

INSPECTION REPORT

MAIDEN ERLEGH SCHOOL

Earley, Reading

LEA area: Wokingham

Unique reference number: 110064

Headteacher: Dr P Thomas

Reporting inspector: Anthony Shield
3569

Dates of inspection: 11 – 15 November 2002

Inspection number: 249824

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11-18 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Silverdale Road
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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr R Nicholson

Date of previous inspection: October 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
3569	Mr Anthony Shield	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and pupils' achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils' taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
9770	Mr John Baker	Lay inspector		<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
23393	Mr Brian Dower	Team inspector	<p>English</p> <p>English as an additional language</p> <p>Educational Inclusion</p>	
12885	Mr John Hunt	Team inspector	Mathematics	
22691	Mr Ray Woodhouse	Team inspector	Chemistry	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
20352	Mr John Wiggins	Team inspector	Physics	
22491	Mrs Lorraine Small	Team inspector	<p>Design and technology</p> <p>Home economics</p>	

18854	Mr Malcolm McGregor	Team inspector	Art Information and communication technology	
8672	Mr Michael Roberts	Team inspector	Geography	
4773	Mr Peter Gilliat	Team inspector	History Religious education	
31649	Mr Richard Marsden	Team inspector	German	
13122	Mrs Stephanie Matthews	Team inspector	Business studies	
7926	Mr James Bowden	Team inspector	Physical education Sociology	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Maiden Erlegh is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 11–18, situated on the south-eastern edge of Reading. The school has been a Visual Arts College since September 2002, and was given a School Achievement Award in 2001 for improving results. Pupils are drawn largely from the immediate residential area, and most pupils come from socially and economically advantaged homes. At around two per cent, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is well below average. There are 1,571 pupils on roll, with 316 in the sixth form. Attainment on entry is above average and the percentage of pupils with special educational needs is below average, with 169 pupils, including five in the sixth form, on the register of special educational needs; this represents around ten per cent of the school roll. Most of these pupils are on the register for emotional and behavioural problems, although a few have learning and physical difficulties. Ten have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The majority of pupils are of white UK heritage, but with significant numbers of pupils from Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds. Although 182 pupils have English as an additional language, most are confident English speakers, and only one is at an early stage.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school in which high standards are promoted by good and often very good teaching. All pupils make good progress. The headteacher, teachers and all other staff have created a climate of excellent relationships and very good behaviour in which pupils have the confidence to achieve well. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Well above national average attainment is promoted by consistently good teaching, which enables students to make good progress.
- The excellent leadership of the headteacher, strongly supported by his governors and senior staff is focused on maintaining and improving the high standards of academic and personal development, and is driving the school to improve further.
- The very good personal development of students is strongly promoted by the very good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, the very good pastoral and tutorial system and the very good range of extra-curricular activities.
- Excellent relationships and very positive attitudes to learning contribute to the strong learning ethos in the school.

What could be improved

- The consistency with which aspects of the assessment and marking policy are implemented.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Overall, improvement since the last inspection in October 1996 has been very good. Test results at the end of Year 9 and examination results at GCSE and A level have all improved; improvements at A level in 2002 were particularly marked. The quality of teaching has improved and the percentage of very good and better teaching is higher than at the time of the last inspection. Key issues from the previous inspection regarding long-term planning and management systems have been very well tackled. There are now more opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and initiative, while the provision for spiritual development, access to information and communication technology (ICT), and the monitoring of pupils' progress has been much improved. However, time for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form remains below recommended levels and the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship is still not met.

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/AS-level examinations.

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

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

Similar schools are those schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals

In 2002, the school's test results at the end of Year 9 were well above average in English, mathematics and science. In comparison with similar schools, results were average in English, and well above average in mathematics and science. The less good results in English were the consequence of a dip in the performance of boys. However, inspection evidence does not indicate that boys underachieve. In fact the performance of boys in English and all other subjects has been consistently better than the national average for boys. Results in all three subjects have improved since the last inspection, above the nationally improving trend.

Seventy-six per cent of pupils gained five or more A* to C grades at GCSE in 2002. This performance maintains the high standards of previous years. In 2001, the latest year for which comparative national figures are available, comparisons against all measures were well above average, although compared with similar schools, the performance is only average. In relation to their prior attainment at the end of Year 9, these pupils made average progress. However, the inspection found no evidence of underachievement. Over the last five years results have been improving at a rate above the national trend.

GCSE results in all subjects in 2001 were significantly above average, and particularly good in art, science, design and technology, English (language and literature), French, German, geography, ICT, mathematics and physical education. Pupils in 2002 met the targets set for them by the school. Those set for 2003 are both challenging and achievable.

In 2001, the average A-level points score was above average. Both boys and girls did equally well. Students did particularly well in French, German, sociology, chemistry, English, geography, history, and physics. They did less well in business studies, design and technology and music. A-level results in 2002 improved significantly on the results of previous years.

In work seen, the standards of pupils' work in English, mathematics, science and most other subjects were well above average at the end of Years 9 and 11 and the sixth form. Pupils' achievements are good, and they make good progress through all years in the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are keen to learn and have very positive attitudes that make a powerful contribution to their achievements.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils demonstrate thoughtful and considerate behaviour both in and outside classrooms.

Personal development and relationships	Very good. The excellent quality of relationships amongst the whole-school community is a strength. Senior pupils act with maturity and take their responsibilities seriously.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance levels are well above average and there is very little unauthorised absence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is good throughout the school; much teaching seen was very good or excellent. Teaching has improved since the time of the previous inspection. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed and just less than one half of lessons were very good or excellent. Teaching in English, mathematics and science is good throughout the school.

High expectations, excellent relationships, good pace of learning and effective classroom management characterise much of the good teaching. Planning is effective in meeting the needs of all pupils. The teaching of both literacy and numeracy is good. The quality of marking is mostly very good, and pupils are clear about their progress and what they should do to improve. However, this is not consistently so. In almost all cases, the quality of learning matches the quality of teaching, helped by pupils' very good attitudes in lessons. Pupils are increasingly taking responsibility for their own learning and working independently of the teacher.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum has good breadth and balance, although statutory requirements for all pupils to study religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form are not fully met. The very good range of extra-curricular activities significantly enriches the curriculum.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The school's strong commitment to educational inclusion ensures a sensitive and supportive approach. Pupils make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. Support provided for the very small number of pupils is effective.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. A strong moral ethic underpins the work of the school and spiritual and moral issues are addressed effectively in a number of subjects. Social development is actively encouraged and there are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility. Cultural development is provided well through good opportunities in the visual arts, music and drama.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Child protection and welfare procedures are very good, as is the pastoral support provided by tutors. The framework for assessment is very good and is being used with increasing effectiveness to monitor progress and set targets. However, this is not consistent in all subjects.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The clarity of the headteacher's vision is ensuring a strong sense of shared values and common purpose. He is driving the school forward with energy and with very good support from senior managers. They are well supported by staff at all levels, and all are committed to maintain and improve standards and provision.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Excellent. Governors are committed and hardworking and bring a wide range of experience and expertise to the school. They have a very good knowledge of the school's work and are confident in their role.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school monitors its performance carefully, and has comprehensive line management and monitoring procedures, in which staff are held accountable for their areas of responsibility. The school is moving towards being a fully self-evaluating school with confidence.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. The budget is prudently managed, and best value principles are applied. The school has worked hard and imaginatively to raise additional funds to support its development.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That their child likes school and there is an expectation that he or she will work hard and achieve their best • That behaviour is good and standards of self-discipline high • That good teaching leads to good progress • That the school is well led and managed and that its purpose and direction are clear • That the school is helping their child to become mature and responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A small minority expressed a wish to work more closely with the school and to be better informed about their child's progress

Parents are very supportive of the school and their children's learning. Inspectors largely agree with parents' views, although they consider that there are many opportunities for parents to contribute to the life of the school if they wish, and parents are regularly informed about their child's progress.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 316 students in the sixth form; 144 boys and 172 girls. This is larger than most sixth forms nationally. Overall there are 174 students in Year 12 and 142 in Year 13. The number of students recruited into the sixth form has been increasing in recent years. Most are of white UK heritage, although there are significant minorities of students from an Asian heritage (both Indian and Pakistani). The school offers a range of AS and A-level courses, appropriate to the students' needs. In 2002 most students from Year 11 continued into the sixth form. The school expects students on entry to the sixth to have acquired at least five or more GCSE grades A* to C.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The overall quality of provision in the sixth form is very good, and it is very cost-effective. Standards are well above average and students achieve well. Good teaching and mature and responsible attitudes by students have ensured that standards are improving. Teaching in those subjects inspected in detail was particularly effective in mathematics, sociology, German, history, geography, and art. The sixth form is very well led and managed. The programme of curricular and enrichment activities is well designed to meet the needs of all students. The main strengths and areas that could be improved are:

Strengths

- Well above national average and improving standards promoted by good and sometimes outstanding teaching
- The maturity, confidence and poise of students, and their very good attitudes to their studies contribute strongly to their good progress
- Very good leadership and management is ensuring a committed drive to improve standards and provision further
- The very good systems for monitoring progress and the commitment of teachers to the students' support and guidance
- Excellent relationships amongst the students themselves and between staff and students

What could be improved

- The access to and use of ICT to support learning
- The more consistent use of assessment data to monitor progress and set targets

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	Very good. AS and A-level results are well above average. Students make very good progress. Teaching and learning are also very good.
Chemistry	Very good. Standards are well above average as a result of good teaching, well-organised work and the very positive approach and response of the students.

