

INSPECTION REPORT

CLEEVE SCHOOL

Bishops Cleeve Cheltenham

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 115722

Headteacher: Mr S A McConaghie

Reporting inspector: Jean Head
1604

Dates of inspection: 14 – 17 October 2002

Inspection number: 249816

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: technology college

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Two Hedges Road
Bishops Cleeve
Cheltenham
Glos

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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs S Wakeford

Date of previous inspection: 11 November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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1604	J Head	Registered inspector		The school's results and students' achievements How well are students taught? Assessment What sort of school is it?
9724	B Quest-Ritson	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development Advice, support and guidance
19135	D Ebbage	Team inspector	Mathematics	
4486	M Weller	Team inspector	English Literature, English as an additional language	How well does the school work in partnership with parents and students.
22691	Ray Woodhouse	Team inspector	Physics	
22491	L Small	Team inspector	Product design Health & social care	
18638	C Shaw	Team inspector	Art and design V Computing	
2740	E Barratt	Team inspector	Geography	How good are the curricular opportunities and other opportunities offered to students
10759	L Bappa	Team inspector	History	
27666	J Dockrell	Team inspector	French	
18542	G Griffin	Team inspector	Biology	

1606	J Murray	Team inspector	Physical education, special educational needs	Leadership and management
15576	D Nebesnuick	Team inspector	Business studies	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Cleeve School is a specialist school for boys and girls aged 11 to 18. With 1542 pupils on roll, it is much larger than many other schools nationally. The school, which has technology college status, is situated in Bishops Cleeve; it has been over-subscribed for several years. The school serves a wide area, including the immediate locality and areas to the north of Cheltenham. Pupils are from mixed socio-economic backgrounds; around six per cent are entitled to free school meals, which is below average. Taken as a whole, pupils' attainment on entry is above average. However, in past years, the school has lost some of its potential Year 7 pupils to grammar schools in Cheltenham and Gloucester. Thus, although pupils of all levels of prior attainment join the school, previous intakes have contained significantly fewer higher attaining pupils than is the 'norm' nationally. The school has identified around 12 per cent of its pupils as having special educational needs, which is below average. Just over one per cent have statements of special educational needs. Needs include specific learning difficulties and emotional and behavioural difficulties. Most pupils are from white families. Less than one per cent of pupils speak English as an additional language, which is low. Usually, about 80 per cent of pupils move into further education at age 16.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school that provides a high quality education for all its pupils. GCSE results are well above average and are much higher than would be expected given pupils' attainment on entry. Pupils learn very well as a result of very good teaching. The school has very many strengths and no major areas of weakness. It is led and managed very well. The school makes very effective use of its staff and of its financial resources; its sixth form is cost effective. Overall, it gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The headteacher provides excellent leadership. He has created an ethos wherein everyone is valued and where staff and pupils alike take a pride in their own and others' achievements.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to work; their behaviour is very good. As a result, pupils learn very well and attain high standards in their personal development.
- Teaching is very good; it helps pupils to achieve very well and to attain academic standards that are well above average.
- The school evaluates its work very thoroughly and takes very effective action to secure consistent improvement.
- Professional development for staff is very good and sustains teachers' motivation for their work. Their enthusiasm for learning is infectious and is transmitted to pupils in lessons.

What could be improved

- The school is working to improve its provision for careers education.
- The school is very successful in spite of its buildings; parts of the accommodation are not conducive to high quality learning.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Overall, the school has made very good improvement since its last inspection in 1996, when it was already judged to be a good school. GCSE results stalled somewhat after the last inspection; nevertheless, the school has maintained its well above average performance in the interim. Indeed, GCSE results have risen significantly in the past two years, reflecting a similar upward trend in the quality of teaching. Improvements in teaching have been achieved by regular classroom observation, the sharing of good practice and by a very effective professional development programme. Teachers demonstrate a willingness to take on board new ideas and a common determination to improve standards. The school has also addressed all the issues identified in the last report successfully. A whole school behaviour policy was introduced two years ago; pupils report that the disruptive behaviour mentioned in the last report has been virtually eradicated; behaviour was very good during the inspection and is now a strength of the school. The curriculum has been reviewed and reorganised successfully; it now meets statutory requirements. Communication within the school is now very good; there is openness regarding what is needed for improvement; roles and responsibilities are very clear. Huge strides have been made in extending the resources for information and communications technology (ICT); teachers use ICT confidently and competently to improve learning. The school has improved its accommodation somewhat and has plans to develop it further.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools *	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A	well above average A below average B well below average C average D average E
A-levels/AS-levels	C	C	C		

**Similar schools - those with a similar proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals.*

National test and examination results show that, overall, pupils achieve very well during their time at Cleeve School. In the 2001 national tests at the end of Year 9, results in English, mathematics and science were well above average in comparison with all schools nationally. Results were also well above those for similar schools; all pupils achieved very well given their attainment on entry. There was no consistent difference in

results for boys and girls. Results across all three core subjects improved from 1999 to 2001; the rate of improvement was faster than that found nationally. 2002 results are again well above average in all three core subjects.

In 2001, overall results at GCSE were well above the national average for both all schools nationally and for similar schools nationally. All pupils achieved very well, given their attainment at the end of Year 9. There was no significant difference in results for boys and girls. Results were significantly above average in English, mathematics and science and in a range of other subjects. National statistical data, used to determine relative overall achievement within GCSE subjects, shows that in 2001, pupils did better in history, geography and business studies than in their other GCSE subjects. Performance in English and mathematics, though well above average, was not quite as strong as that in most other subjects. GCSE results in 2002 are the 'best ever'; almost 70 per cent of pupils gained at least five A* to C grades.

Overall results in the school's GCE advanced level examinations have matched those for all maintained schools nationally for the past three years. However, in 2001, although results were categorised nationally as average, they were right on the borderline of average/above average performance. From 1998 to 2001, students achieved consistently well in biology, physics and geography; taken as a whole, students' achievement across subjects is good. The very good 'value added' seen in results in the main school is not yet quite replicated in the sixth form results. In the 2002 advanced level examinations, the school improved its pass rate but the proportion of higher grades fell somewhat. Overall, the school's 2002 results are slightly lower than those in 2001. There is no data as yet for comparison of 2002 results with national standards.

Standards of work seen during the inspection largely reflect the school's test and examination results. Standards are well above average in both Year 9 and Year 11 in English, mathematics and science and across a range of other subjects. Standards of literacy and numeracy are well above average. Pupils learn very well due to very good teaching and their own very positive attitudes. Achievement is very good. In the sixth form, particularly in Year 12, standards of work are above average overall. Achievement is at least good in all subjects except for French, where it is satisfactory, in relation to GCSE scores on entry. The school sets clear and challenging targets for improvement for Years 9, 11 and 13. The 2002 results show that virtually all targets were met or surpassed.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very positive. Pupils like their school and want to do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils behave very well both in lessons and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships between pupils and staff and among pupils themselves are very strong indeed.
Attendance	Very good. The attendance rate is well above average.

Pupils take on positions of responsibility willingly and with enthusiasm; Year 10 pupils carried out their duties as prefects confidently and competently during the inspection week, whilst Year 11 prefects were on work experience. Pupils show a genuine respect and liking for their school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Pupils in all year groups learn very well as a result of very good teaching. Very good levels of interest and concentration, and an eagerness to learn, were features of students' learning in almost all observations. Teaching is very good overall across the school and meets pupils' needs very effectively. There are no generic weaknesses; all aspects of teaching are strong. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and expertise, which they use very skilfully to plan and teach their lessons. Most use questions very effectively to make pupils think for themselves and to promote discussion. Teachers manage pupils very well indeed; very strong relationships, based on mutual respect, underpin all teaching and learning. Teaching in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 11 is very good; in all subjects, pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations for standards of work and behaviour. Literacy skills are taught very well; the school's literacy policy supports practice across departments. Numeracy skills are taught very well by the mathematics department and are developed effectively in many other subjects. A whole school approach is being developed.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The breadth and range of courses already meet pupils' needs and aspirations well. A major review for Years 10 and 11 is planned.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils are supported well in lessons and in small group work; they make similar progress to their peers.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The school meets the needs of such pupils appropriately and in line with the good practice it has for all pupils.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural	Good. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory; that for moral, social and cultural development is very good. Many opportunities are created for pupils to reflect on their own values, to learn to take responsibility and to respect other

development	cultures and societies.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Standards of care are very high. Pupils' welfare and progress are monitored and supported effectively.

The curriculum meets all statutory requirements and has many strengths. For example, in Years 10 and 11, all pupils take either a GCSE or a GNVQ qualification in ICT. Pupils are offered a very wide range of enrichment opportunities at lunch times, after school and through school visits; the Duke of Edinburgh scheme is particularly popular. The school is aware that whilst provision for work experience is successful, the teaching of careers education needs further coherence and co-ordination.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good overall. The headteacher provides excellent leadership; senior managers form a strong, cohesive and very effective team. Middle managers are of good and often very good quality.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good overall. Governors are very supportive and well informed; they work effectively in partnership with staff.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Monitoring procedures are well established; the school evaluates many aspects of its work regularly and takes very effective action to secure improvements.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school makes very skilful use of its staff and of its financial resources; spending decisions are influenced appropriately by the principles of best value.

The strength of leadership is reflected in the way in which staff and pupils alike take pride in high achievement in all aspects of school life. Pupils' efforts are recognised and rewarded, creating an ethos wherein everyone feels valued. Governors are aware that statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship remain unmet.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children are expected to work hard and to achieve of their best. • Their children make good progress. • Their children like school. • The teaching is good. • The school is well led and managed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about how well their children are doing. • The closeness with which the school works with parents. • Behaviour. • The amount of homework that is set.

Parents think highly of the school. Responses to the parents' questionnaire, and those of parents at the parents' meeting, were largely very positive. The inspection team

agrees with these positive views. Pupils respond very well to teachers' high expectations of them; in turn, they expect a lot of themselves. Pupils' positive attitudes, underpinned by very good teaching and leadership, are the main reasons behind pupils' very good achievements. Behaviour is now very good. During the inspection, pupils behaved very well indeed. Inspectors found that the amount of homework set is appropriate. They also felt that the school provides parents with an appropriate amount of information about their children's progress, through progress and annual reports. However, the school has already recognised the fact that it needs to strengthen further its partnership with parents.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form currently has 257 students on roll; it is larger than average and is starting to expand further. Typically, round 60 per cent of pupils from Year 11 continue into the sixth form; a few students join from other schools. As in the main school, students are predominantly from white families. There are very few pupils with special educational needs and none with English as an additional language. Attainment on entry is often lower than one would assume given the school's well above average GCSE results. For many years, the percentage of A* and A grades at GCSE has been below average, reflecting 'top-slicing' of the intake by local grammar schools. Thus, whilst attainment on entry is broadly average - in that most students have attained a minimum of five GCSE's at grades A* to C - there are fewer higher attaining students in the sixth form than is usual. This depresses students' intake scores in comparison with national norms. Most students embark on two-year programmes leading to advanced subsidiary (AS) level, advanced (A) level or advanced vocational (AVCE) level qualifications. The proportion moving into higher education has risen significantly over the past few years, from around 55 per cent in 1999 to just under 70 per cent in 2002.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is successful in providing a good education for its students and in meeting their needs effectively. Overall, examination results are broadly average, although, in 2001, they were right on the border of average/above average performance nationally. Students have achieved well in recent examinations, given their attainment on entry to Year 12. The sixth form is led and managed well. It is cost effective and caters well for its students through a wide range of subjects and vocational courses. There is a very clear drive to improve provision further, reflected in the above average standards of work and in the very good teaching and learning that were seen during the inspection.

Strengths

- Teaching is very good overall; teachers are very knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. As a result, students benefit from a variety of teaching approaches and learn very well.
- Students are responsible young adults, with very positive and mature attitudes to their work.
- Relationships with staff are excellent; this results in a working environment in which individual learning needs are met very effectively.
- There is a good range of courses, well suited to students' needs and aspirations.
- Students receive very good overall support for both their academic and their personal development.

What could be improved

- The improvement plan for the sixth form should be clarified and shared with

governors.

