and current affairs, as important and relevant. They respond diligently and recognise the wisdom of their teachers' insistence on hard work. In Year 12, they require considerable support when involved in conversation and, in some cases, written work displays gaps in grammatical knowledge. In some lessons, particularly in Year 12, students can remain passive, preferring to listen than to participate actively and only practising their speaking skills in highly structured situations.
153. In the best lessons, when teachers challenge students with stimulating activities, often involving group and paired work, students join in with enthusiasm. In one Year 12 lesson on the French education system, students responded very well to many interesting pieces of statistical and factual data that the teacher had obtained from French news broadcasts. In a lesson in Year 13, students spoke with confidence and performed some ambitious and humorous sketches, which their peers assessed. Another group of students had prepared well at home for a Year 13 lesson on a novel by François Mauriac and they made many perceptive contributions, encouraged by their teacher's helpful direction. They spoke in French which, in some cases, was grammatically imperfect but was always readily comprehensible. Teachers maintain the use of French throughout all lessons and students have little difficulty understanding what is said to them.
154. Students derive benefit from resources, including books, magazines and web sites, recommended by their teachers to improve their ability to read for pleasure and to learn independently. They are encouraged to use information and communication technology, if they have the facilities at home, but opportunities for doing so in lessons are limited by the teachers' lack of experience with computers. Printed resources are often unsatisfactory owing to poor photocopying facilities and French accent marks are not properly inserted because of inadequate word-processing. Whilst students have the opportunity to visit France during Year 11, the modern languages department currently arranges no visits aimed specifically at sixth form students of French.
155. The leadership and management of the department are good. The head of faculty directs the work of the whole department and the staffing structure allows for separate departmental heads for German and Spanish, although only one of them is currently in post. Self-evaluation is carried out within the department, including careful analysis of examination data and lesson observation, leading to appropriate staff training. There are very good procedures for tracking progress and students are given regular information about their levels and what they can do to improve. An annual development plan contains several appropriate priorities but does not include the specific objective of raising attainment or strategies for ensuring that all students fulfil their potential. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.