Physics	Very good. Standards are above average. Teaching and learning are good and the students respond with interest and involvement.
Design and technology	Satisfactory. Standards are about average and improving. Teachers provide good support to the students within a very positive climate for learning.
Home economics	Very good. Standards are now well above average and improving rapidly on results in previous years. This is because of the well-organised course and very good teaching and support for individual students.
Business studies	Good. Recent results have been above average and improving. Teaching is good and good use is made of the limited teaching space and ICT resources available in the department.
Computing	Good. Standards are slowly improving. There is good specialist teaching and learning is good. The use of assessment to inform and challenge students is underdeveloped.
Physical education	Satisfactory. Standards are improving at A level. Good quality teaching and learning results in good progress being made in lessons.
Art	Very good. Results are improving as a result of very good teaching. Levels of independent learning are very good. The use of assessment to monitor and challenge and the support given to students are excellent.
Geography	Excellent. Examination results in 2001 were above average. In 2002 they were significantly higher. Attainment and learning are well above average as a result of very good teaching. Leadership and management are excellent.
History	Very good. Standards of work are above average. Very good teaching and very positive attitudes help to promote very good achievement by students. History is an improving subject in the sixth form.
Religious education	Good. Standards of work are in line with national averages. Good teaching and very positive attitudes help to promote good achievement by students. RE is a popular subject in the sixth form.
Sociology	Very good. A-level results are well above average and improving further as a result of very good teaching and support for the students' learning.
English	Very good. Results are above average and improving. The students' attitudes are enthusiastic and there is committed guidance and support from teachers.
German	Excellent. Results are well above national averages and show a rising trend. Students have an excellent attitude, and teachers have very high expectations for all their students.

In other subjects, work was sampled. Teaching was generally at least good and often better. In biology some very good teaching and, in one case, excellent teaching was observed leading to high standards of work. In economics very good teaching was leading to well above average standards. There is excellent provision in theatre studies, where some outstanding teaching was observed and students were producing work of a high quality. In music, well-informed teaching was leading to good levels of understanding and practical work and in media studies, some good teaching was observed ensuring that the students were making good progress. Some very good teaching was observed in French and there have been some very good recent improvements in the overall provision for French.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students benefit from excellent relationships with their teachers and tutors, and most feel well supported. Teachers give of their time freely and willingly to support the students. Academic performance is closely monitored. Students are well informed about subject and higher education options and careers.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. The school's ethos and expectations of both academic success and personal development are clearly shared and understood. Examination results are carefully analysed and effective steps taken to maintain high standards. The school strongly promotes educational inclusion.

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 quality and dedication of the teachers; teachers are prepared to support them outside of lessons • The wide range of opportunities to participate in activities outside lessons • The approachability of teachers and the excellent relationships that exist in the school • Sixth-form life and work is challenging, but fun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A minority felt that they were not kept well informed about their progress and that careers advice was limited • Others felt that the advice given to them on what to do in the sixth form was inadequate

Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by most students. They looked into their concerns, but found that they were largely unjustified.

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

Well above national average attainment is promoted by consistently good teaching, which enables students to make good progress.

1. Attainment on entry in Year 7 is above average, although pupils of all abilities are represented in the school. Standards in national tests in English, mathematics and science, taken by pupils at the end of their time in their primary schools are above average overall. In English, the percentage of pupils reaching Level 5 or better is lower than in mathematics or science, but is still above average. Cognitive ability tests taken on entry to the school in Year 7 confirm this judgement. This ability profile is consistent in all years. One hundred and sixty-nine pupils are on the register of special educational needs, including five in the sixth form, a proportion that is below average. Of these, ten have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Most of these pupils are on the register for emotional and behavioural problems, although a few have learning or physical difficulties. Given the attainment of pupils on entry to the school, all pupils make good progress throughout the school and their achievements are good.
2. Results in national tests taken in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9 in 2002, were well above average overall. In each subject results were well above the national average. Comparison with schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals – 'similar schools' - indicates that results were average in English, and well above average in both mathematics and science. The average comparison in English is the consequence of fewer boys in this cohort reaching Level 5. The school is aware of this and is monitoring the performance of boys carefully. However, in previous years, boys' results have been consistently better than the national average for boys. Results in English have been variable in recent years. Results in mathematics and science have improved and the percentages achieving the higher Level 7 increased markedly in 2002 by around ten per cent. The trend in the school's average points score for all subjects has been improving at a faster rate than the national trend.
3. The teachers' assessments of pupils in information and communication technology (ICT) indicates well above standards overall. The percentages reaching higher levels are particularly high. In other subjects, pupils are reaching well above average standards, according to teacher assessments. Judging by the percentages of pupils reaching higher levels, pupils are doing particularly well in design and technology, history, geography, modern foreign languages and art.
4. Seventy-six per cent of pupils achieved five or more A* to C grades at GCSE in 2002. Nearly 100 per cent (99.7) achieved five or more A* to G grades. Nearly 30 per cent (29.4) of grades were at A* or A grades. Results over the last five years have been consistently well above average and the improving trend has been broadly in line with the improving trend nationally. Pupils' progress in 2001 was average overall in comparison with other schools with similar test results at the end of Year 9 in 1999, and with particularly good progress being made by the pupils who achieved five or more A* to G grades.
5. In 2001, the latest year for which we have national comparisons, pupils did significantly better than the national average in English (both language and literature), mathematics, science, design and technology, French, German, geography, ICT and physical education (PE). The percentages achieving A* or A grades were particularly high in German, art and geography.
6. The overall school targets in relation to GCSE performance in 2002 were met, and the school has set itself challenging and ambitious targets for 2003.
7. A-level results in 2001 were above the average for maintained secondary schools. The average percentage of grades at A or B was 35.1. Both boys and girls did equally well, and students did particularly well in English, chemistry, physics, French, German, sociology and history. The school operates a policy of open access to the sixth form, but all students are interviewed to determine their suitability for the courses they are choosing. Students are expected to achieve at

least five or more GCSE grades C or above. Students achieve well through the sixth form, making good progress. The average points score improved significantly in 2002 from 17.1 in 2001 to 19.8 in 2002.

8. Performance at AS level is also above average. In 2001, 50.6 per cent of grades were at A or B and in several subjects, notably French (80 per cent), geography (72 per cent), German (84 per cent), sociology (69 per cent) and physics (57 per cent), pupils achieved a high percentage of A or B grades. Results in 2002 were slightly lower with 46.1 per cent of A and B grades.
9. The most significant factor in these high standards is the good quality of teaching, which has a strong focus on maximising achievement for all pupils. In addition, the very good attitudes of most pupils to their learning, supported by the overall ethos for learning, promote good progress. The quality of teaching is good throughout the school in all years. It has improved since the time of the previous inspection. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. In the 40 lessons observed in Years 7 to 11 around 85 per cent of teaching was judged to be good or better and two out of five were judged very good or excellent.
10. In work seen in English, mathematics and science, standards were well above average at the end of both Years 9 and 11. The teaching of these subjects is particularly effective, and the teaching of both literacy and numeracy is good. This ensures a solid foundation on which achievement in other subjects can be based. Pupils are able to write in a range of styles and their extended pieces are fluent, accurate and well organised. Factual and imaginative writing are of a high standard with a good range of vocabulary and varied sentence structures. In GCSE work, analytical work is very strong. Pupils make perceptive analyses and support their arguments with relevant textual references. High standards of presentation and accuracy are expected. Many subjects as well as English, offer good opportunities for different kinds of writing, in particular, geography and history.
11. Speaking and listening skills are high and a strength. Good opportunities for oral presentations encourage pupils to speak with confidence and listen attentively to others. In this respect drama makes a strong contribution, but examples of teachers challenging pupils to explain their thinking were witnessed in most subjects. Language is effectively used to challenge and deepen pupils' understanding, and the good use of questions ensures that pupils explain their answers and think deeply about the issue. In a very good Year 11 food technology lesson when pupils were designing a sweet baked product for a vending machine, the teacher asked questions to encourage the pupils to predict what might happen. This facilitated thoughtful and extended responses. In a Year 8 history lesson on the Reformation, effective questioning enabled the pupils to understand with more clarity the impact of different events. In a number of subjects, many pupils are able to argue a case and explain a point of view convincingly.
12. Numeracy skills are very good and pupils are able to manipulate numbers and apply numerical and graphical skills in a variety of subject contexts. Many pupils are very adept at mental calculations. Some effective work was seen with pupils using graphs and formulae in science, and pupils confidently and accurately tabulate results and plot graphs. Other subjects in which the confident application of numeracy was witnessed included design and technology, geography and ICT.
13. It is the high expectations that teachers have of what pupils can achieve that characterises the very best teaching. Where these are high, pupils are constantly challenged, the pace of lessons is brisk and the pupils' learning is very good. This takes place within well-planned and well-managed lessons that take account of the different starting points of each pupil. For example, in an outstanding Year 11 German lesson, which was preparing the pupils for the forthcoming mock examinations, the pace of learning was very brisk throughout. The teacher's charismatic approach ensured that all pupils were fully engaged and sustained high levels of concentration throughout. The pupils used ICT with confidence to enter text directly in German, while the teacher offered constant and effective support. As a result, excellent progress and consolidation of learning were made.
14. Another lesson observed in which high expectations led to pupils achieving well was a Year 9 PE lesson. Expectations of improvement beyond each pupil's previous best were clear. The theoretical