- Provision for careers education is satisfactory, but it could be better.
- The use of assessment data by managers, to ensure that results are as high as they should be, needs further development.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Students achieve well as a result of good and often very good teaching, which makes very effective use of new technologies.
Physics	Very good. Very good teaching, students' positive response and excellent relationships in lessons allow students to achieve very well.
Biology	Very good. Teaching in this popular subject is very good; students share their teachers' enthusiasm for the subject and achieve well.
Product design	Very good. Very good teaching and very effective individual support help students to achieve very well.
Business studies	Good. Teaching is good and sometimes very good in spite of limited accommodation; pupils achieve well.
Computing	Very good. Students with a range of attainment at GCSE achieve well on this challenging and rewarding course, due to very good teaching.
Physical education	Very good. Very good, enthusiastic teaching and good structured support enable students to achieve well.
Health and social care V	Very good. Teaching is very good and meets the needs and aspirations of individual students well; achievement is very good.
Art and design V	Good. Both students and teachers work hard, despite the unsatisfactory surroundings. Teaching is good; students achieve well.
Geography	Good. Students enjoy geography and achieve well; they respond positively to consistently good teaching.
History	Very good. Students respond positively to the very good and well-informed teaching and achieve well.
English literature	Very good. Teaching is very good and encourages independent learning. As a result, students achieve very well.
French	Satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge but some do not encourage independent learning. Achievement is satisfactory.

Lessons were also observed in a range of other subjects; in all instances, teaching was good or very good. Key skills are taught well through a general studies course and reinforced across subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good advice and support is provided both on entry and thereafter; students meet regularly with tutors to discuss their academic progress. Guidance on future career choices is satisfactory but could be better.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good. Leadership provides a very clear direction for improvement. Monitoring and evaluation are good overall but the monitoring of achievement against national data is not sufficiently rigorous.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The very strong relationships, both with subject teachers and with tutors.• The way in which teachers give up time to help them.• The way in which the school tailors its curriculum to meet individual preferences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The quality of their accommodation.• The guidance given to Year 12 students on career choices and on the next stage of their education.

Inspectors agree with students' positive views. Relationships in lessons are excellent. Very skilful timetabling enables most students to study the subjects they choose. The sixth form centre has been renovated recently. Facilities for private study are good. Whilst the social area is somewhat small, it is adequate for students' needs. The school has plans to improve provision for careers education.

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

The headteacher provides excellent leadership. He has created an ethos wherein everyone is valued and where staff and pupils alike take a pride in their own and others' achievements.

1. This is a school where achievement is recognised and celebrated in all aspects of school life and where everyone wants to do well. Staff and pupils alike take pride in their own achievements and in the success of others. This ethos, wherein it is 'good to do well', stems from the leadership of the headteacher. He is determined to take an already successful school into another period of improvement. As a result, there is a clear sense of direction and purpose within the school. Staff and pupils are committed to learning and have high expectations of themselves and of each other. Consequently, boys and girls across the attainment range work hard and achieve their best.
2. High standards are encouraged and celebrated in many different ways. Sporting achievement is recognised by displays in the school's entrance foyer. The school's "Wonderwall" gives all pupils a chance to receive recognition for particular successes in all aspects of school life. For example, during the inspection week, 11 pupils' efforts and achievements were recognised. These included recognition for: persistence and making huge progress in a year: getting grade A's for effort throughout the year; attaining distinction in GNVQ ICT coursework; attaining high standards in music: completing excellent work in religious education; achieving excellence in a language investigation in modern foreign languages in Year 13; achieving outstanding presentation and pride in work in technology; and for gaining an award in the junior mathematics challenge. An older pupil was heard to remark that he only had two terms left to "make it to the Wonderwall". Assemblies are used effectively to recognise different talents; so too is an annual achievement evening for pupils and their parents.
3. The headteacher's leadership is affirmed by a very strong and cohesive team of senior managers and by a very effective governing body. Governors' commitment to high achievement for all is promoted through appropriate policies, including the school's new policy for racial equality. Middle managers also make an important contribution to the school's success. Their leadership is at least good; often it is very good. The purposeful and productive life of the school is attributable to its very good overall leadership.

Pupils have very positive attitudes to work; their behaviour is very good. As a result, pupils learn very well and attain high standards in their personal development.

4. Over 90 per cent of parents who responded to the questionnaire said that their children liked coming to school. This was evident during the inspection week; pupils in general demonstrated a genuine liking and respect for both their school and their teachers. As a result, a sense of purpose and enjoyment was evident in many lessons. Pupils have very positive attitudes to their academic work; most are very well motivated. Pupils take pride in their work; they want to do well and work hard to achieve high standards. For example, standards of presentation are very good. Pupils concentrate well, remaining attentive throughout relatively long lessons. In particular, they listen very well, both to their teachers and to their peers.
5. Behaviour in lessons is very good. Pupils are polite and respectful to their teachers and to visitors; they are also considerate and supportive of their peers. Behaviour at breaks and lunchtimes is also very good; often, it is remarkably orderly given the fairly cramped conditions in some corridors and dining areas. The last report cited a small, but significant, amount of disruptive behaviour. This was not the case during this inspection. Pupils themselves confirmed that behaviour has improved in recent years; they say that whilst inappropriate behaviour has not been eradicated completely, very few lessons are now affected by silly behaviour. A new behaviour for learning policy, introduced two years ago, has established a climate wherein pupils realise that disruption to lessons will not be tolerated. Pupils know what sanctions will be imposed if their behaviour is not as expected. Strict enforcement of this policy means that the rate of fixed-term exclusions is fairly high for a school of this size; the school monitors carefully to ensure that all exclusions are in accordance with its policy.
6. Very good behaviour and attitudes allow pupils to make the most of the very good teaching they receive. As a result, pupils learn at a fast rate and achieve very well academically. These high standards in attitudes and behaviour also help pupils to attain equally high standards in their personal development. Pupils are given many opportunities to take responsibility; for example, through the relatively new house system, through enrichment activities at lunch times and after school, through peer counselling and by acting as prefects. As in lessons, pupils from Years 7 to 10 spoke positively and enthusiastically about all such opportunities. Pupils take their responsibilities seriously. Year 10 pupils, acting as temporary prefects during the inspection week, did an excellent job in ensuring that movement around the school was orderly and well controlled.

Teaching is very good; it helps pupils to achieve very well and to attain academic standards that are well above average.

7. National statistical information confirms that not only were pupils' 2001 results well above average in relation to all schools nationally, they were also well above average in relation to results for similar schools. GCSE results in that year were also well above those for schools whose pupils had attained similar results in their end of Year 9 national tests in 1999. The school's GCSE results in 2002 were better still; almost 70 per cent of pupils attained five or more A* to C grades. This is well above the 2002 national average for all schools of just over 50 per cent. There is as yet no information for 2002 to allow comparison with similar schools

nationally. Thus, test and examination results indicate that pupils achieve very well during their time in the main school. Inspection evidence confirms that standards of work are well above average in Years 9 and 11; pupils' achievements are very good.

8. This very good achievement is promoted partly by the school's expectations for high standards and partly by pupils' own determination to do well. Another key reason for pupils' success is the high quality of teaching they receive. Teaching is very good across the school. In Years 7 to 11, teaching was good or better in over nine out of every ten observations; it was very good or excellent in over four out of every ten lessons. This high proportion of very good and excellent teaching reflects a considerable improvement since the last inspection, when around one in ten lessons were judged to be very good or better. It also reflects the school's success in its work to improve both teaching and learning by sharing good practice amongst the teaching staff.
9. Teachers know their subjects and how to teach them well. They also understand how to manage pupils effectively. As a result, all aspects of teaching are strong and there are very good relationships between pupils and staff. Most lessons are very well planned and structured, with a clear sense of purpose. Pupils know what they will be learning and why. Lessons have good pace; good discipline means that teachers can use their skills, and a range of strategies, to bring the best out of pupils. Teachers expect a great deal from their pupils and do not accept second best. The very good relationships in classrooms allow pupils to try out ideas and to take risks; as a result, pupils gain in confidence. For example, in a Year 7 history lesson, all pupils were prepared to give their own views on the problems faced by William the Conqueror after the battle of Hastings. In a Year 8 lesson, the teacher used a range of strategies to give pupils confidence in speaking French. Teachers are very aware of pupils as individuals; they use questions and individual support effectively to ensure that each pupil knows what needs to be done to improve.

The school evaluates its work very thoroughly and takes very effective action to secure consistent improvement.

10. Since his appointment nearly three years ago the headteacher has endeavoured to improve standards, and has inspired others to do so, not just by creating the necessary ethos, but also by ensuring that the school is very well managed. He has created a team of senior managers, all of whom share a common view of where the school is going and what needs to be done. A very thorough programme of monitoring and evaluation is well established. Most crucially, this process is followed up by clearly agreed action, which in turn is evaluated for its effectiveness.
11. The headteacher and other senior managers have developed a strong 'oversight' system to bring a unified and coherent approach to the school's work. Regular meetings with middle managers, good communication and an openness about what needs to be done to secure improvement have established a clear sense of direction across the school. Each year there are subject reviews where heads of department are questioned in great detail about their results. As a result, each

department has clear priorities for improvement; effective support is given by the head and by senior managers to help departments meet their targets. The school makes appropriate use of some, but not all, national data to underpin this process. The school also monitors and evaluates its teaching very effectively through regular classroom observation. Good practice is shared through discussion and through staff training days. Similarly, a whole range of reviews and surveys are used to ascertain pupils', parents' and teachers' views on a variety of school practices. In all cases, responses are analysed, discussed and acted upon as appropriate.

12. This very thorough monitoring and evaluation informs the annual school improvement plan which, in turn, is evaluated to ensure that it is indeed a vehicle for improvement. Plans are appropriately detailed; priorities are entirely appropriate. The school does not have any formal, written longer-term strategic plans. Informal strategic planning for ways in which the accommodation can be improved are well advanced. The school is aware that an overview of its future development would provide further impetus for development. However, this detail does not detract from the overall effectiveness of the school. The school uses its finances very astutely. Particularly effective use of funds is made through the school's strategies for the appointment of well-qualified teaching and support staff. The very good use of funding to achieve well above average standards is a tribute to the high quality of financial management. The school provides very good value for money.

Professional development for staff is very good and sustains teachers' motivation for their work. Their enthusiasm for learning is infectious and is transmitted to pupils in lessons.

13. The headteacher, senior managers and governors all recognise and appreciate the significant contribution that staff make in promoting the school's ethos and in raising standards further. This is evident not just from discussion, but from the very good provision made for staff development. The commitment that governors and the headteacher give to staff management procedures, and to the working conditions of teaching and support staff, is recognised by a national award that the school has gained for the third successive time. Staff development is linked carefully to the needs of individual members of staff, and also to school priorities as outlined in the school improvement plan. The result is a sense of purpose both within departments and throughout the school, which has a positive impact on the quality of educational provision. There is a clear commitment to developing people, in order to sustain their enthusiasm for their work. The headteacher is very skilled at recognising people's strengths and in developing and using them to maximum effect. The school makes every effort not just to recruit well-qualified staff, but also to motivate, develop and inspire them thereafter.
14. As a result, teachers are eager to listen to advice, keen to learn and very willing to try out new ideas. Their enthusiasm for learning is infectious; it is shared with pupils in many lessons. For example, in a Year 9 religious education lesson on Buddhism and suffering, the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject promoted a very positive response from pupils, allowing them to understand the Buddhist concept

of 'right action'. This enthusiasm has also allowed the school to embrace fully the ethos and opportunities provided by its technology college status. Teachers have responded positively and enthusiastically to the introduction of new technologies to improve teaching and learning. For example, in mathematics, the imaginative use of new interactive whiteboards has enhanced pupils' understanding of the subject. In physical education, movement captured on a digital camera assists pupils' evaluation of performance. All teachers have recently been issued with a laptop computer. The school has well-developed plans for their use to improve further both teaching and learning and the tracking of pupils' progress across year groups. At present, teachers are expected to use their laptops only for registration purposes. Already, many are using their laptops far more widely. Teachers have seen the potential of having a laptop as a teaching resource; they have responded quickly and enthusiastically to the challenge. The fact that all the teachers are using laptop computers in all lessons, for administrative purposes at the very least, is raising expectations and, consequently, standards.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The school is working to improve its provision for careers education.

15. The school is aware that further development is needed in its provision for careers education; an action plan to achieve this development is already in place. Year 11 pupils have appropriate experience of the world of work through a well-planned and co-ordinated work experience programme. Teachers and external advisers give pupils effective support and guidance at appropriate times in their school life. Pupils also have access to appropriate careers information and receive some careers education through their tutorial and their personal, social and health education programmes. However, at present, there is no clear co-ordination of the programme of courses and activities designed specifically to prepare pupils for working life.