basis of vaulting was explained and a confident rapport between teacher and the pupils ensured a very good exchange of ideas. Tasks set were well structured, and with learning effectively broken up into small steps, very good progress was made. Throughout the lesson there was a real sense of enjoyment and achievement.

15. Characteristic of much of the teaching is the excellent relationship between staff and pupils. Many teachers have established trusting and productive relationships with their pupils. As a consequence, good learning takes place in a friendly and secure atmosphere. Overall classroom management and discipline are also strengths of the teaching. In an excellent Year 8 drama lesson observed, the pupils were learning how to create a physical environment using their bodies. Pupils were given a clear focus for their work because the learning objective was made explicit at the start. Pupils also had to refer to their personal targets and were advised to assess progress against them during the lesson. The teacher's own expertise ensured that pupils were clear about what was expected, and her own demonstration by example enthralled and fully engaged the pupils. Organisational skills were excellent and the pupils responded with some impressive work, making excellent progress throughout the lesson. The pupils worked well together, sharing ideas, respecting one another's opinions and responding very well to the teacher's questions. Although much of the teaching was to the whole class, the teacher's sensitive awareness and very good knowledge of individual learning needs resulted in effective learning. The lesson was characterised by clarity of purpose, and a well-managed plenary enabled the pupils themselves to evaluate the progress they had made. Good relationships secured high levels of motivation and concentration amongst all pupils, and this was another key factor in their very good progress. Gains in learning and understanding were tangible and all pupils responded very positively to the teacher's approach.
16. Teachers use questions effectively to assess progress and probe for understanding. In one good Year 7 science lesson on the classification of invertebrates, the teacher's skilful questions were used to ensure that all pupils were involved. However, at times in some other lessons, the teacher talks too much, telling pupils rather than encouraging them to discover for themselves. Teaching in one Year 10 science lesson was well planned and thorough, but there were not enough strategies to make pupils think for themselves. In a Year 11 design and technology lesson, the teacher's questioning required only restricted answers and failed to ask for a developed argument. Passive learning is the most common characteristic of the less effective teaching. However, this was observed in only a minority of lessons during the inspection. In most lessons, pupils are actively engaged and encouraged to participate. As a result, their learning is purposeful and productive. Pupils' skills in solving problems independently of the teacher and of thinking for themselves in different situations are well developed.

The excellent leadership of the headteacher, strongly supported by his governors and senior staff is focused on maintaining and improving the high standards of academic and personal development, and is driving the school to improve further

17. Leadership and management are excellent. The school has maintained consistently high standards of achievement and teaching since the last inspection, but it constantly seeks to improve further. Its traditions of 'caring and excellence' are core values shared by the whole-school community. Pupils thrive on the opportunities the school provides. The school has recently been designated as a Visual Arts Specialist School and has been awarded School Achievement Awards by the Department for Education and Skills.
18. The headteacher has been in post for just over two years, and he inherited an already successful school. His excellent and inspirational leadership is the fulcrum for a determined drive for further improvement. He is clear about the direction of the school and his vision is widely shared. While maintaining the school's values, he is moving the school forward and embracing new ideas and approaches.
19. The school is confident in its successes, but is never complacent. Governors and the senior leadership group are continually seeking ways to secure further improvements. The headteacher's approach has successfully gained the full support and co-operation of the staff. He is well

supported by three deputy headteachers and one assistant headteacher whose experience and expertise complement each other and provide the school with effective role models of good management.

20. The senior leadership group are a strong focus for development in the school. They have a good understanding of standards through their monitoring of provision. Line management systems are robust and ensure that all staff are held to account for their work. Monitoring of teaching and learning in lessons is rigorous, and the school has effective procedures for performance management. The two-year cycle of departmental reviews carried out by external specialists alongside the line manager and head of department, have been an effective means of reviewing and improving provision. Action taken to address particular areas of weakness; for example, in mathematics and drama, has been effective in ensuring improvements.
21. Management at other levels is also good and heads of department are providing effective leadership of their subjects, working hard to maintain high standards and secure improvements in teaching and learning, based on a careful evaluation of standards. Heads of year are also offering very good leadership of their teams. Line management meetings with senior staff are held regularly and are purposeful and useful opportunities to raise issues and review the work of their teams. This structured approach to management has been welcomed by staff, who feel that lines of communication have been improved and that their ideas and views are valued. Regular meetings provide a useful sounding board for ideas and a forum for raising and discussing ideas for development. Communication throughout the school is very good. As a consequence, all staff are committed to improvement and share the school's values and ideals.
22. At the time of the last inspection, the school was criticised for its long-term development planning. This is no longer the case. The school improvement plan is a detailed and comprehensive document that links subject plans with whole-school priorities. Eight strategic priority areas provide the framework for overall school improvement. The plan is the focal point for school improvement, and progress towards agreed targets is monitored regularly by senior staff and governors. Increasingly this is a reflective and self-evaluating school in which all members of the school community are involved in monitoring and reviewing practice and seeking ways to improve and sustain high standards.
23. Governors are committed and hard working. They bring a very good range of experience and professional expertise to the school's governance. They have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses through their detailed and comprehensive discussion of the school's work in committee and full governors' meetings. Governors are confident in their ability to question and challenge the headteacher and senior staff. Statutory requirements are met, except with regard to the provision of a daily act of collective worship, and the time available for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.
24. The school's budget is prudently managed, and the school seeks best value wherever possible in its spending decisions. The school has adopted an entrepreneurial culture, raising significant additional funds to finance its development. Money, for instance, to build the proposed new visual arts block, has been raised from both public and private sources. This is a measure of the school's confidence in the future and the confidence of the community in the school. Governors have a good overview of the budget and are kept regularly updated with monitoring statements. Budget planning is carried out with the school's educational priorities in mind.

The very good personal development of students is strongly promoted by the very good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, the pastoral and tutorial system, and the very good range of extra-curricular activities

25. Pupils' personal development is very good. Most senior pupils are mature and sensible young people. The aims of the school, which are to encourage respect for one self and others, the community and the environment, provide a strong focus for co-operative endeavour and shared values. Following the lead set by staff generally, the great majority of pupils and students bring responsible and caring attitudes to their work and the whole-school community. They co-operate

well and enjoy teamwork. When opportunities for responsibility are offered within school, such as being a peer counsellor to help others to deal with the very occasional instance of bullying, pupils take their duties seriously and reliably. Sixth-form students are given responsibility as house captains and take the responsibility for organising pupils in particular year groups. All Year 7 pupils participate in community service through the Passport for Life Scheme. Pupils carry out these responsibilities conscientiously and responsibly.

26. Relationships throughout the school are excellent. Staff and pupils co-operate very well together. Form tutors often have very good levels of rapport with pupils, and pupils often relate very well to particular teachers. Pupils are very much at ease with one another. Overall there is tolerance of other people's differences, and pupils are encouraged to be aware of the impact of their actions. Only a few examples of less thoughtful behaviour were witnessed by inspectors.
27. Form tutors are central to the personal development of the pupils. They develop a close and detailed knowledge of their tutees through regular daily contact and the tutorial programme. Tutorial time is used to register the pupils and to deal with any outstanding administrative issues. Thereafter, tutors often work with individuals, monitoring their progress in subjects. The pupil progress review is led by form tutors and is an effective means of monitoring progress, both academic and personal. Parents are involved as and when necessary. Pupils write personal targets in their school planners to reinforce their growing sense of maturity. Each pupil keeps a record of achievement in which evidence of achievements, both academic and non-academic, are kept and recorded.
28. Heads of year also play a significant part in monitoring the personal development of pupils. The meeting of Year 9 tutors observed during the inspection demonstrated the conscientious approach adopted by the school to pastoral issues. The school's disciplinary code is sensitively operated, although within a clear framework of high expectations. Detentions are given for misbehaviour. Some parents felt that these were given unnecessarily and for minor offences. Although there are some inconsistencies in the approach of different teachers, the boundaries are firmly set and all pupils are aware of the consequences of their actions.
29. Assemblies are well planned and structured. Each year group has a short weekly assembly, as well as one extended assembly every half term taken by senior staff or local clergy. They are thoughtful, well-organised occasions, which contain an act of worship and contribute well to pupils' spiritual development. Pupils listen with attention and have good opportunities to reflect on religious and moral issues.
30. Overall the school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Spiritual development has improved since the last inspection. An audit of provision has taken place and schemes of work have been augmented and strengthened to enable planned opportunities to take place. However, there is still insufficient time to implement the religious education (RE) agreed syllabus fully in Years 10 and 11. In one Year 8 RE lesson observed, the pupils were understanding the concept of a pilgrimage. Pupils responded thoughtfully to the very good teaching and were led to an understanding of how you might 'find yourself' on a pilgrimage. The considered manner in which the sixth form committee discussed the school's response to Remembrance Day on November 11th is another example of the pupils' developing spiritual awareness.
31. Moral issues are also raised in a number of different subjects, and a moral dimension underpins much of the school's work. The school has a strong tradition of fund-raising for charity and large sums were raised for Comic Relief and the Goma volcano appeal. The school offers many very good opportunities for pupils to develop a sense of social responsibility and for interacting with others in a mature way. Although there is no school council and only in the sixth form are pupils provided with formal opportunities to express their views to senior staff, the excellent relationships between staff and pupils mean that pupils rarely lack the confidence to express their point of view.
32. The school's approach to self-discipline enables pupils to develop a strong sense of personal and social responsibility. Within a secure framework of excellent relationships, pupils are encouraged

to be self-reliant, and to co-operate with each other in pairs and group work. The school jointly owns an outdoor educational centre in South Wales. Here pupils may spend time on environmental and fieldwork activities as well as outdoor pursuits such as orienteering and mountain walking. This is highly valued by pupils who all speak warmly of the time they have spent there and of the opportunities provided for social development.

33. Throughout Years 7 to 11, the programme of personal, social and health education contributes effectively to personal development, and includes reference to sex education, a healthy lifestyle and the dangers of drug and alcohol misuse.
34. Pupils have very good opportunities to participate in music, drama and art activities, which help to promote their cultural development. During the inspection, an informal concert demonstrated the wide range of musical opportunities that the school offers. Music by Bach, alongside the pupils' own compositions in a blues and Bhangra style were all performed. The drama department was in rehearsal for a forthcoming end-of-term production, and the art department was alive with pupils working at their own pieces a long time after the end of formal school. The school's commitment to the arts is demonstrated through its designation as a Visual Arts Specialist school. This is opening doors to an even wider range of opportunities in the arts. The recent day devoted to the Aboriginal arts made a strong impact on a number of pupils who participated.
35. The very wide range of extra-curricular activities is a measure of the commitment of staff to the widest possible educational opportunities for the school's pupils. An early afternoon finish to formal school is in many cases the start of an extended programme of classes and clubs. These range from musical groups, dance and drama groups, sports clubs, a debating society, and opportunities to participate in Young Enterprise Award and Duke of Edinburgh Award schemes. School journeys, including exchange visits to Europe, and participation in Challenge Expeditions to the developing world and day visits to lectures and exhibitions add to this rich diet of opportunity.
36. Both parents and pupils commented on the hard work and commitment of staff. Many of these activities beyond the school's formal curriculum are well supported by pupils who feel that the opportunities help to create a sense of school identity. This wide and comprehensive offer contributes much to the personal development of pupils as well as effectively enhancing the pupils' learning experiences.

Excellent relationships and very positive attitudes to learning contribute to the strong learning ethos in the school

37. The school's very positive ethos for learning underpins the school's work and the attitudes of pupils. Excellent relationships amongst the whole-school community help to create an harmonious learning atmosphere. Learning is at the heart of the school's work, and is immediately apparent. Pupils move purposefully to lessons, and attitudes in class indicate that most pupils are keen to do well. As a consequence, they work hard and learn at a good pace. Pupils' co-operative skills are very good. In a Year 10 physical education lesson, pupils were introduced to badminton. They listened well to the teacher and co-operated sensibly and purposefully, supporting and listening to each other. In a Year 9 music lesson observed, pupils worked together on composing using minimalist techniques. They responded positively to the task and worked purposefully in groups or on their own. Although the teacher intervened to support and prompt ideas, overall the pupils worked successfully on their own, solving compositional and harmonic problems themselves.
38. Many pupils demonstrate considerable responsibility and independence in their learning. At its best in the art department, the teacher is a facilitator intervening only occasionally to prompt ideas or adjust the direction of the learning. This is managed very effectively and encourages the pupils to solve problems themselves and not to rely on the teacher. In observing each other's work, pupils are sensitive and constructive in their evaluations. The introduction of a distance learning course for ICT in Year 8 is another indication of the autonomy given to pupils in their learning. Much of this work is carried out independently of the teacher who intervenes only when necessary to support or guide the pupil to the next step.

39. Very good learning was observed in a Year 11 mathematics lesson. The lesson was focused on revision and consolidation of learning in preparation for forthcoming mock examinations. Pupils were given some autonomy in the choice of topic. They worked collaboratively, learning as much from each other as the teacher. The focus on active learning ensured that pupils made very good progress and developed independent learning skills. A very positive working atmosphere encouraged pupils to speak with confidence and sometimes with enthusiasm about the work they were doing. Throughout the lesson, pupils were very keen to do the tasks set accurately. They were all highly motivated and industrious and there was evident pride in their achievements by the end of the lesson. The lesson strongly encouraged the pupils to learn and think for themselves, and pupils produced a vast amount of high quality work.
40. Very good learning skills developed in the main school are put to good use in the sixth form, where students are encouraged to be increasingly independent in their approach, and to take the responsibility for organising and planning their own learning. This is evident in the very many examples of very well-organised work files of students sampled during the inspection.
41. Pupils' excellent attitudes to their learning, encouraged by the school's disciplined approach to work, make a powerful contribution to school standards.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The consistency with which aspects of the assessment and marking policy are implemented.

42. The school has responded positively to the key issue reported in the previous inspection report to 'improve the monitoring of pupils' progress, including the collection and use of attainment data'. Much has been done. The appointment of a deputy headteacher with responsibility for pupil progress has been the catalyst for a number of significant initiatives. The school has introduced a computerised system - Assessment Manager - as a means of tracking progress. Cognitive ability tests are now taken on entry to the school in Year 7 and this data is used to set targets for performance in Year 9 statutory tests. In the sixth form, A Level Information Systems (ALIS) has been introduced to predict A-level performance with more consistency. Records of pupils' progress have been improved and made more coherent through the use of Assessment Manager. A revised marking policy has been introduced.
43. However, while much has been achieved, more needs to be done to ensure a more consistent and effective use of data across all subjects. While subjects are analysing their examination results against national benchmarks, insufficient use is made of value added measures to analyse performance. The school has begun to analyse its results by ethnicity, gender and other groups, but this is at an early stage and this is limiting the school's capability to evaluate its performance and set even more challenging targets with confidence.
44. The school marking policy is detailed and comprehensive and sets a framework for good practice. Evidence from the inspection finds a range of practice both between and within different subjects. Much marking is of good quality. In English, the marking of pupils' work in Years 10 and 11 is regular and supportive, with clear guidance given on how to improve. However, in Years 7 to 9, marking is less helpful in ensuring that pupils know how well they are doing and what they should do next. Although the school's policy is to grade selected pieces of work according to National Curriculum Levels in Years 7 to 9 and in relation to GCSE grades in Years 10 and 11 in order to inform pupils of their progress, this is not consistently carried out. In mathematics, good practice is giving pupils a clear sense of how well they are doing while making it clear how they should improve.
45. The introduction of 'pupil friendly' schemes of work is an important contributory factor in giving pupils a sense of direction in their learning. This is considerably empowering and encourages pupils to take responsibility themselves for their learning. Pupils bring mature attitudes to their learning. In discussion with pupils it was evident that while some were clear about what grade they should expect to achieve and whether they are on target to make it, others were less confident in

their evaluation of progress and in understanding how they can improve. Improving the use of assessment for learning remains a strategic priority on the school improvement plan.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

46. In order to maintain and improve standards and the quality of provision further, the headteacher, staff and governors should:

Improve the consistency with which aspects of the assessment and marking policy are implemented by:

- further refining data to analyse performance through the use of value added measures;
- further analysing assessment data by ethnicity, gender and other groups;
- ensuring a more consistent implementation of the marking policy;
- involving pupils themselves more consistently in the evaluation of their own progress and target setting.