The school is very successful in spite of its buildings; parts of the accommodation are not conducive to high quality learning.

16. The school achieves considerable success in spite of its buildings. Very few departments have suited accommodation; some lessons in English, geography and history are taught in temporary classrooms. Whilst accommodation for sixth form courses is satisfactory overall, there are similar limitations in provision. However, in general, there is no evidence that the accommodation depresses overall standards. Exception is to be found in a few of the sixth form subjects inspected in depth. Accommodation for art is unsatisfactory; that for physics and business education is not conducive to high quality learning. Inspection evidence shows that these limitations restrict learning in these subjects, to varying degrees, at advanced level. In all instances, teachers make the best of their accommodation; many classrooms provide a stimulating environment for learning. The school is about to start on a building project to improve its art and sports facilities. It has plans to improve other aspects of its accommodation thereafter.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER

17. In the context of a school that enables its Year 7 to 11 pupils to achieve very well, there are no major areas of improvement for the school to address. To raise further the standards of work and the quality of education provided, governors, managers and other staff should sustain their efforts to:

- improve provision for careers education* - (paragraph 15);
- improve the accommodation, especially that for sixth form physics, business studies and art, as far as funding will allow* - (paragraphs 16, 57, 58, 59, 75, 85, 106).

Sixth form

To raise further standards and the quality of provision in the sixth form, governors, senior and middle managers and other staff should:

- finalise and agree the draft sixth form improvement plan, share it with governors, and use it to drive further development - (paragraph 52);
- implement action plans to improve provision for careers education* - (paragraphs 35 and 43);
- ensure that senior and middle managers use assessment information rigorously to ensure that examination results are as high as they should be, given students' GCSE results on entry to the sixth form - (paragraphs 42, 51, 63, 89, 94, 105, 113).

* Identified in the school's improvement plan.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	70
	Sixth form	73
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		54

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	6	24	36	4	0	0	0
Percentage	9	34	51	6	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	3	32	30	7	1	0	0
Percentage	4	44	41	10	1	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1285	257
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	80	3

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	22	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	153	3

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	6

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	37

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.9
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	122	130	252

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	100	98	105
	Girls	126	108	109
	Total	226	206	214
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	87 (86)	79 (87)	82 (88)
	National	66 (63)	67 (65)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	50 (50)	60 (61)	46 (56)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	90	102	104
	Girls	112	114	104
	Total	202	216	208
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (78)	83 (88)	80 ([90)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	43 (45)	55 (58)	41 (52)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	129	112	241

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	86	123	127
	Girls	79	104	111
	Total	165	227	238
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	68.5 (63)	94.2 (95)	98.8 (98)
	National	51.2 (50)	88.9 (91)	94.6 (95)

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

*Based on all results for each pupil

GCSE results 2002		GCSE point score
Average point score	School	48.0* (47.5*)
per pupil	National	34.6** (39.0*)

**Based on the best eight results for each pupil

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

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations 2002		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	54	54	108
	Average point score per candidate	18.7 (16.1)	21.0 (17.3)	19.9 (16.8)
National	Average point score per candidate	(16.9)	(17.7)	(17.5)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	39	39	78	15	15	30
	Average point score per candidate	21 (15.2)	22 (17.0)	21 (16.2)	9.5 (9.4)	11.5 (12.5)	10.5 (11.1)
National	Average point score per candidate	(16.9)	(17.9)	(17.4)	(9.8)	(11.4)	10.6

Figures in brackets refer to results in 2001; these are not directly comparable with results in 2002 due to differences in the examination systems in 2001 and in 2002.

Ethnic background of pupils**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1447	64	6
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	20	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	18	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	29	3	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	96.83
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	

Total number of education support staff	21
Total aggregate hours worked per week	575.25

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.6
Key Stage 4	22.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	29.1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	34.2

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	4,204,992
Total expenditure	4,252,007
Expenditure per pupil	2,805
Balance brought forward from previous year	104,375
Balance carried forward to next year	57,360

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1542
Number of questionnaires returned	300

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	51	6	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	36	55	3	1	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	18	56	11	1	13
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	52	18	3	3
The teaching is good.	25	61	2	1	11
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	21	40	22	4	12
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	42	43	8	2	5
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	54	40	3	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	22	47	20	2	9
The school is well led and managed.	30	56	3	2	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	32	52	6	2	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	34	48	8	3	7

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Many of the 'do not know' replies were from parents of Year 7 pupils who had been in the school for only a few weeks when the parents received the questionnaire.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

18. The schools advanced level examination results at the end of Year 13, (including A-level and where relevant, AS and AVCE level results), have matched those for all maintained schools nationally for the past three years. In the 2001 examinations, although performance was categorised officially as average, results were in fact right on the borderline of average/above average performance nationally. Results for male and female students were both above their respective national averages. These results represent an improvement in the school's average points score at the last inspection. There is no national data as yet with which to compare the school's 2002 advanced level results. The pass rate rose to almost 98 per cent, which is well above average in relation to last year's national figures. However, the proportion of students gaining the higher grades of A and B fell somewhat. Consequently, results overall are slightly lower than those in 2001.
19. In 2001, the AS-level results achieved by students at the end of Year 12 were broadly average. The proportion of students gaining an A to E grade was around 87 per cent, which is very close to the national figure for that year. Results in 2002 were similar; the pass rate was again almost 90 per cent per cent; about one third of students gained an A or B grade.
20. Performance in subjects varies from year to year, depending on the students who choose to study various courses. In 2001, A-level results were well above average in biology, physics, product design and computing. They were above average in art, geography, history and English literature. Looking at performance over four years, from 1999 to 2001, students have performed consistently well in biology, physics, and geography. Performance, although average, has been relatively weak in French. Again, there is no national data, as yet, for subject comparison for 2002 results.
21. Assessment data collected by the school show that students have achieved well in recent examinations, given their attainment on entry to the sixth form. In 2000 for example, students' average GCSE points score on entry was somewhat lower than that found nationally across a range of subjects. It was rather higher than national in only chemistry, computing and geography and in music and French, where numbers starting A-level were very small. Thus, in most subjects, 2002 results represent good achievement. There is further evidence of good achievement in advanced level examinations in both 2001 and 2002, in that most pupils exceeded the A-level targets they were set at the start of Year 12. These targets resulted from tests administered at the start of Year 12 by a nationally recognised external agency. Retention rates are also good. The proportion of students entering the sixth form from the main school varies, but it is currently around 60 per cent. Of these, nearly all stay on to complete their studies. There are a few inevitable

changes of mind at the start of Year 12 but, in such cases, students swap courses; very few leave the school. The headteacher, the head of sixth form and the governing body have set appropriate academic targets for improvement for the sixth form. These were not quite met in 2001 but they were met in 2002.

22. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average overall. They are well above average in biology and physics, average in physical education and French and above average in all other subjects. Standards in the key skills of communication, the application of number and information technology are also above average overall. Students' communication skills are very good; almost all speak clearly and confidently. Students listen attentively, but critically, and argue a coherent point of view. They read widely and independently and write fluently and accurately. Students' have the necessary mathematical skills to cope with the numerical demands of other subjects. They apply and develop their algebraic and data handling skills effectively across a range of subjects. Students are working at least at the national key skills standard in ICT; most work beyond this standard. Students make good use of their ICT skills in work across the curriculum to enhance their learning.
23. Inspection evidence thus indicates that standards are higher than the 'average' picture painted by past examination results, particularly in Year 12. The sixth form was identified about two years ago as an area of the school's work that needed improvement. Since then, entry requirements have been applied more rigorously to ensure that students have the prerequisite knowledge to succeed in their advanced level studies. New assessment procedures have been introduced to ensure that individuals know what they should be aiming for and how well they are doing. Now, students' progress is tracked carefully by subject teachers; tutors provide an overview of progress and give effective on-going support and guidance. Teaching has been monitored and supported very effectively. Consequently, at present, very good teaching, students' very positive attitudes and excellent relationships are creating a working atmosphere in which very good learning is taking place. It is too soon for these measures to be reflected in consistent improvements in examination results, or in very good overall achievement. However, inspection evidence suggests that the school is succeeding in its endeavours to improve standards in its sixth form further.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

24. Sixth form students have particularly good attitudes to their work. They are highly motivated and want to do well in the subjects they have chosen. In lessons, they work conscientiously with very high levels of concentration. They enjoy learning and discussing their studies. Students recognise the need for them to research and learn independently, and their skills for doing so are good. They can research work individually, then share ideas and information in discussion. The quality of the relations which exist between students and their teachers is excellent and is an important aid to successful learning. It was a consistent feature of lessons seen during the inspection. Students feel they can ask for help and appreciate the way teachers give time to meet their needs as individuals.

25. Students can also work together and collaborate very well among themselves. They are expected to make a contribution to the community, whether within or outside the school. This expectation is fulfilled enthusiastically and diligently. Students help with tutor groups, a breakfast club, paired reading and peer counselling within the school, and with a wide range of activities outside the school; for example as volunteers with the local hospital radio. Sixth form attendance levels are high: students know they cannot continue their courses otherwise. There were no exclusions in the year before the inspection. Students' behaviour is very mature and responsible. This is demonstrated by the way they accept the opportunities offered to take responsibility and through their work within the school and the wider community.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

26. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is very good overall. Teaching was good or better in nine out of every ten lessons seen; it was very good, and occasionally excellent, in very nearly one half of lessons. Teaching is at least good in all subjects inspected in depth except for French, where it is satisfactory. It is very good in physics, biology, design and technology, computing, physical education, health and social care, history and English. In other lessons seen, sampled from across the curriculum, teaching was good or very good. The teaching of key skills is carried out effectively. The key skills of communication, application of number and ICT are taught well through the AS general studies course, taken by all students. These skills are reinforced and developed consistently across the curriculum. As a result of this high quality teaching, current students are learning very well. Most make very good progress in lessons, acquiring knowledge, skills and understanding at a fast rate.
27. There are very many strengths in the teaching and no generic weaknesses. Teachers challenge, support, cajole and praise to try to get the best out of their students. However, two major strengths underpin and permeate the teaching in Years 12 and 13; these are teachers' very good subject knowledge and the excellent relationships that are evident in classrooms. As a result of these strengths, all aspects of teaching and learning are of high quality. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is infectious and is transmitted to students. Teachers use their subject knowledge skilfully, not just to impart information, but to challenge students and to extend their thinking. Confidence in what they are teaching, and very thorough planning, allows teachers to use different strategies and resources in their teaching. Students benefit from a variety of approaches and activities, which cater for a range of learning needs. This helps all to learn very effectively. For example, in business studies, students are introduced to business concepts through presentations, debates, vigorous questioning and stimulating visual material. In a Year 13 biology lesson, students used the web, books, fact sheets and their teacher's expertise when preparing for a presentation on diabetes.

28. Teachers' expertise results in clear and fluent explanations. In physical education, for example, teachers present information very clearly and in a manner that students can understand easily. Teachers use questioning very effectively for a variety of purposes: to consolidate learning; to strengthen understanding; to promote discussion; and to make students think for themselves. For example, in an English literature lesson introducing Shakespeare's "Othello", the teacher used questions very skilfully to draw out students' ideas, to challenge them to use language more precisely and to model note taking, by organising their ideas on a whiteboard. Teachers also deal confidently and competently with students' questions; often they provide interesting background information that adds interest and relevance to the subject being studied. For example, in physics, Year 13 students were provided with a fascinating example about the use of Newton's Law in the eighteenth century to estimate the weight of the earth.
29. Teachers have high expectations for students. Learning outcomes are clearly identified in lesson plans and are communicated to students. In physical education, students are clear what they are going to learn and self-check their own learning and understanding as the lesson progresses. In mathematics, students are expected to listen carefully and to concentrate for long periods of time and they do so. In biology, students learn a lot during lessons because teachers set demanding time limits for activities. Students respond very well indeed to their teachers' high expectations and, in turn, expect a lot of themselves. Teachers manage students seemingly without effort. In most lessons, there are high levels of participation. Students enjoy their work with each other and with their teachers in an atmosphere of achievement and respect.
30. Teachers make very good use of the school's above average facilities for ICT to strengthen learning in Years 12 and 13. The school's computer network is extensive, providing an outlet in nearly all classrooms. All teachers plug in their laptop computers when they arrive to teach and have access to an excellent management information system. This enables them to check attendance, student records, examination statistics, departmental schemes of work and e-mail. Many teachers display lesson notes and, where available, make effective use of electronic whiteboards to help students' learning. For example, in mathematics, where every room has an electronic whiteboard, the teacher demonstrated a worked example from an examination paper to a Year 13 class, which also included a detailed mark scheme. Students could see clearly how to improve their performance.
31. A recent internal evaluation highlighted the need for students to have increased opportunities to become independent learners. The school has taken this on board and already there is evidence that departments are considering carefully how this aspect of students' learning can be improved. During the inspection, many examples were seen of students undertaking research, either as individuals or in groups. Students have the necessary skills for independent learning; they are given particularly good guidance on appropriate reading and on the use of ICT in design and technology, art and geography. In many, but not all, lessons, students are encouraged to interpret and analyse data for themselves, to present their own points of view and to devise their own solutions to problems.

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

32. The school caters well for students' needs and aspirations. The curriculum provides good breadth, balance and relevance. Planning is based on a clear rationale; the school aims to provide a broad range of learning opportunities which meet both the interests and aptitudes of its students and the nature of the locality served by the school. A good range of subjects is offered, comprising twenty eight subjects at A and AS-levels, and five vocational courses leading AVCE qualification. Students who are predominately interested in vocational courses transfer to a local tertiary college. In addition to examination courses, students follow a programme of core studies, which comprises general studies and key skills. The latter are also taught across subjects.
33. Every effort is made to ensure a curriculum which matches students' aspirations and potential, builds effectively on their earlier attainment and provides a fully inclusive programme. Students are very well guided, counselled and consulted about the courses they wish to follow from Year 11 onwards. New courses are introduced to meet their interests if sufficient numbers of students make them viable. Very skilled and detailed timetabling enables students to make more or less free choice. All are interviewed individually to ensure that their course choice is appropriate to their needs. This very close focus on individual requirements ensures that all students, including the few with special educational needs, are provided for well.
34. Students also have good opportunities to pursue and widen their interests and learning experiences through a wide range of clubs and activities. These include for example, rugby, netball, badminton and hockey, the fitness club, debating, musical activities including the orchestra, dance, the breakfast club and a wide programme of community service. The school also makes good use of its industry links, emanating from its technology college status, to strengthen curricular provision.
35. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that students are well advised and prepared for the next stages of their education and employment. The careers education policy has a clear aim to help students to help themselves and to provide for a broad careers programme which builds on that provided in Year 11. The school is aware that actual provision needs further development to ensure that it is fully effective; an action plan for improvement has been drawn up. At present, provision involves weekly lunchtime sessions with careers officers, parents' evenings, visiting speakers, and visits to universities and UCAS conventions. In addition, there is an annual post 16 pathways day to advise on finance, GAP year courses and employment choices.
36. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall. It is rather stronger than that in the main school, since opportunities for students to reflect on their own and on other people's lives are extensive and

regular. A display in the history department, for example, commemorates the First World War with students' work on the local war memorial, poetry, diary entries and photographs. Statutory requirements for general religious education are met.

37. Provision for moral development is very good. The general studies course has frequent planned opportunities for discussion on moral issues; further opportunities are provided by an AS-level course in ethics. In addition, sixth formers take the lead in organising and delivering practical tasks which demonstrate moral and social commitment; for example, supporting a local charity working in Sierra Leone or running a tea party and Christmas party for local senior citizens.
38. Students in the sixth form have increased opportunities for responsibility, and take leading roles in the life of the school by, for example, acting as subject representatives, organising paired reading groups with younger children and participating in a peer mentoring counselling scheme. Many students are also involved in schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award or as Millennium Volunteers. Others are given opportunities to help in lessons in the main school, for example in design and technology, music, and sports coaching.
39. Provision for cultural development is also very good. A number of subject areas make significant contributions to cultural development. For example, students in an art lesson reflected on sexuality as portrayed in paintings by Manet and Titian. History students have recently visited a local theatre to hear First World War poetry; they also visit the Battlefields. African American air force officers visit the school to talk about their experiences in the context of black civil rights in the USA. Other visitors come and talk about the Holocaust from a Gypsy viewpoint.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

40. Overall, the assessment and monitoring of students' attainment and progress are good. Procedures at departmental level are very good; teachers assess students work and monitor their progress very thoroughly. Students' work is marked regularly; detailed comments, helping students to know how to improve their work, are commonplace. Assignments are assessed regularly and rigorously against examination criteria; teachers' very good understanding of their subject and of examination requirements ensures that assessments are generally accurate and reliable. Work is returned with grades relating to performance at advanced level, so that students know how well they are doing. Overall, teachers' assessments help students and their parents to have a very good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and a realistic understanding of their likely performance in examinations. They also enable teachers to prepare students well for examinations and to adapt their teaching to address areas of weakness.
41. A substantial amount of data is collected and recorded when students enter the sixth form. This is used to set minimum target grades for students, which are then given to heads of department, tutors and class teachers. As a result of teachers'

own rigorous assessments as above, targets are amended in the light of current performance. This process, which has only been in operation for two years, has been very successful in establishing a culture wherein expectations for achievement are clear to students and teachers alike from the start of Year 12. It has allowed effective tracking of students' progress, at regular intervals, during their time in the sixth form. Students now are very aware of how well they are achieving; teachers know where extra support is needed as the course progresses.

42. Students had been given their target grades just before the inspection. There was some confusion and some loss of confidence in the idea of minimum target grades since, in many instances, students and staff alike felt predicted grades were too low. Target grades were already being adjusted to provide appropriate challenge. Teachers rely appropriately on their own professional intuition to amend targets. Their very good intuitive assessment of students' academic performance is not yet underpinned by a rigorous understanding of what students should achieve in a particular subject, given their GCSE scores at the start of the course.

Advice, support and guidance

43. The advice, support and guidance given to students in the sixth form are very good. Students receive a very good range of information as preparation for choosing and starting their courses, both written and oral. Those interviewed during the inspection considered that they knew exactly what to expect. If students feel that despite the careful preparation they have made a wrong decision, there are procedures for them to change courses early in Year 12. Equally good support and guidance is given to students during their time in the sixth form. A well-structured programme of interviews and discussions forms a significant part of this support. Students meet their tutors regularly as a group and as individuals. They and their teachers discuss their performance in the students' chosen subjects against the targets they have been set and students follow these discussions with tutor interviews. This process continues into Year 13 with greater emphasis on preparing for university. Such an adult approach - and students appreciate the way they are treated as young adults - gives confidence and is good preparation for higher education. Guidance on future career choices is less strong, though satisfactory. This affects those students who leave for employment at the end of Year 12 more than those who need guidance on careers after higher education. The school recognises that this area of guidance needs strengthening and has produced a plan to take appropriate action.

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

44. Parents think highly of the school. Responses to the parents' questionnaire, and those of parents at the parents' meeting, were largely very positive. In general, parents are very pleased with what the school, and its sixth form, offers. Parents in general feel that the sixth form provides well for their children; most felt that students were treated appropriately as young adults.

45. In general, students are equally positive in their views of the school. The school had issued a questionnaire to students prior to the inspection to ascertain their views. Students were encouraged to be critical, to inform the school's own drive for improvement. Some of the responses to this questionnaire were fairly negative, but this was not borne out in discussions with sixth formers during the inspection week. The somewhat negative responses emanated in the main from current Year 12 students, who had only two weeks experience of the sixth form when they made their responses.
46. Most students who were spoken to felt that the school had given them clear guidance, through booklets, prospectuses, open evenings and tutor periods, to help them choose their sixth form courses. All said that they knew "exactly what was required". Although some expressed concern that their minimum target grades were too low, all students agreed that they have a very clear idea of how well they are progressing in different subjects, through regular monitoring and mentoring.
47. Some of the benefits students feel they gain by joining the sixth form at Cleeve include familiarity with teachers and very good student-teacher relationships. Students say that they are now more in charge of their own learning. They feel that they can ask for help; teachers are open and accessible, but respect confidences. Students are particularly appreciative of how teachers are willing to give up their time to meet individual needs, and of how flexible the school is in providing a range of sixth form options to meet individual requirements. They also appreciate the benefits of the school's technology college status. Students were appreciative also of the opportunities they have to take responsibility. All students are given and take the opportunity to do community service. This includes helping with breakfast clubs, supporting younger readers, sports leadership and senior students doing duties around the school. They feel that the Sixth Form Council gives them a voice that is listened to; for example, study areas have been improved at their suggestion.
48. Although Year 13 students felt that they received good advice on the next stage of their career, for example in completing UCAS applications, Year 12 expressed more apprehension. They reported that some of their peers were 'petrified of making the wrong decisions' and that 'reassurance would not go amiss'. Other areas suggested for improvement were the need for a bigger sixth form building; the provision of lockers for sixth formers; and better communication from some teachers.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

49. The leadership and management of the school's sixth form are good overall. The quality of leadership of the sixth form is very good, due to the shared and agreed principles upon which it operates. The governing body is very well informed of the strengths of the sixth form and its committees are working extremely closely with

school managers to keep the sixth form aims and values in close alliance with those of the main school. There is a clear rationale for the range of courses offered; this is based on the needs of students. There is clear intention that sixth form provision should build on the high achievement gained in Years 7 to 11 and that students' personal development should continue to be enriched.

50. Overall, monitoring and evaluation of performance in Years 12 and 13 and the action taken to secure improvements are good. Certain aspects of monitoring and evaluation are very good. Systems and procedures to monitor attendance and students' welfare are securely in place and are used very well to underpin the excellent standards of behaviour and sense of responsibility displayed by students. Tutors are provided with a very comprehensive handbook of guidance to ensure consistency and conformity in the way they manage and support their groups. As with the main school, supportive monitoring and openness to learning and development are seen as a key element in managing improvements. The quality of sixth form teaching is monitored regularly and there is a welcome attitude by teachers to identify what can be improved further.
51. The monitoring of academic results and progress by managers is not as secure. The school uses a range of assessment data to set appropriate targets for improving standards; it monitors its success in meeting such targets carefully. Departments undertake a detailed annual analysis of results and identify areas for improvement. However, these processes are not underpinned by a rigorous analysis and understanding of what students should have achieved, given their GCSE results, in relation to national patterns. Managers are not able to demonstrate conclusively that students' achievements are at least as high as they should be. The school is not as aware as it should be of how students have achieved on different courses. Neither is it sufficiently aware of any differences in the performance of students with differing levels of prior attainment. This lack of focus, regarding where specific support is needed, limits the effectiveness of departments' efforts to improve examination results further.
52. About two years ago, the school identified its sixth form as an area of its work requiring specific support to secure further improvement. There is a clear commitment by all concerned to develop and improve. As a result of monitoring, priorities for development have been identified. Clear direction for the way forward is outlined in a paper that is currently being considered. This has not yet been developed into an action plan agreed by governors.

Resources

53. The school makes very good strategic use of its resources to support its sixth form. The budget is administered efficiently. It is linked clearly to the school's improvement plan, so that school and sixth form priorities can be addressed. For instance, there has been additional expenditure during the current financial year on improving the sixth form social and study areas.