(paragraphs 43,44, 45)

Sixth form

Improve the access to and use of information and communication technology to support learning by:

- continuing to implement the school's ICT development strategy;
- ensuring that teachers are aware of the potential for developing the use of computers to support learning within their subjects at this level.

(paragraphs 67, 102, 121, 125, 128, 136,143, 151, 162)

Ensure a more consistent use of assessment data to monitor progress and set targets by:

- ensuring that the monitoring of students' progress is done regularly, informs curriculum planning and challenges individual students even further;
- ensuring that assessment is made against national standards and in relation to the student's target grade;
- ensuring that data is used to set specific learning targets for students.

(paragraphs 68, 84, 107, 114, 155, 158, 159)

These issues are already part of 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	40
	Sixth form	73
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		71

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7 - 11

Number	3	13	18	6	0	0	0
Percentage	7.5	32.5	45.0	15.0	0	0	0

Sixth form

Number	7	32	23	11	0	0	0
Percentage	9.6	43.8	31.5	15.1	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1255	316
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	30	

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	9	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	164	5

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	182

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	24
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	38

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	127	122	249

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	108	105	111
	Girls	114	104	104
	Total	222	209	215
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	89 (93)	84 (84)	86 (83)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	54 (62)	62 (68)	57 (57)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	107	109	105
	Girls	113	109	103
	Total	220	218	208
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (85)	88 (82)	84 (86)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	46 (44)	64 (62)	53 (52)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	117	131	248

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
	Boys	82	113	115

Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Girls	111	129	129
	Total	193	242	244
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	78 (71)	98 (98)	98 (98)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	47.8 (45.3)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13) 2001

		For candidates entered for GCSE A / AS examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	62	73	135
	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.3	17.1
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4

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	1207	22	0
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	28	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	78	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	63	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	6	1	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	12	0	0
Black or Black British – African	14	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	4	0	0
Chinese	16	0	0

Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

72
24

0	0
0	0

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

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	93.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.6

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	22
Total aggregate hours worked per week	406.5

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	70.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.7
Key Stage 4	20.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	37.1
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	41.0

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.5
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	2001/2
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	£
Total income	4,228,961
Total expenditure	4,183,740
Expenditure per pupil	2,745
Balance brought forward from previous year	19,874
Balance carried forward to next year	65,096

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1571
Number of questionnaires returned	374

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	33	56	8	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	41	53	4	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	35	57	4	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	27	54	16	3	1
The teaching is good.	37	57	2	9	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	20	49	23	2	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	39	47	7	3	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	32	1	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	23	49	18	4	7
The school is well led and managed.	47	46	2	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	39	51	7	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	47	45	5	1	2

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

47. The results of students entered for AS and A-level examinations in 2001 were above the national average for maintained schools. The average points score of candidates entered was 17.1. In 2002 results improved significantly and the average points score was 19.8. There are no national comparisons currently available for the 2002 results, but results have been consistently above average in recent years.
48. Both boys and girls do equally well and there are no significant differences between their relative attainment. In 2001 at A level, students did particularly well in French, German, sociology, chemistry, English, history, physics and business studies where results were above the national average for these subjects. They did less well in computer studies, design and technology, home economics and music, although numbers taking these subjects were relatively small making national comparisons less reliable. The overall percentage of A or B grades was 35.1. Several subjects exceeded this figure including art, business studies, chemistry, French, German, mathematics, physics and sociology. At AS level in 2001, nearly all students passed and just over one half of the grades were at A or B. Subjects that did particularly well included French, German, geography, sociology and physics.
49. In 2002 performance at A level improved significantly, with the overall percentage of A or B grades increasing to 47.9. Eleven subjects achieved an A/B pass rate of over 50 per cent. The AS-level results were less good than in 2001, but not markedly so.
50. The school's own analysis of performance in the sixth form suggests that progress is not so consistently good through some AS and A-level courses. Inspectors found little evidence to support this. The teaching is almost always good and sometimes outstanding. Although there are a few subjects where results are not as good as others, the school has taken appropriate action to identify weaknesses and target underperformance. The improved performance overall in 2002 is a measure of the success of this action. Examination performance has improved in design and technology, computer studies and home economics, where the improvement is marked. Inspectors judge that the improvement is being sustained in the work seen during the inspection.
51. The school expects students on entry to the sixth form to have acquired at least five or more GCSE grades A* to C. While most students will study four AS levels, reducing to three at A level, some students with lower GCSE grades may be advised to study only three subjects at AS level.
52. In Year 2000 the school introduced systems to measure the value added performance of its students through the sixth form. Inspectors judge the achievements of most students to be good. Much of the teaching observed in the sixth form was of a good or better quality and offered good levels of challenge. Retention rates through courses are good, and students rarely embark on courses to which they are not suited.
53. Not all subjects were inspected in detail during the inspection. Of those that were, standards observed in German were very high. In English, mathematics, sociology, art and geography, attainment was judged to be well above average. In chemistry, physics, home economics, business education and history attainment was above average. In design and technology, computer studies, physical education and religious education attainment was in line with that expected at this stage in the course. For most students on these courses, their achievements and progress through the course, given their attainment at GCSE are good, and very good in German, mathematics, art, and geography. Students' achievements are satisfactory in design and technology. In subjects sampled some very good work was seen in biology, French, economics, media studies and theatre studies. Male and female students achieve equally well, as do students from minority ethnic groups.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

54. Students' attitudes to the school are very good and the vast majority like being in the sixth form, recommending it to others. Their good and smart appearance reflects their commitment to the school's values. Their attitudes to work are very good overall and sometimes excellent; this has a major impact on their learning. In a number of lessons observed across all subjects, students were focused on their work throughout.
55. Relationships between students are excellent. They work very well together in lessons and tutorial periods having lively discussions, but also respect others' points of view. They also show consideration for others and understand their feelings. For example, when a sixth form committee representative addressed Year 13, she was greeted with good humour, listened to respectfully and received spontaneous applause at the end. Relationships between students and their teachers and tutors are also excellent and students are very appreciative of the support given to them by members of the staff.
56. Personal development is very good. Students show maturity and a willingness to take on responsibilities both within the school and the community. They play an important part in the life of the school; for example, as house captains, helping in the careers library and at the careers fair as well as taking responsibility for the organisation of younger pupils. In addition, through the sixth-form committee, they use their initiative in coming up with ideas to improve the sixth form and for raising money for charity, which they do very successfully. Also they are involved in community work that includes supporting pupils from a local special school on a one-to-one basis at the Tirabad activity centre. One student, indicating a maturity beyond his years, commented that helping in this way was the most rewarding experience that he had ever had.
57. Attendance is very good, in line with that of the main school, where it is well above the national average for secondary schools. Students also arrive punctually and lessons begin on time, which, together with the good attendance, has a positive impact on standards achieved.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

58. The overall quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good. During the inspection, over eight out of ten lessons were judged at least good, and just over one half of lessons were judged very good or better. No lessons were judged unsatisfactory. Of the subjects inspected in detail, teaching is excellent in German, very good in mathematics, home economics, art, geography, history and sociology. It was judged good in English, chemistry, physics, computing, business studies physical education and religious education, and satisfactory in design and technology.
59. Strengths of the teaching include the teachers' subject knowledge and understanding. This expertise enables them to approach the syllabus confidently, pose and answer questions that challenge the students' thinking and plan lessons and schemes of work that successfully build on prior attainment in a meaningful and relevant way. In one very good Year 13 art lesson observed, the teacher's excellent subject knowledge was used to good effect to ensure that appropriate links were made with other artists' work and that techniques were developed and broadened. As a result, the students were able to talk confidently about their work, explain their thinking well and put their own work into context. The teacher's sensitive interventions encouraged the students to work independently and yet know that support was always available. High expectations ensured that the students made very good progress in developing their work. The assured approach of teachers to their subject was characteristic of teaching observed in most subjects and is a key factor in students' achievement.
60. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the requirements of the examination. This enables the students to approach examinations with confidence. In one Year 12 history lesson observed on the mid-Tudor crisis, the teacher had prepared a very useful handout that guided the students in understanding examination requirements. Questions from students were answered skilfully and

helpfully. In another very good lesson, Year 13 geography students were asked to examine critically sample essays provided by the teacher. This was a well-devised activity carried out at a brisk pace, which challenged the students' own knowledge of sea level changes as well as their perception of good communication. Students were also made aware of the mark scheme and how best to maximise their performance. The teacher's skilful use of open-ended questions elicited an increased understanding of the structure of a good essay.