54. Particularly effective use of funding is made through the school's strategies for the appointment of well-qualified teaching and support staff. The match of teaching staff to the demands of the broad sixth form curriculum is very good. Expenditure on support staff is below average, partly due to the relatively low incidence of special educational needs within the school as a whole. However, if extra support is needed, then additional expenditure is authorised in order to provide the necessary help. For example, extra administrative hours have been allocated recently to the head of sixth form and to students, to assist with applications for higher education courses. Liaison between teachers and technicians is particularly effective in sixth form science subjects, in product technology and in ICT subjects and enhances students' learning.
55. Slightly more funding is spent by the school on staffing its sixth form than is allocated for this purpose in the budget. There is no evidence that this has an adverse effect on the rest of the school, where standards in general are well above average. Grant funding is spent as required; for instance, on the professional development of teachers. This ensures that they are kept up-to-date with the requirements of vocational and AS and A-level courses. Overall, the sixth form is cost effective in providing a good education for its students.
56. An above average provision of resources for teaching and learning supports the work of sixth form students well. Provision for almost all subjects inspected is good or very good. Since the last inspection, the school has made very good improvements in resources for ICT; the number of computers is now above average for a school of this size; all teachers have laptop computers; several classrooms have electronic whiteboards. The school has invested very heavily in books, both for library and classroom use. In many subjects, students benefit from a very good supply of reading material. The library has also been improved, not only with more books, but also with more videos, CD-ROMs and computer terminals. Students are encouraged to use these resources to research, to complete assignments and to extend their knowledge beyond the work covered in class. Most take full advantage of the facilities.
57. The accommodation for sixth form courses is satisfactory overall. In many subjects, the accommodation is far from ideal, but there is little evidence to show that it is detrimental to standards. For example, a number of English lessons have to be held in temporary buildings and teachers of mathematics have to move to different rooms to make way for other groups in the main school. Some graphics lessons are taught in small workshops; sociology teaching takes place in a very narrow room, which is not conducive to high quality learning.
58. In some other subjects, the accommodation does depress standards. Accommodation for art and design is unsatisfactory. It has improved slightly since the last inspection, but the provision of sinks and storage facilities are inadequate for sixth form work. The small display areas mean that some lessons lack sufficient visual focus for high quality learning; thus, students' understanding of the range of possibilities for their work is limited. For example, students were hampered in their understanding of how to exploit watercolour techniques by limited display. Business studies classrooms are scattered across the school and are not in

suites, which would be more conducive to educating students about modern office facilities. The Year 13 AVCE business courses are taught in classrooms without computers, which has an adverse impact upon learning and progress. Regular and easy access to ICT is essential for all units in this course. For the teaching of physics, there is one very well appointed laboratory which has been converted to modern facilities, but another laboratory is not big enough for groups of over 20 in Year 12. Teachers cannot circulate around the students efficiently to give help and advice during practical work; this is impacting adversely on standards of practical work.

59. The sixth form centre has been renovated recently to a good standard. The common room is small, but adequate, for the number of students in the sixth form. Two study areas contain modern study booths and are very well used. A few students would like the facilities to be open for longer hours after the normal end of the school day. The school is about to start a building project to improve facilities for art; it also has plans to improve facilities for physics and business studies.

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

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

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

GCE A-level and AVCE courses Year 13 2001

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	23	91	87	30	43	5.0	5.8
Biology	18	100	88	33	34	6.0	5.3
Physics	14	100	88	64	40	7.4	5.7
Product design	15	93	91	53	30	7.1	5.4
Business studies	30	100	92	17	32	5.2	5.5
Computing	9	100	86	33	23	6.4	4.6
Physical education	11	91	92	36	25	4.9	5.1
Health & social care V	4	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	16.5	10.8
Art and design V	11	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	12.0	12.2
Geography	10	100	92	50	38	6.6	5.7
History	30	97	88	40	35	5.7	5.5
English literature	21	95	95	33	37	6.1	5.9
French	6	83	89	17	38	5.7	5.6

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, biology and physics, but chemistry, science for public understanding, and electronics were sampled.

In chemistry, results in the A-level examinations in 2001 were below average, particularly in the proportion of students gaining higher grades. However, in 2002, there was a significant improvement in results, including a much higher proportion of A and B grades. The work seen during the inspection was of a high standard. In both of the lessons observed, teaching was very good. Students' attitudes to work were excellent; all were very involved in their work, and there was a very good working atmosphere in lessons. The standard of written work in students' folders is high.

The course in science for public understanding leads to a qualification at AS-level. In the lesson observed, teaching was very good. Students discussed the use, and possible overuse, of antibiotics knowledgeably. This course is particularly useful in broadening the opportunities available in the sixth form, since none of the students involved take any other science subject. They all regard the course as interesting and useful.

Electronics is taught to a small group of students in Year 12 and also leads to a qualification at AS-level. In the lesson seen, teaching was very good. The course is well organised and provides a worthwhile opportunity for students to extend their scientific knowledge.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good; often it is very good. As a result, students learn well.
- Teachers' subject knowledge, planning of lessons and management of students are all very good; consequently, students have very positive attitudes to learning.
- AS-level results in 2002 show significant improvement over those in 2001.
- Students' work is marked regularly; the addition of many helpful comments ensures that students know what they must do to improve.
- Teachers have quickly and enthusiastically grasped the advantages of using laptop computers as a tool. The imaginative use of the new interactive white boards by teachers really helps students to understand new concepts.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good; so too are the qualifications of teachers and the match of teachers to the curriculum.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers could intervene more regularly at various stages in a few lessons to check on students' understanding and to increase the pace of learning.
- The department should develop their use of data to evaluate students'

achievements against their prior attainment.

60. The department offers AS and A-level courses in mathematics and further mathematics. From 1998 to 2001, the number of Year 13 students entered for A-level examinations was about twenty. Results were above or well above average until 2001, when results were average; this represented satisfactory achievement given students' GCSE results on entry. In 2002, numbers entered for A-level were very small, following disappointing results in the 2001 AS-level examination, when results were well below average. In 2002, 25 students were entered for the AS examination; results were much better than in 2001, with almost 40 per cent of students gaining grades A or B. Two thirds of these students have continued with the A-level course in Year 13. In the current Year 12, there are over 30 students; during interviews, all but four indicated that they would be continuing with the A-level course leading to qualifications in 2004. These are very good retention rates.
61. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' folders shows that current standards are above average; students are achieving well. There is good progression in the work covered; an increasing difficulty of examples is seen in written work. Students take pride in their files of written work; different sections of the syllabus are very well organised. In their statistics module, students understand how to calculate the median and the quartiles of grouped data. Higher attaining students use tree diagrams well to calculate conditional probabilities; students' files show good use of Venn diagrams. Lower attaining students confirm knowledge of algebra, which was initially covered in the GCSE course. In discussions, students praise the department because the mathematics covered in Year 11 was adjusted so that students could move comfortably forward to AS-level courses. In a very good lesson, Year 13 students worked well in pairs using a past examination paper for practice.
62. Teaching is good overall and often very good. As a result, students concentrate intently and show a very high level of interest in developing their mathematics. In particular, teachers' knowledge and understanding of the mathematics and the requirements of the courses are very good. Teachers present their lessons extremely fluently; they show a very high command of the subject and are able to deal very confidently with students' questions. They help students in a caring manner, building a strong, working rapport with their groups. Teachers plan very carefully, and lessons have clear objectives. Lesson plans show how new work is built on what students should already know; for example, a very good lesson to investigate the features of sketch graphs, including maximum and minimum values, asymptotes and symmetry, relies on previous knowledge of composite, inverse, odd and even functions. Teachers encourage students to use computers and interactive white boards confidently to demonstrate their solutions of problems to the rest of the group. Teachers' expectations of students are high, and often very high. Students are expected to listen carefully and to concentrate for long periods of time. Teachers could intervene more regularly at various stages in a few lessons to check on students' understanding and to increase the pace of learning. Students' work is marked regularly; the addition of many helpful comments ensures that students know what they must do to improve. Longer-term assessment has

improved by the recent introduction of a larger number of tests and a standard pass mark for each test. Thus, students know how well they are doing and have good knowledge of their target grades.

63. Standards of work seen are better than the most recent examination results. Leadership and management of mathematics are very good indeed and are instrumental in this improvement. The organisation and planning of courses are discussed very carefully, so that students are clear about what is expected of them. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning takes place regularly. There is good analysis and evaluation of examination results, but the department's analysis of the value it adds to students' achievements is underdeveloped. The match of staffing to the curriculum is also very good indeed, as the school has used very sensible policies to recruit teachers in this shortage subject.
64. The department has improved significantly since the last inspection. Teachers are very enthusiastic and work together extremely well, showing an extremely high team ethos. Ideas and resources are shared energetically among members of the department. These improvements have not yet been reflected in recent A-level examination results, but the department is very well placed to improve results and provision further.

Biology

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

Strengths

- A-level results were well above the national average in 2001.
- Teaching is very good and students learn very quickly as a result.
- Teachers share their enthusiasm for biology with their students.
- Students work hard; their notes are detailed and their files are well organised, providing a secure basis for further study and revision.

Areas for improvement

- To continue to develop the use of ICT by students for research, modelling and presentation.

65. The department offers courses in AS and A-level biology. Around 40 students take up the subject in Year 12, making biology one of the most popular subjects in the school. Most students complete the AS course and nearly all continue with the subject in Year 13. Results in the A-level examination in 2001 were well above national figures. Students gained better results in biology than they did on average in their other subjects. Results have steadily improved over recent years, although results for 2002 dropped. In relation to their GCSE results, all students achieve well and gain better A-level results than might be expected.
66. The standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average in Year 13. Students' knowledge and understanding of current topics are detailed and secure. The department is aware that, in 2002, students did not achieve particularly well in course work. Teachers have carefully analysed this problem and have taken realistic action to raise future course work marks. High attaining students' work is consistently of a very high standard in all modules. All students attain very well in the foundation and human health and disease modules. Low attaining students' marks in the physiology module are lower than in other modules. Overall the use of ICT to research, model and present work is under represented in students' work. This is recognised by teachers who now include more ICT in their plans.
67. Students in Year 12 are only in the first few weeks of their AS course but already their standard of work is well above average. For example students have a real depth of knowledge of cell micro-structure.
68. Teaching is very good and students learn very quickly as a result. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and a genuine enthusiasm for biology. Students value the very good teaching they receive and enjoy the different styles of their teachers. Teachers' plans include many different activities that ensure students are actively involved in their learning and this makes for very good progress. For example a Year 13 class were researching from the web, books and fact sheets to prepare an ICT presentation on diabetes. Students learn a lot during lessons because teachers set demanding time limits for activities. For example, each

student in a Year 12 class made an oral presentation on cell structure. This was followed by a discussion to collate their findings. The lesson continued with students devising a key to identify cell organelles. Students' work is marked in detail, so that they know how their answers could be improved. For example, a student who had gained full marks for an A-level answer was still given ideas for further study and improvement! Students respond by working hard; their notes are detailed and their files are well organised, providing a valuable basis for further study and revision. Teachers prepare students well for examinations and return marked work as A-level grades, which helps students to map their own progress.

69. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The teachers of A and AS-level biology work together very closely and are quick to identify any weaknesses and take action to overcome them. They make very good use of assessment data to plan their teaching. There has been good progress in biology since the previous inspection; the subject remains one of the more successful A-level subjects in the school.

Physics

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

Strengths

- A-level results were well above average from 1998 to 2001 inclusive.
- Teaching overall is very good, leading to very positive attitudes by students.
- There has been a significant increase in the use of computers to improve learning.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- Assessment procedures are thorough; students are given challenging targets by their teachers.

Areas for improvement

- Students need more encouragement to ask questions in some lessons.
- Some accommodation is rather small, and some is below standard; this limits learning.
- The overall number of students taking A-level physics is low; there are very few female students.

70. From 1998 to 2000, results in A-level physics were in the top five per cent of all schools nationally. In 2001, overall results were well above average. A high proportion of those entered gained A grades; all students gained at least a pass grade. These results represent very good achievement. Overall standards in the 2002 examination were not as good, and were below the previous year's national average. However, once again all those entered gained a pass grade.

71. In the AS-level examinations in 2001, students performed in line with their targets. In 2002, AS-level grades improved; these students, who are now in Year 13, gained better results than expected based on their target grades.