61. The most effective teaching uses a range of strategies to involve the students actively in their learning. In an excellent Year 12 German lesson on the topic of juvenile delinquency the teacher used whole-class work, paired work, listening to a tape recorder, chanting and a presentation using visual aids throughout the lesson. The energetic and demanding pace set ensured that the students sustained concentration and a high work rate throughout. Teachers often put points across skilfully and ensure that material is presented in an interesting and relevant way. Consequently, students participate fully in the lessons and make good progress. Students told inspectors that they particularly appreciate teaching that encourages them to contribute. However, in some lessons opportunities for active participation are limited. The teacher talks for too long and the students are involved merely in passive note taking.
62. Most sixth form teachers have high expectations of what all the students in the group are capable of achieving, and the students respond very positively to this approach. Very challenging questions are asked to encourage the students to think deeply and explain their ideas and reasoning in detail. As a consequence, students often give thoughtful and perceptive answers. In one excellent Year 12 geography lesson about hydrology and the human and physical influences on drainage basins, the students responded very well to the challenge and high level questioning of the teacher. This, combined with excellent relationships and a brisk pace, ensured excellent gains in knowledge and understanding.
63. Most students adopt a very positive and mature attitude to their studies. They are keen to do well and succeed to the best of their ability. In a Year 12 theatre studies lesson high levels of motivation contributed strongly to the very good progress made. The students were exploring physicality, gesture and body language in drama. The teacher was clear about the learning intentions of the lesson and enabled the students to measure their own progress against these intentions. The students' evaluative skills were very good and they were confident and articulate when expressing themselves. Their attitudes were very good and stem from the excellent quality of relationships within the class. The quality of relationships and mature approach adopted by most students are key factors in the high levels of achievement in the sixth form.
64. Some teachers adopt good strategies to promote the students' independent learning and their perseverance to solve problems and overcome difficulties themselves. Some particularly good examples of this approach were observed in art. High levels of independent learning and research skills were also demonstrated in an excellent Year 13 home economics lesson, in which students were looking at types of advertising and the effect on consumers. The teacher guided the students skilfully in identifying key points themselves and led the subsequent discussion with authority. As a result, the students were confident in their own ideas and as importantly, confident in approaching issues of which they were unsure. During the set task, much good independent learning was carried out, although the teacher remained in control and monitored progress very well. The teacher's excellent relationships with the students, and knowledge of when and when not to intervene, ensured that the students were prompted to work as much as possible on their own. This they did with confidence, demonstrating high levels of resourcefulness and independent thinking.
65. For some students, however, this more independent and self-reliant approach to learning is the biggest challenge of sixth-form work. These students are supported effectively in lessons. On occasions, however, there is a tendency for teachers to over direct the learning, and not allow students to pursue their own thinking and ideas. In one otherwise good chemistry lesson with Year 12 students, the teacher tended to talk for too long, even when the students were engaged in their practical work and they were not all listening. The most effective strategies for learning had not been considered by the teacher. Missed opportunities to engage the students in more active

learning during lessons were observed in a number of subjects, including mathematics, biology, business studies, computing, physical education and history.

66. In most lessons observed, the quality of discussion and encouragement of students to express their ideas and opinions were good. The teachers constantly challenged and provoked the students to think more deeply and to reconsider their views. In one very good Year 13 English lesson, the students were studying the poetry of William Blake and Wendy Cope. From the start, the teacher engaged each student actively in the learning, insisting that they put forward their own point of view. Subsequently, the teacher ensured that they reflected on and responded to each other's contributions, and very good use of supplementary questions encouraged the students to develop their thinking and answers.
67. Much effective use of ICT was observed. In design and technology for example, students use computers confidently to process and present data. However, in other aspects of design and technology, there is insufficient use of computer aided design and manufacture. In history, students use computers to research ideas on the Internet and to present their findings; for example, on Richelieu's rule in France. Elsewhere, however, the use of ICT is not fully developed to support learning. In mathematics, business studies, art, geography and sociology, opportunities are sometimes missed.
68. The use of assessment data to monitor progress and set targets is developing strongly across all subjects, although its effectiveness remains patchy. In mathematics, assessment practice is thorough and well used to inform teaching and learning. In some other subjects, notably history, chemistry, physics, computing, geography and religious education, recent developments in the use of assessment data have still to make a significant impact on the quality of learning.
69. In discussion with the students themselves, it was clear that they have a mature and sensible view of what makes for effective teaching. They reported that one of the key factors in the most successful teaching was the fact that the teacher made the learning relevant to everyday events and contemporary issues. Good examples of this were observed in expected subjects such as business studies, sociology, design and technology and home economics, but teachers in other subjects also made work seem relevant through the use of good examples. A Year 12 French lesson required the students to give thoughtful responses in French to the problems of drug addicts. Another Year 12 lesson in mathematics was made more meaningful by reference to their use in real life, such as calculating the population of Mexico City. However, sometimes, opportunities are missed to link abstract concepts to everyday and relevant examples.
70. The students also praised the support and helpfulness of teachers and their approachability and willingness to offer help at any time. Mathematics students spoke of the dedication of their teachers, but these views were by no means exclusive to mathematics. Students also reported that lessons in which their own views and ideas were valued were effective. Students' learning skills are good, and most work hard with good levels of motivation. The commitment and hard work of staff is another key factor in the levels of students' achievement. Most students take care with the presentation of their work, and files and notes are well organised and can be used effectively for revision. Students have been taught good strategies for taking and organising their notes. In general, students' skills in self-study and research are good.

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

71. The overall quality and range of learning opportunities in the sixth form are good. The school has given careful consideration to the principles embedded in Curriculum 2000 in the courses it provides, and there is good breadth and balance. The subjects match students' aspirations and potential, resulting in an increasing proportion of students remaining at the school each year into Year 12. A high proportion of students complete their courses.
72. The school offers 25 courses at AS level, with most subjects providing the opportunity to progress to A-level qualifications. Students are expected to gain at least five GCSE grades at C or above in order to show that they have the potential to gain AS grades, and to be admitted to the sixth form.

These grades should include English language and mathematics; there is an after-school class in mathematics for those students needing to improve their grade. No vocational courses are offered; this is because of the lack of demand due to the wide range of options available in colleges near the school. With no joint provision, however, it does mean that there is a lack of opportunity to follow a mix of AS and vocational courses. There is little curricular provision for work related learning, although some links have been established in business education and technology. There has been no increase in the length of the school day since the last inspection, and a number of subjects supplement their teaching by holding additional sessions after school.

73. No specific lessons are provided in the key skills of communication and the application of number, although all students are offered the chance to gain a qualification in ICT at level 2. The school assumes that having grade C in English language and mathematics provides a basic understanding of these subjects, and that further development will be enhanced in the AS-level courses students select, and will be specific to those subjects. A minority of students in the sixth form find difficulty because of a lack of key skills; for instance, students taking science subjects sometimes have difficulty with numeracy when using formulae and doing calculations, in spite of additional help from their science teachers.
74. Students in Year 12 take four AS options. In addition there is a tutorial period, and most students also take one lesson of recreational physical education. However, some are unable to do so because of AS commitments. For the minority who find four subjects too demanding, there is a sensible reduction to three AS levels. In Year 13, most students reduce their commitments to three A-level courses, plus general studies, physical education and tutorial time. The quality of support provided by sixth form tutors during tutorial time has improved; they are increasingly involved in academic monitoring as well as pastoral support.
75. However, the curriculum does not meet statutory requirements in religious education, and many students do not have full access to the locally agreed syllabus. In Year 12, only 11 students take the AS general studies course, but even in Year 13 where all students take part in general studies, the religious content of the programme is insufficient. Moreover, the relatively short time allowed for the extended assemblies twice a term means that these cannot fully compensate for the shortcomings. The school still does not meet requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship.
76. The award of the status of Visual Arts College has not yet had sufficient time to make a major impact on the sixth-form curriculum. However, provision in art and design is strong, and there is an increasing range of accreditation, including plans for vocational qualifications. There is also a major contribution to the wide range of extra-curricular provision, including visits to London, Paris and New York, as well as after-school activities.
77. The breadth of the curriculum is considerably enhanced by the excellent range of extra-curricular opportunities. As well as the visits in art and design, there are scientific conferences and links with Reading University, fieldwork in biology and geography, and a wide range of enrichment activities and classes each week after school. These include an Amnesty group, mock trials, Young Enterprise, debating, a regular mathematical challenge, competitive sports fixtures and music groups. A high proportion of students take part. Members of the local community make a good contribution to the curriculum through the general studies course, including talks on topics such as stress management and racism. Sixth form students make a major contribution to the organisation of house competitions in main school. Life in the sixth form undoubtedly helps students to become confident and mature individuals.
78. The provision for students' personal development is very good and students have responded very well to the school's approach, treating them as adult partners in learning. This change of approach in recent years has been much appreciated by the students themselves and is reflected in the increasing numbers staying on into the sixth form from Year 11.
79. A large number of subjects make a very positive contribution to students' spiritual and moral development, including art, English, biology, chemistry, geography, modern languages and

religious education. In art, for example, Year 12 students were given very good opportunities to respond in a personal way to different places in their project on 'A Sense of Place'. In English, work comparing the Biblical story of 'Babel' with Brian Friel's play 'Translations' encouraged students to think through and reflect on the nature of disintegration. Weekly assemblies, as well as two extended assemblies every half term taken by senior staff or local clergy, are very carefully prepared occasions that challenge students' thinking and encourage them to reflect on issues of meaning and value.