72. The standards of work seen during the inspection were well above average, as a result of very good teaching and the very positive attitude of students. While there is a wide range of attainment in both Years 12 and 13, a significant proportion of students is aiming for the higher grades. Students rise to the challenge of the more difficult advanced level courses, and take pride in their achievements. In Year 12, students are able to recall from a previous lesson key facts about the refraction of light. They use Snell's Law confidently to calculate the refractive index of a substance, or the angle of refraction. In a practical lesson using convex lenses, they demonstrate good practical skills when investigating how the object and image distances affect the magnification produced. In Year 13, students are rather slow to recall Newton's Law of Gravitation and Kepler's Laws. They show more confidence when using data and computer spreadsheets to investigate how accurate Kepler's Laws are in practice.
73. Teaching overall is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, and are particularly well prepared; liaison with technicians is very good. Teachers also provide interesting background information that adds interest and relevance to the subject. For example, Year 13 students are provided with a fascinating article about the use of Newton's Law in the eighteenth century to estimate the weight of the earth. There is regular and effective use of number; students are particularly adept at setting out their calculations clearly. There is high expectation that all students will be fully involved in lessons. The style of teaching requires them to be thinking about their work, and to be ready to respond, but there is insufficient encouragement for them to ask questions. The marking of homework is thorough, with suggestions about how to improve. The standard of each student's work is regularly compared with A-level grades. Students therefore know how well they are performing in relation to their target grades. The high quality of teaching, students' positive response, and the excellent relationships in lessons provide a working atmosphere in which very good learning takes place. The proportion of students who successfully complete the two-year course is in line with national figures.
74. The leadership and management of physics are very good. The head of department leads by example; he is well organised, and clearly enjoys his subject. The advanced physics course is relevant and thought-provoking. The subject development plan has appropriate targets, but priorities are not costed, and there is insufficient detail about the development of strategies to ensure these priorities are achieved. Data is used effectively in order to monitor the work of the department, and of individual students.
75. Since the last inspection, there has been good overall improvement in physics. Results at A-level, apart from those in 2002, have been consistently high, and students taking the subject enjoy their work. The use of computers to improve learning has increased significantly. However, weaknesses in the quality of the accommodation, and in the standard of resources, still apply and these inevitably have an impact on learning. Moreover, the number of students taking physics to A-level standard is rather low, though there is some increase in Year 12.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on product design, but the AVCE course in engineering was sampled. One engineering lesson was seen; teaching was very good. Lesson aims were shared with students and were reinforced at the end of the lesson. There was a good mix of practical work and theory. Learning was put into context and progress was good. Students worked in pairs doing gas and resistance welding. They were working in a small heat workshop; the space was small and just accommodated the four students taking the course. There was an effective whole class summary that brought together the theory and the application. Throughout the lesson the students worked with great focus and enthusiasm; all were very positive about the course. Students themselves assess much of the course, as well as their teacher; as a result, students' knowledge of their own learning is very high.

Product Design.

The quality of provision in product design is **very good**.

Strengths

- Relationships between teachers and students are very good and this creates very good conditions for learning.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and provide very good individual support for all students; as a result, achievement is very good.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers should increase the use of ICT within the coursework components of students' work, in order to demonstrate students' awareness of industrial techniques.

76. A-level results have improved steadily since 1999. In 2001, results were above average; students achieved very well in relation to their average GCSE scores when they started the course in Year 12. A-level results in 2002 show a drop in the number of A and B grades achieved. The AS-level results in 2001 were above the standard expected for these students.

77. Standards of work of students currently doing the product design course are above average in both Years 12 and 13; students are achieving very well. Coursework is closely linked to the examination mark scheme, ensuring that all important aspects of examination courses are covered. Teachers provide very good opportunities for students to develop their basic skills. Graphics skills are highly developed and standards of presentation are very good. Students use the design process well to show each stage of their development work; they consider standard production processes, mass production possibilities and basic skills in using computer aided control and manufacture. Students' ability to follow the design process has enabled them to work quite independently, using their teacher as a guide and mentor. As a result, teachers support students well on an individual basis. Modelling techniques are used well to test and improve each prototype during the development stages. However, students' ability to analyse a range of products and then use the information to inform their own design ideas is less well developed. At this stage of

their final projects in Year 13, students also show limited use of how to use ICT to demonstrate a range of industrial procedures within the context of their own work.

78. Students demonstrate a good understanding in handling and processing numerical data. They apply accurate measurements and estimations to both design and manufacturing and work to scale when developing prototypes. Students use a good range of writing skills as part of their development work and as part of the overall presentation of their examination portfolio work. In the coursework seen during the inspection, the majority of students used ICT well to process and present data from their market research. They also used ICT well to increase the quality and presentation of their work.
79. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13 is very good overall. Teachers place good emphasis on individual achievement. Lessons are structured well, with a good mix of group and individual work. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject. As a result, lessons set clear objectives for designing; students' learning is linked very well to their individual needs. Teachers plan very well for students to extend their basic knowledge and skills. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson, where students were learning to scale up their standard drawings. Teachers ensured that students understood the process, as well as increasing the overall accuracy and quality of their planning. The very good relationships between students and their teachers creates a positive impact on learning. Students take their work seriously and are keen to do well. As a result, they discuss their work in depth with their teachers, and readily take on board the help and guidance that is given. Students said that they received a good level of help and support from their teachers.
80. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department has focused on raising standards. Schemes of work are well planned, linked to work in class and, as a result, teachers work well as a team to deliver a well-structured course. Systems to monitor the achievement of students are very good, with regular opportunities for students to discuss their work with teachers. The course is now well established and improvement since the start of the course has been good.

BUSINESS

The focus was on A-level business studies but A-level economics and an AVCE course in business were sampled. Economics has been offered in the sixth form for many years. Numbers have been small in recent years, with nine students in the current Year 12. In 2001, three of the four students taking the A-level course achieved grades A or B. In the lesson observed, teaching was good, with a very good teacher led question session, where students were challenged in their knowledge of elasticity of demand. Students showed a good understanding of their work and were able to work well in pairs, preparing for a mini presentation. Attitudes were very positive.

Results in 2001 in the advanced GNVQ business examination were average, with one fifth of students achieving a distinction grade. This represents satisfactory achievement.

In the previous two years, standards had been above average. In 2002, the new AVCE was examined and one eighth of students achieved an A or B grade in the double award, with all students achieving an A to E pass grade in both the single and double awards. Numbers have fallen over the past four years; there are currently four students in Year 13. One lesson was sampled and the quality of teaching and learning was good. However, the accommodation that is used by the Year 13 class is unsatisfactory for two reasons. There is no business environment in which students can learn and there is no access to ICT resources which, in most courses, are integral to learning. There are plans to change this within the school.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan lessons very well.
- Marking is very thorough and supports good learning and progress.
- Students are well prepared for examinations.
- Relationships are very good.
- The business studies intranet site provides good opportunities for learning.

Areas for improvement

- Students need further opportunities for independent learning and a better range of books for research.
- There needs to be more systematic monitoring of students' progress.
- The accommodation and facilities for ICT need to be improved to support learning.

81. Standards in recent A-level examinations have been above average, although the 2001 results were in line with the national average and this represents satisfactory achievement for those students. In the last three years, including 2002, all students have achieved an A to E pass grade. There was an overall improvement in the A and B grades in 2002, with one third of students obtaining these higher grades. This represents an improvement in standards for students based on their GCSE grades and indicates good achievement.

82. The AS examination was successfully introduced in 2001; almost one half of students achieved an A or B grade, this percentage was not quite maintained in 2002. The numbers taking business studies have declined steadily over four years from 38 to 15 in the current Year 13. The introduction of the AS examination has not introduced additional students to the subject. There is currently a 70 per cent retention rate from Year 12 to Year 13.

83. Standards observed in lessons and in written work are above average and are consistent with the most recent examination outcomes. Achievement is good. In Year 12, students show a good understanding of the impact of legal constraints on businesses and are able to analyse effectively both a cartoon and a pamphlet to identify the underlying implications for business. In Year 13, students are able to

dissect a case study to determine whether a company should take on additional orders at marginal cost. They demonstrate good knowledge and are able in discussion to link these financial considerations to capacity utilisation, market share and company responsiveness.

84. Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. Students are very enthusiastic about the subject and learn well as a result of very good teacher knowledge and careful lesson planning. In the best lessons, the pace of learning is fast and students are introduced to business concepts through a wide range of activities: presentations, debates, vigorous questioning and stimulating visual material. Students respond very well to this variety of task and relationships within the classroom are very good and sometimes excellent. This positive learning atmosphere, and very thorough preparation for external examinations, promotes good attainment and progress for all. Some lessons are, however, too teacher led, with insufficient opportunities for students to develop their own research skills; in one lesson, teacher questioning overshadowed a student's presentation. Recently, a comprehensive business Intranet site has been developed and this provides greater support for research and independent learning. However, access to ICT is still limited within the department, as one teaching room has no access and the other two rooms each have only 12 workstations. Marking of students' work is rigorous, with comprehensive and diagnostic comments from the teachers. Assessment procedures have recently been improved with the introduction of computerised monitoring. This development needs to support regular and systematic monitoring of all aspects of students' progress, so that the recent improvement in standards is maintained.
85. The department was not inspected last time so no judgement can be made on improvement. A very experienced head of department, with a clear view of the development of the department, leads an effective team; leadership is therefore good. Management is also good because departmental organisation has been improved in recent years with an enhanced handbook and thorough new schemes of work. Students are encouraged to read the business sections of the broadsheets, however the range of additional books both within the department and the library needs to be extended. The business accommodation is spread throughout the school and does not provide a high quality business environment for students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The school offers courses in AS and A-level computing and an AVCE course in information technology. The focus was on computing but information technology was also sampled. The AVCE students did well in the 2002 examinations, both in the Year 12 and the Year 13 examinations. There are no national figures for comparison but results are likely to be above average. One lesson was seen. Teaching was good. The teacher's clear explanations and good use of the display technology enabled students to see the relationship between Web page appearance and HTML code. The students' designs were above average in their use of frames and hyperlinks.

Computer studies

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good overall; students learn very well.
- Leadership and management, in particular the development of teaching and the professional development of staff, are very good.
- Systems for assessing students' attainment and progress are very good.

Areas for development

- Students need more encouragement to work independently.
- The department's use of data to measure students' individual achievements is not yet leading to accurate enough targets.

86. In 2001, students attained well above average results in the A-level computing exam. In 2002, results are likely to be closer to the national average. In the AS-level examination at the end of Year 12 in 2001, results were broadly average. In 2002, the AS-level results are likely to be well above average.
87. Current standards are above average, which represents good achievement, since students enter the sixth form with a range of attainment at GCSE or GNVQ. The A-level computing course is quite different from previous study, making much greater demands on the students' analytical and mathematical skills. Students have a good grasp of the requirements of 'real life' applications, such as a hospital equipment loan system. Most students are able to clearly explain the implementation from the user's point of view. They can describe how they use a relational database application to provide weekly reports of the equipment stock levels or to issue an overdue return letter. Higher attaining students use subroutines developed in Visual Basic to make the application easier to use.
88. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers question students effectively to reinforce and develop their knowledge. They set challenging tasks and a brisk pace, so that the rate of learning is high. Lesson planning and preparation are very effective and teachers make good use of up to date equipment in demonstrations. This involves the students well and provides good motivation. In a very good Year 12 lesson, by means of a quick fire, competitive 'warm-up', the teacher ensured that the students practised necessary de-bugging skills before proceeding with a programming exercise. This speeded up the development process greatly, as students were keen to spot errors before compiling their programs. Again, a set of 'real' data, on hotel bar prices in a cash register, raised the students' awareness of the use of information technology in society. In less successful, but otherwise good lessons, this preliminary boost is missing and teachers' desire to set a challenging pace leaves behind the slower learners. Students benefit from having two teachers with very good knowledge and understanding of the subject.

89. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of information and communication technology has developed the range of sixth form courses, based on an analysis of students' needs and a good eye for the requirements of industry and higher education. Although not all students are going to specialise in computing, most have chosen the course to enhance their studies post sixth form. There are very good systems for assessing students' attainment and progress. These are clear to students and are accessible on the school's Intranet network, so that students can keep an eye on their targets. This is fairly new and some students have yet to make full use of self-evaluation to support their progress. The department has been less successful in analysing data on individual achievement. The head of information and communication technology now recognises the need to set more demanding targets, rather than relying on generalised performance figures.
90. Since the last inspection there has been a very good improvement in the provision for computing. Standards in examinations have improved very well and the provision of space and resources has improved dramatically. Students now have ready access to a computer terminal and this enables them to work on their own at most times of the day. The school's electronic mail system is powerful, enabling fast written communication between staff and students. Students make very good use of the Internet for research. A high level of technical support, from full time technicians, means fast and safe access at all times. Problems are tackled vigorously and rapidly.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical Education

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good; as a result, students learn very well.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and are committed to raising standards.
- Lesson planning is excellent.
- Students receive good structured support that enables them to achieve well.

Areas for development

- Students need further opportunities to discuss and debate issues in lessons and to research more widely by using the world wide web and the school's Intranet.
- Teachers need to use data more consistently and effectively to improve attainment.