80. Students' social and cultural development is very well supported and extended through the provision of a wide range of opportunities and activities. The community participation credits system encourages students to take part in activities within the school and local community, such as helping in the school's support unit and local primary schools. Recently a group of students took pupils from a special school to the Tirabad Residential Centre in South Wales. Sixth form students organise, encourage and coach junior teams as part of the house system. The student sixth-form committee takes responsibility for representing students' views and ideas, and for organising fund-raising for charities. Students' cultural interests and horizons are developed very successfully through extensive opportunities offered in music, the visual arts, dance and drama. The school's outstanding provision has recently been recognised in its designation as a Visual Arts Specialist School.
81. Provision for careers education and guidance is good. A good range of information is provided in the sixth form library and consists mainly of details on universities, but also includes information on other options. Year 12 students follow a careers advice programme that includes an introduction to the careers advice service, timetabling careers support, advice on UCAS applications, preparation for the Higher Education conference and personal interviews. In addition, in Year 13 interviews are arranged for students not planning to go to university. Also students have the opportunity to attend the 'Careers Fair' where outside experts are available to talk about their profession. Students also undertake mock interviews and there are close links with Reading University through the 'Compact Scheme', which gives students an insight into university life including the range of courses offered.
82. There are six students identified as having special educational needs in the sixth form. Four are at the school action stage of the Code of Practice for special educational needs, one is at the school action plus stage and one student has a Statement of Special Educational Needs. Provision for these students is good. Individual education plans are reviewed on a regular basis and targets subsequently modified or changed. When Statements of Special Educational Needs are reviewed annually, the review draws upon a range of professional opinion and consultation with parents or carers. This provides for and effectively informs the updating of students' records on a regular basis. The curricular provision and level of support deemed necessary for students is fully met.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

83. The systems to monitor the academic progress of individual students and groups of students are very good. All sixth form students have individual reviews of progress each half term. Subject teachers report to tutors on individual student's attitude, oral work in classes, achievement and ability to meet deadlines. An overall attainment grade is also assigned. Any underachievement is identified and appropriately dealt with. There is a system of marking that involves the allocation of an effort grade to completed work. An attainment grade is also given that corresponds to the AS or A-level grade to which the level of work corresponds. Individual students have predicted or target grades. These are used to calculate predicted examination outcomes at various levels in the school. The school has commenced using the A-Level Information System (ALIS) to predict A-level grades for students.
84. The school has recently refined its system for monitoring the progress of individuals and groups of students. It is well used and applied in almost all departments. However, in a few subjects, marking policies are not consistently applied. In physics, computing and physical education in

particular, marking is not regular. Teachers keep good records of individual student's progress. Students are clear about how well they are doing and what they need to do in order to improve. Several departments are developing systems that increasingly involve the students in assessing themselves. Some subjects, however, are not using assessment data with sufficient precision to set targets for individual students. Overall, however, the school has made good progress in meeting the deficiencies identified at the time of the last inspection in its assessment processes.

Advice, support and guidance

85. Students consider that the personal support and guidance they receive is very good and this is confirmed by the findings of the inspection team. Tutors are the first point of contact if students have any concerns and they stay with their tutor for the whole of their time in the sixth form. Tutors provide both the academic and pastoral support and, consequently, know their students very well and are sensitive to their needs. The excellent relationships between students and tutors give students confidence to raise any concerns they may have, knowing that they will be dealt with sympathetically. At half-termly reviews, the data provided by subject teachers on students' personal development is discussed and strategies are agreed to give the student any support that they may need. In addition, they are invited to discuss any personal problems that they may have. This ensures that tutors have a full picture of the students in their care.
86. Admission arrangements for pupils entering the sixth form are very good and include talks by heads of departments on what is entailed by taking their subjects and AS and A levels as well as the benefits in career terms. Also an induction course is held for sixth form entrants after they have taken their GCSE examinations. Some sixth formers' perceptions that they are not well advised at this stage of their school career are not well founded.
87. Provision for careers education and guidance is good. The sixth form careers library provides mainly details on universities, but also some information on other options. The annual 'Careers Fair' provides an opportunity for students to discuss possible careers with about 100 outside experts who are available to talk about their profession. Students also undertake mock interviews and there are close links with Reading University through the Compact Scheme.
88. Health and safety procedures are excellent and ensure a safe working environment. Inspections of the premises are carried out annually by the governing body members who have considerable health and safety experience and half-termly by staff responsible for health and safety. Appropriate action is taken on any issues that arise and there are very thorough recording and reporting procedures.

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

89. Parents have positive views about the sixth form. Virtually all parents expressed satisfaction with the fact that their sons and daughters were expected to work hard. The vast majority are satisfied with the progress their children are making and the quality of teaching. Parents also felt that their children were given more responsibility in the sixth form and were encouraged to develop good attitudes and values. They also appreciated the academic support given to the children after school.
90. Students have very positive views about life in the sixth form. They like being treated like adults, and are generally very appreciative and supportive of the school's provision for their education. They are particularly satisfied with the way they are taught and challenged to do their best, and with the help and encouragement they receive to work independently. In addition, they are very appreciative of the help that is readily available if they encounter difficulties with their work. Virtually all students enjoy the sixth form and would recommend it to others.
91. However, the students' questionnaire indicated that a significant minority felt that they were not given good advice on what subjects to do in the sixth form and others felt that they were not given good careers advice. Also a significant minority felt that they were not well informed about their progress and could not rely on support with personal problems. While inspectors support students'

positive views they do not agree with their concerns. Good advice is given on sixth form options, and careers guidance is also good. Information about progress and personal support and guidance are very good. The students' questionnaire had been completed prior to students receiving their first half-termly review and discussions with them during the inspection revealed that most of their concerns were ameliorated.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

92. Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The headteacher offers a clear sense of direction and purpose to the whole school and takes an active part in ensuring that the sixth form provision is consistent and adds value to other aspects of the school's activities. Management of the sixth form is the responsibility of one of the school's deputy headteachers, supported by two heads of year. Both he and his staff ensure that students in the sixth form act as excellent role models for younger pupils. The success of the sixth form contributes to the very strong school ethos of hard work and achievement. Students in the sixth form are treated differently to their younger contemporaries. They have both more responsibility and slightly more freedom, yet the sixth form is very much connected to and integral to the success and good reputation of the school.
93. The sixth form aims to promote both academic excellence and personal development. These aims are understood by all and expectations are high. Students are expected to make a positive contribution to the school community and take part in a range of activities outside the academic curriculum. This emphasis on taking responsibility and setting an example is readily accepted by students. The highly visible and successful presence of sixth form students contributes to the ethos and reputation of the school as a whole.
94. The school has been successful in increasing numbers staying on into the sixth form. The subtle changes in style and ethos introduced in the last two years have had a marked impact on recruitment. From 260 students in Year 2000, there are now 316 students, mostly recruited from Year 11, although a few are taken in from other local schools. Rising numbers have been accompanied by improving standards and the sixth form is now very well placed to sustain and build on its considerable successes.
95. Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the sixth form are good. There is a sharp focus on reviewing and improving examination success. Data is increasingly being used to indicate added value and to set targets with more accuracy. Head of departments are expected to identify strategies to raise standards further, although precise targets for examination performance are not included in their subject improvement plans. The systematic observation of sixth form teaching within departments is not well established, and opportunities for spreading good practice are not widespread. The senior leadership group has monitored sixth form teaching, which has been the focus of several internal departmental reviews in the recent past.
96. The governing body is well informed of the performance of the sixth form, although there is no single governor with responsibility for sixth form matters. They play an active role in contributing to the constant drive to raise standards of achievement still further. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of individual departments and ready to intervene when appropriate.

Resources

97. Sixth form provision is cost effective and the school manages both high retention and course completion rates. In addition, the high standards that are achieved along with a good average class size in the sixth form indicate very good value for money. The school applies the principles of best value whenever possible and a number of governors have extensive commercial and business experience.