91. A-level examination results in 2001 were average in comparison to those nationally. However, the proportion of students who attained the highest grades was well above the national figure. Boys performed less well than girls, but the relatively small numbers make direct comparison of standards unreliable. Students did equally well in physical education as they did in their other subjects. The overall A-level results of 2002 are similar to those attained in 2001. The weakest grades

were awarded to the synoptic and exercise physiology paper. The AS results for 2001 show the overall standard to be broadly average

92. The standards of work of current students in Y12 are above average. They have made a very good beginning to their work on skills and abilities and defining the characteristics of types of physical activity. They show good thinking skills and are learning to link their previous learning with new information. They are gaining a good understanding of the demands of the course and the need for wider reading. The work of students in Year 13 is of an average standard. These students write with sufficient detail to show that they can apply their theoretical knowledge to the analysis of techniques and skills in sports. Their contributions in lessons demonstrate that they have a sound grasp of concepts, such as the need to achieve and its effect on performance. In both year groups, achievement is good because students are given very good structured support and this helps them to learn and progress well.

93. Overall, teaching is very good; there are many strong features. The teaching team is relatively inexperienced in teaching the course but their very good subject knowledge and excellent planning, ensure that students learn very well. Teachers present information very clearly and in a manner that students can understand easily. They use their knowledge well to illustrate and expand their teaching. All lessons begin by teachers telling students what they are going to learn. Students are thus able to self-check their own understanding and learning during each lesson; this provides them with a very good foundation to undertake further research. Teachers actively encourage students to read widely, but they do not fully exploit the opportunities available through the world wide web or the school's Intranet. Very good attention is given to developing subject language and teachers' lesson plans indicate whether opportunities will be taken to improve students' numeracy and information and communication skills. Teachers use questions very well to probe students' understanding, but this does not always lead on to discussion or debate. Students are interested in lessons and their behaviour is always excellent, as are their relationships with teachers and each other. However, they are quite content to be provided with information rather than asking questions or challenging ideas. The newly acquired lap top computers and the digital camera are already enhancing the way lessons are taught. Power point presentations are visually motivating and movement captured on camera is assisting with students' analysis of performance.

94. The leadership and management of the course are very good. Monitoring takes place regularly and the frequent meetings of the team of teachers ensure that planning is effective and that the course is delivered to the best advantage of the students. Assessment criteria are applied accurately. The analysis of data and the recording of students' strengths and weaknesses are not yet used well enough to ensure that the highest possible standards are achieved. However, students are given information about their progress and are beginning to chart how they are doing compared to the targets set for them.

95. Progress since the last inspection has been very good. The new head of department is enthusiastically developing physical education courses and opportunities for post-16 students. Improvements have been made to the proportion of students who attain the highest A-level grades and students' knowledge and skills now match national averages. Teachers have improved their questioning techniques and they have an excellent and unified approach to structuring their lessons in order to help students to learn.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

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

Strengths

- Achievement is very good as a result of very good teaching.
- Very good relationships between staff and students lead to positive attitudes and a very good learning environment.
- Work is well structured and meets the needs and aspirations of individual students.
- Leadership and management of the course are very good, resulting in very good planning, plus a well co-ordinated team of teachers and this has had a very good impact on raising standards.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers should increase the use of ICT: to enable students to draft and re-draft as part of the process of upgrading their ongoing work; and to extend the range of presentation skills that students use.

96. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average in both Years 12 and 13. This is in keeping with the above average examination results in 2001. This represents very good achievement when compared to the average standards students achieved by the end of Year 11. Results in 2002 have improved further.
97. In the work seen during the inspection, students gain a good understanding of promoting good health and well being, personal development, relationships and the work of support agencies within the community. The examination coursework shows that students take the opportunity to build their knowledge base to a good level through structured lessons, discussions, reading and researching the topics being studied. They apply this knowledge well when they prepare and write up their final coursework. Students follow the guidance provided by their teachers well and structure their work closely to match examination requirements. By building their knowledge before starting coursework projects, students are beginning to show a good level of independence. They make very good use of opportunities to broaden their experience and knowledge of the work of support agencies within the community. Planned visits and speakers are integrated well by teachers into the course and students benefit from these community links. Their coursework also shows a good level of research, it is well structured, with a good level of knowledge to meet the examination requirements.

98. The majority of students demonstrate good numerical skills when analysing and using statistical data. They gain sufficient understanding of the concepts of using data in preparing their own work, for example in a lesson where students were measuring the own heart rates before and after exercise. Students also use a good range of literacy skills and complete work to a level appropriate for the examination. However, folders showed that students found note taking more difficult. Students generally use ICT well to present their final coursework, although the use of ICT at the earlier stage of drafting their work was relatively under developed
99. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons are very well planned and teachers are well organised. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and, as a result, teaching focuses on the most relevant and worthwhile experiences for students. Students benefit from very specific guidance and support, which is well matched to their individual needs. Teachers set clear objectives to guide students with their coursework. In lessons, teachers cover the basic knowledge to good depth and explain concepts well. Students are encouraged to complete a work experience placement and many have benefited greatly from their work in local nurseries and care centres for adults with disabilities. This experience gives students the opportunity to gain further practical application and to extend their knowledge to every day situations. This helps to consolidate their learning. Teachers plan work well; this enables students to experience a range of activities to help them analyse some of the topics studied. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson, where students were learning about the value of play in the development of children. The teacher used the students to play with some of the toys provided. As a class, they analysed the learning activities and developmental stages of children between the ages of two and seven years. This analysis and group discussion was linked well to the child development studies of the psychologist Piaget to establish how children develop skills of conservation.
100. Leadership and management are very good. The AVCE course is now well established and has become very popular with students. Teachers have established very good relationships with students, which creates a good learning ethos in which there is mutual respect. There is good monitoring of students' work. There is a wide range of books and specialist learning resources within the department and these are used well to facilitate learning. Teachers are sensitive and supportive of the needs of individual students on the course. Standards are improving as more students are now doing the AVCE course and achievement is very good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The school offers single and double award courses in AVCE art and design, as well as AS and A-level courses in art. The focus of this inspection was the AVCE course, but A-level art was also sampled. A-level examination results were above average in 2001, which represents at least satisfactory achievement. Two lessons were observed. Both were at least good. In one very good lesson, the teacher engaged Year 12 students in a lively debate about the cultural and social differences between Manet's "Olympia and Titian's "Venus d'Urbino". Students' observations and responses were well above average, building on their knowledge of the history of painting as well as past and current sexual mores.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average
- Leadership and management, in particular the development of teaching and the professional development of staff, are very good.
- The quality of teaching and the teachers' commitment and enthusiasm are good.

Areas for development

- The unsatisfactory accommodation reduces the quality and scope of teaching and learning options.
- The department's use of data to measure students' individual achievements is not yet leading to accurate enough targets.

101. Results in the 2001 AVCE examination were average. In 2002, results are likely to be above average. There is no appropriate national data which indicates how well students achieve in relation to their prior attainment or in relation to the other subjects they take.

102. Current standards in Years 12 and 13 are above average. The work of the small number of students taking the dual award course is well above average. These standards represent good achievement, since although the students' GCSE results are generally at least above average, the sixth form course covers different areas and places considerably different demands on the students. This is particularly reflected in the requirement to engage in personal research and knowledge of commercial art.

103. Students draw on a wide range of skills and knowledge when developing presentations based on studies of a range of art from different times and cultures. They are developing a good sense of style in relation to commercial applications. The work of higher attaining students is rich both in the range of influences, such as Ancient Greek pottery or Maori decoration, and in the use of materials and media, such as block printing and desktop publishing. All students are confident in their experimentation, which often produces imaginative 3-dimensional work. All students thoroughly enjoy the course; often, they are prepared to put in extra time, both at home and in school.

104. Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. Students learn well as a result. The best teaching quickly builds on students' prior skills and knowledge, introducing new techniques and challenging tasks. In a very good lesson, students had to devise their own ways of combining drawing, collage and printing, whilst at the same time expressing what they had learned about different types of design. They responded to this with maturity and insight, offering a range of inventive solutions. The teacher also recognised and encouraged a particularly gifted student to take a more advanced approach. The bleakness of the art rooms and the lack of well-planned storage and display areas provide an unsatisfactory

working environment for sixth form students. Lessons often lack a visual focus because of this. It is difficult to display work in progress, as the AVCE course lacks a base of its own. In less successful but otherwise good lessons, the teacher does not compensate sufficiently for this, for instance by setting up appropriate visual examples. In such instances, students make less progress in their understanding of the range of possibilities, for instance, in exploiting water colour techniques. Teachers assess students' work very well, enabling them to give very good advice and support to help students make progress.

105. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The school was part of the national pilot for the vocational course; hence, the department has developed considerable expertise in developing the course and in providing opportunities for students. In particular, the department has built up good links with a local publisher, whose employees set 'real life' graphic design briefs and guide the students with technical support and even equipment. Students are also able to avail themselves of study visits, both locally and abroad. One student had produced a very evocative record of a visit to Barcelona. The department's use of information technology is developing well and has become an integral part of the course. There is a good number of well-qualified and committed staff. Teachers are enthusiastic in developing and delivering the programme of study. They work well as a team, often sharing the teaching, which enables good monitoring and feedback. This has been instrumental in the department's decision to place more emphasis on developing the students' individual learning strategies. The department has been less successful in analysing data on individual achievement. The head of art now recognises the need to set more demanding targets, rather than relying on generalised performance figures.

106. There has been satisfactory progress in art since the last inspection. It is not possible to make a direct comparison with examination results, since the AVCE course did not then exist. However, sixth form standards appear to have been maintained overall. Whilst more room has been added to the art department, the accommodation continues to be unsatisfactory. Little appears to have been done to improve display and storage facilities. One room has to act as a passage to other rooms, which is very distracting for the teacher and students. Teachers work hard to overcome these difficulties; display areas around the school are used where possible. A new art block has been planned.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography and history; however, sociology was sampled. The AS and A level course in psychology, also offered by the school, was not sampled. Numbers taking sociology are too small for comparisons with national results to be made. Two sociology lessons were observed; teaching was at least good. In a very good lesson, the teacher made very good use of time and of a variety of activities, including discussion, analysis of statistical data and pair work. Students were enthusiastic and confident and learned very well.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average and students achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good.
- The geography curriculum offers good breadth, balance and relevance
- Students' attitudes and classroom relationships are very good
- Leadership and management are very good.

Areas for development

- Teachers need to ensure that all students are challenged sufficiently well and are given sufficient opportunities for learning at a high intellectual level.
- The department should improve its use of performance data to measure value added and to set realistically challenging targets for attainment.

107. Standards are above average at the end of both Years 12 and 13. This is shown in the 2001 AS and A-level results, and in students' work seen during the inspection. In 2002, A-level results were very similar; AS-level results were slightly weaker. Overall, students achieve well in comparison with their earlier attainment at GCSE. Male and female students achieve equally well, and do as well in geography as in the other subjects they study.

108. Students build well on to their very high standards at GCSE, and develop good, and in the case of higher attaining students, very good, knowledge and understanding of both physical and human geography. Their work in environmental investigation is particularly strong and benefits from field work, which forms an integral part of their learning. It also benefits from students' very good use of maps to identify and categorise features and the main factors that determine the nature of an environment. Year 13 students have a very good grasp of environmental and global issues. Their replies in a lesson on balancing population and resources, for instance, indicated very good understanding of complex, interrelating factors influencing population changes, including those which are currently being debated world wide. Students are confident in using a range of resources to assist their learning, making particularly good use of the Internet, downloading, for instance, satellite images to support their research into management problems caused by changing weather conditions.

109. The difference in the standards reached by the higher attaining students and some of the other students tends to be greater than expected. This is evident in the often more limited and hesitant contributions of average and lower attaining students in lessons, and in their written work, which is often much less detailed than that of higher attaining students especially in Year 12. While usually reflecting sound knowledge and understanding, accounts are often too simplistic; explanation and use of data are not always developed fully in answers to specific questions.

110. Students enjoy geography. Their positive attitudes and the very good relationships between themselves and with teachers, create a relaxed, yet highly purposeful, working atmosphere in lessons. Students respond very well to the teachers' high

expectations that they should do well. Their personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported very well.

111. Teaching is consistently good, with some very strong features. Students benefit from their teachers' very good subject expertise, which is skilfully shared through well-planned and structured lessons, through very clear presentations and explanations, and through teachers' enthusiasm for the subject, which inspires students to have a genuine interest in the subject. Lessons begin briskly, students' attention is immediately engaged and a good pace of work is established. Skilled questioning is used well to check understanding and at best, establishes a productive dialogue and exchange of views, as in a Year 13 lesson on population control in China. In the best lessons, group work is used very effectively to enable students to explore issues in depth and to learn from each other. Learning is supported consistently well by well-chosen homework assignments. Literacy and numeracy skills are supported very strongly through their constant use. In several lessons however, while the structure and pace of learning is effective in conveying knowledge and covering syllabus requirements, the pace is such that students have too little opportunity to think, to reflect, to contribute and to work at full stretch intellectually. There are instances when too little is expected of them in analysing and interpreting texts and data for themselves, thus limiting opportunities for them to deepen their understanding. The development of understanding is also restricted sometimes by questioning not being sufficiently probing and challenging in requiring students to develop their knowledge and ideas.
112. Students achieve well because of the teachers' high expectations that they work accurately as geographers. Learning is very well structured and guided so that students are fully briefed about course and examination requirements from the beginning of Year 12. They are helped to study independently through good guidance for reading, and strong encouragement for them to use ICT. Guidance for environmental investigation is particularly strong. During the inspection, Year 12 students were given clear guidance, with a strong emphasis on the importance of work of the highest quality, for methodology, data analysis, and the recording of their findings in fieldwork to be carried out in mid - Wales the following week.
113. Students' progress is monitored closely. Assignments are assessed regularly and rigorously against examination criteria, and outcomes are used to track students' progress and to inform teaching. Marking is usually accompanied by comments, but these are not always detailed enough in giving clear guidance for improvement. Minimum target grades are set for students' attainment at AS and A-levels but these tend to be modest in comparison with their earlier attainment and are not helpful in encouraging them to aim high enough.
114. The above average standards achieved in geography result from the very good, experienced, deeply committed leadership and management of the head of department. She provides a very clear direction for work in geography, and is skilfully shaping and developing the work of a new team of teachers, three of whom are in their second year of teaching. The very good support she gives for the further development of their already strong teaching skills, through regular monitoring and

professional development activities, places the department in a very strong position for improving even further the good provision made for geography. Planning is thorough. The curriculum is broad, balanced, relevant and interesting. Resources are very good. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in all aspects of the department's work.

History

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average in both Years 12 and 13.
- Teaching is very good: it is enthusiastic, well planned and reflects strength of subject knowledge and high expectations of students.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards the subject.
- The department makes use of an excellent range of resources.

Areas for improvement

- The department should continue to work on developing students' skills in speaking and in arguing a historical viewpoint with confidence.

115. Students' performances in GCE A-level examinations in 2001 were above average, both for the percentage achieving A-B grades and the proportion achieving A grades. A large number of examination papers for 2002 are currently the subject of extensive remarking so that it is not possible to use figures originally provided by the exam board to make statistical comparisons. Several papers already returned, however, have been awarded substantially higher marks so that it is likely that standards continue to be at least above the national average. AS-level results are also above average.

116. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of students' work confirm that standards are solidly above average and achievement is very good in both Year 12 and Year 13. It is rare for a student not to complete a course. Attainment is above what might be expected at this early stage in the Year 12 AS-level course. The performance of the current Year 13 GCE A-level group is above average overall.

117. Students' written work is organised carefully and they arrive at coherent conclusions based on solid historical evidence. Most students have developed comprehensive and well-organised notes, effectively supplemented by information sheets, outline plans and work booklets, to enable them to produce detailed written essays. Students make good use of opportunities to discuss their opinions in both formal and informal debate and also use their own knowledge and understanding to offer positive criticisms of the work of fellow students. The most able students articulate their own views with fluency; other students are becoming more confident and work hard to explain and justify their conclusions even though they find this difficult. This was evident, for example, in a Year 13 lesson where students talked to me about their presentations. Topics chosen included Stonehenge, Al Capone and the significance of Joan of Arc. Students learn very effectively in their courses

in sixth form history and they show very good progress in both thinking and writing. This very good learning results from both the experienced teaching in the department and from the positive attitudes students have towards their work.

118. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very quickly as a result. They also share in the enthusiasm of their teachers. There are many significant strengths in the teaching. Teachers present information quickly and clearly and work hard to ensure that students of all abilities are able to reach their full potential. Teachers make very good use of questioning to clarify and reinforce students' understanding. This was evident, for example, in Year 12 lessons where students are looking at the relationship between officers and ordinary soldiers during the First World War. They compared sources which reflect popular opinion (such as 'Blackadder goes Forth') with diaries of soldiers and officers. Although students in one of these lessons were initially diffident, the teacher's questions enabled them to develop their arguments and gain in self-confidence. Abstract historical concepts are taught in a very effective manner, which enables students, for example, to develop a good understanding of what historians mean by concepts such as the failure of democracy in the context of the Weimar Republic. Teachers are enthusiastic and provide students with an excellent range of historical resources. When studying the First World War, for example, students make use of sources as diverse as 'Blackadder', poetry, novels, films and the local war memorial. The department makes effective use of information technology, for example in the use of digital cameras to photograph the war memorial and DVD clips from 'Blackadder'. They receive visits from historians, they visit the Battlefields and during the week of the inspection many had just been to see a play about war poetry at a local theatre. They are introduced to the latest historical arguments such as, for example, whether poetry written during the war can be used as a source of historical evidence.
119. The subject benefits from very good leadership, very effective management, very good planning and a clear sense of direction shared by both the head of department and by his very experienced and committed colleagues. A particularly good example of strong planning can be seen in the schemes of work which are detailed, thorough and very effective. This is a reflective department: recently, for example, setting has been introduced so that teaching can focus more effectively on addressing students' particular needs. Very few issues were identified in the previous inspection: all have been addressed well.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English literature and French, but English language, theatre studies and Spanish lessons were sampled. The course in A and AS-level Russian, also offered by the school, was not sampled. One Year 13 A-level English Language lesson was observed. Students were conducting their own choices of language investigations and receiving individual tutorial support from the teacher. Students had selected an interesting range of topics for study, including the language of film reviews and the linguistic features of single gender conversations. Learning was very good. All students were able to employ a variety of research techniques. They were familiar with the

concepts and vocabulary of the subject and had read widely in support of their investigations.

One AS-level theatre studies lesson was sampled where students were learning about the visual, spatial and aural elements of theatre related to Caryl Churchill's play "Credible Witness". The quality of teaching and learning was very good. Having effectively revised varieties of stage design with the students, the teacher invited them to take the role of a newly established company of theatre designers and to produce a rationale for their designs for a production of the play. They responded very well to the challenge, inventively incorporating what they had learned.

Two Spanish lessons were seen. In 2001, both candidates for A-level gained high grades, showing an improvement over the previous year when results were below those in other subjects. There were no entries in 2002. The teacher's sustained use of Spanish challenged students and accustomed them to the pace of the language. Good relationships support teaching and learning.

English literature

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

Strengths:

- The quality of teaching is very good; as a result, students learn very well.
- The quality of support, guidance and personal development, particularly the encouragement of students' independent study skills, is very good.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- All students need more consistent challenge to use language appropriately and to participate actively in discussion.

120. Standards in English Literature are above average. In 2001, A-level examination results were above average. In 2002, results improved further; all students attained A to D grades. All students also attained A to D grades at AS-level, with nearly one half receiving the highest grades. Based on previous attainment at GCSE, students' achievements are very good. The number of students progressing from AS-level to A-level is high. Although fewer boys than girls opt for the subject, boys achieve as well as girls.

121. Attainment in lessons is above average; students are achieving very well, particularly in Year 12. All students read widely and are able to draw parallels between different texts. They show a developed appreciation of characterisation and recurring themes in literature, well substantiated by textual references. In their writing, high attaining students demonstrate very perceptive analysis of writers' use of language, form and style. They are able to understand and explain complex philosophical ideas. For example, one student compared the transference of ideas between cultures in Michael Ondaatje's "The English Patient" with Salman Rushdie's "Shame". He argued very coherently, writing with an independent voice

and showing a clear, personal point of view. Lower attaining students show good improvement over one year, but they show less appreciation of writers' intentions and craft. They tend to discuss fictional characters as real life people and are less aware of social, historical and cultural contexts. Lower attaining students also need to use language more precisely in discussion and in their writing.

122. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. A very good foundation is laid in Year 12 with teachers modelling study skills, establishing a high expectation of students to read widely and to research independently. Where teaching is most effective, all students are given a very clear indication of the context of an individual lesson within a unit of study. They understand where a lesson is leading, what the ultimate assessment task will be and how this is related to the advanced level assessment objectives. For example, in a lesson introducing Shakespeare's "Othello", the teacher encouraged students to consider their research on the background to Shakespeare's theatre to broaden their understanding of the play. They were invited to relate their reading on theatre architecture and design and on morality plays to Othello as tragic hero, and the roles and functions of Iago and Desdemona. The teacher questioned very skilfully, drawing out students' ideas, challenging them to use language more precisely and modelling note-making by organising their ideas on the whiteboard. Students were also helped to develop their skimming and scanning techniques by highlighting significant areas of the text. Students were then challenged to substantiate their initial perceptions by working in pairs and selecting quotations from the text, thus ensuring that even the more reticent students were actively involved.
123. In other lessons students' interest and understanding were stimulated by the use of contemporary paintings, or modern parallels. For example, Year 13 students were invited to compare "King Lear" with an extract from the modern American novel "A Thousand Acres". Other Year 13 students, with a well-developed awareness of Ben Jonson's use of comedy as social criticism from their initial reading of "Volpone", were provided with articles on satire to broaden their understanding. Some teachers try to help students by talking 'at their level'. They need to ensure a better balance between using language that all students understand and extending their use of language by insisting on precision and the correct use of terminology.
124. Students' attitudes and responses are generally very good, although some Year 13 students could contribute more to discussion. Students are very positive about their lessons, referring to 'constant intellectual stimulus'. They have a very good idea of their strengths, weaknesses and how to improve from teachers' marking and assessment and individual support. Student representatives are also invited to English department meetings and encouraged to make suggestions for improvement.
125. The subject is led and managed very well, ensuring consistency and continuity through a time of staffing changes as the result of close teamwork. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. There is a good subject development plan, based on the analysis of results and perceived need. Teachers have a good, shared understanding, through professional development, of new syllabuses and

courses. The sixth form would benefit from being taught in classrooms nearer to a departmental library and ICT facilities.

French.

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

Strengths

- The leadership of the department is good, with clearly identified areas for development.
- The level of recruitment into Year 12 has improved, following improved GCSE results.

Areas for development

- The department needs to raise standards, especially at AS-level.
- Teachers should widen the range of teaching strategies used, to develop independent learning.

126. In 2001 pass rates and overall points scores at A-level were broadly average, although the percentage of higher grades was below average. 2002 results improved on this, with all three candidates gaining higher grades. In 2001 and 2002, results at AS-level were below predictions based on students' GCSE results.

127. Overall standards of work seen are average. Students in Year 12 benefit from confidence stemming from their GCSE performance. Students show good attitudes and an understanding of the change to independent learning. In group work, they co-operate productively. Most have already bought a quality dictionary to support their studies and the benefit was seen when producing French definitions of words. One higher attaining student was able to do this task without dictionary support. Written work is limited at this stage, but shows an appropriate emphasis on grammar to secure the basis for future work. Achievement for this year group is satisfactory and better than in the small Year 13 group. The standard of work in the smaller group in Year 13 is unsatisfactory; achievement falls short of expectations from their GCSE results. Year 13 written work has some good features, with the use of the internet to research the cultural background to topics. There is good redrafting of work in preparation of oral tasks. Support materials introduce extensive new vocabulary but, in lessons, students' vocabulary is limited for this level. Some writing which is good in content is spoilt by fundamental grammar weaknesses. Students' reluctance to be more active participants, especially in speaking tasks, is a key factor in limiting their learning.

128. Overall teaching is satisfactory. The preparation is good and teachers direct students to independent research. The French assistante is used well both for oral work and to support research. Teachers have good personal language skills and conduct lessons in French. Some of the teaching resorts too readily to the use of English to compensate for students' difficulties or their reluctance to offer answers. This limits the challenge to students and encourages dependence on the teacher and impacts on the quality of learning. Teachers have limited strategies to address

this issue. Teachers regularly reinforce features that are the requirements for good grades. Marking is good, and often very extensive, but misses the opportunity to set tasks or specific targets to ensure that students benefit from teachers' efforts.

129. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department shows good insight into the key issues of teaching and learning. Results are analysed thoroughly; the work of the department has been evaluated and a development plan has been formulated to address the identified weaknesses in teaching and learning. There is already good monitoring of teaching, with feedback to teachers to ensure common practices.

130. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. Whilst there were no major issues at that time, there has been clear development in assessment and in the evaluation of the department's work to produce a programme for improving attainment.