98. Teachers are very well qualified and experienced. Students are well supported by the range of adequate learning resources available. The number of computers available for sixth formers to use is only just adequate and access and use needs to be improved in a number of subjects including mathematics, design and technology, home economics, business studies, art, geography and sociology. Resources in the library are good and support sixth form work well. Accommodation for the sixth form is also only just adequate and the growing number of sixth formers has put pressure on several subjects, notably English, modern foreign languages 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, 15 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 courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	28	79	87	43	43	5.8	5.8
Chemistry	20	85	90	50	43	6.5	5.9
Physics	27	89	88	37	40	6.1	5.6
Design and technology	12	83	91	8	30	4.3	5.4
Home economics	13	69	83	8	28	2.9	4.7
Business studies	29	90	92	0	32	4.1	5.5
Computing	13	69	86	8	23	3.1	4.6
Physical education	8	88	92	0	25	4.5	5.1
Art	27	85	96	41	46	6.1	6.6
Geography	19	89	92	37	38	5.9	5.7
History	9	100	88	22	35	5.8	5.4
Religious education	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sociology	34	100	86	50	35	6.7	5.3
English	40	100	92	30	30	6.0	5.3
German	18	100	91	72	40	8.1	5.8

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, chemistry and physics, but biology was also sampled.

The quality of provision in biology is very good; it is an increasingly popular subject. Examination results in 2001 were in line with the national average, but in 2002 there was a significant improvement with almost one half of the candidates gaining A grades in the A2 examination, and over one half doing so at AS level. High standards were also seen in the lessons observed.

Teaching is always good, and occasionally excellent. Students are challenged to think in both practical and theory work. For instance, in a practical lesson, each student dissected a mouse, and preserved parts of its gut for later analysis by chromatography; they received expert instruction from their teachers. Very good use was made of modern technology to demonstrate the process. The teaching was also excellent in a theory lesson about the nervous system, resulting in all students being totally absorbed in their work. The high level of standards in examinations is the direct result of the high quality of teaching, and also the students' commitment to their work.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Standards in both AS and A-level examinations are well above average.
- Teaching is consistently very good.
- Students' committed approach to learning helps to ensure very good progress.

Areas for improvement

- The use of information and communication technology to support learning is underdeveloped.

99. Standards of attainment are well above average. Since students enter the sixth form with average levels of attainment the majority of students make very good progress. In 2001 approaching 90 per cent of the candidates achieved grades in the range of A to E. This was broadly in line with the national average. However, there was a significant improvement in 2002 when all 34 candidates achieved grades in this range. Nearly one half of the candidates gained either A or B grades and ten students achieved a grade A. Several of the students progressed on to university to study mathematics. The school entered its first candidates under the new arrangements for the AS-level examination in January 2002. All candidates achieved pass grades in the range A to E. This pass rate is significantly above the national average for 2001 for this examination. A few students retake the GCSE mathematics examination during Year 12. Although most students improve their grades, results have been mixed in terms of the number of students achieving their main aim of a grade C or better.
100. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average. Students' achievements through the course are very good. As they progress through the sixth form students develop a good range of skills and understanding of mathematical topics. They become increasingly confident in tackling more complex problems, and frequently undertake work independently as they progress through the sixth form. For example, in a Year 13 A-level mathematics class students quickly picked up the basic concepts involved when finding areas and volumes under a series of curves by integration. During the class the students were quickly able to apply the basic concepts to increasingly complex examples without any further significant support from the teacher. Students in another Year 12 AS-level class were undertaking examples involving basic transformations of trigonometrical functions. Standards of attainment in the class were wide. Although some students were able to make good progress with sketching the graphs on an independent basis, several others made more limited progress.
101. Teaching and learning are very good. All lessons are very well planned and contain a good range of teaching and learning approaches including whole group, smaller group and individual work. Teachers make extensive use of questioning during the group work and in most lessons a good level of interaction results between the teacher and students and sometimes between the students. Teachers deliberately ask questions that will promote extended responses. Several teachers exhibit a level of enthusiasm for the subject and this frequently shows through in their teaching. Presentations are lively and interesting with a challenging pace. Tasks are frequently presented in context and are not merely undertaken as academic exercises. In many lessons teachers make good use of prepared overhead projector transparencies to support aspects of the development of topics. Teaching and learning in a number of lessons is being positively affected by the National Numeracy Strategy currently being targeted mainly in the lower school. Some lessons have a well-planned starter activity, a main activity and a plenary. Teachers keep good records of individual student's progress. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject. A number show a level of enjoyment and enthusiasm when undertaking work in the subject. Only in a few lessons is there insufficient interaction between the teacher and students, and occasionally a number of students do not fully participate in the group discussions.

102. Leadership and management in the department are very good. Policies and procedures are clearly defined. Monitoring and evaluation procedures, including routine lesson observations, are in place. Teachers are very well qualified. They meet on a regular basis and are working well as a team. Aspects of the team meetings, however, deal with basic administrative matters rather than issues directly relating to teaching and learning. Appropriate schemes of work are in place. Resources available in the department support the work well. The curriculum is appropriate. There is, however, little use being made of ICT to support the work. Overall this is an improving department. Standards at the time of the last inspection were high and for several subsequent years they declined. Standards in the most recent years have risen and they are now well above average.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- Teaching is good overall; planning is very thorough.
- Attainment in examinations is normally at, and often above, the national standard.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- There is a relatively high uptake for the subject.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient monitoring of teaching skills.
- Students are not always provided with sufficient opportunities to use their initiative.
- Assessment is not sufficiently related either to national standards or to the students' own target grades.

103. On entry to the sixth form, standards are above average, with a high proportion of chemistry students having A*/A grades in GCSE science. The A-level results in 2001 were above the national average; one half of the students entered obtained one of the higher A/B grades, but three students did not obtain a pass grade. In the 2002 examinations, the proportion of students gaining the higher grades fell, but the overall pass rate remained in line with expectations. The achievements of these students during their two years in the sixth form were satisfactory overall. There are no consistent differences between the results of male and female students.
104. In the 2001 AS-level examination taken at the end of Year 12, the proportion of students gaining grades A/B was in line with the national figure, but the overall pass rate was above the national average. These results were better than predicted. In 2002, the proportion of higher grades fell significantly, although the overall pass rate remained high. Only one half of these students decided to continue to study chemistry in Year 13; an unusually low proportion.
105. In work seen during the inspection, both in lessons and in folders, standards are generally above national expectations and students make good progress. This is particularly noticeable in Year 12 because of the quality of teaching and the very positive approach of these students. Students generally show good recall of work from previous lessons as in a Year 13 lesson on the oxidation of alcohols. As a result, the pace of learning was good. By contrast, in another Year 13 lesson on the reactions of aromatic compounds, their recall was not so clear. Furthermore, the reassurance they, therefore, required was not provided by the teacher. The pace dropped as a result, and learning was satisfactory at best. Students' practical skills are good; they read instructions carefully and work confidently in groups or individually. They make accurate observations and can analyse these because of their good understanding of the work.
106. Teaching is good overall, with some very good features. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject. Moreover, planning is particularly good, including liaison with the technicians. Lessons, therefore, start promptly and with purpose. Nevertheless, in a minority of lessons, the introduction to the work takes too long, and the practical work and lesson summary are too rushed, resulting in less effective learning. The management of students is very good, and

relationships between teachers and students are based on mutual respect. For instance, in a lesson about using the compounds of transition elements as catalysts, a very good working atmosphere developed. Both students and teacher enjoyed the lesson; the magic of chemistry was evident, particularly as the teacher did not give the students too much information, but allowed them to find out for themselves. Homework is set regularly; in the best examples, the tasks are graduated to ensure that there is sufficient challenge for the higher attaining students.

107. Teachers regularly assess students' standards. The use of 'topic revision summaries' encourages students to become involved in self-assessment of their work. They are also given challenging written tests that are well marked, and which provide good preparation for the national examinations. However, test grades are not sufficiently related to national standards or to students' individual target grades. Furthermore, there are insufficient constructive comments from teachers to help students to overcome any areas of weakness.
108. Students are very positive about their work in chemistry. They recognise that hard work is required to obtain high grades, and appreciate the additional support available from teachers after school, often on an individual basis.
109. There is very good leadership and management of the subject. The head of department leads by example in his commitment to his work, and in pursuit of further improvement in standards within the subject. The AS and A-level courses are well planned, with an ongoing review of schemes of work to ensure consistency in practice across the subject. Many of the worksheets used to support learning are of a very high quality, although the result is that students do not always receive sufficient practise in writing in their own words. Teachers are well qualified, and the standard of resources is satisfactory.
110. Since the last inspection, good progress has been made. The monitoring of examination data is increasing, with more emphasis now placed on measuring the improvement made by individual students. There is increasing use of ICT to improve learning opportunities. However, insufficient time is devoted to the monitoring of teaching and to the sharing of good practice.

Physics

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

Strengths

- The department is very well managed and the teachers are very experienced and capable.
- The subject is popular with students who display very positive attitudes in the classroom.
- The teaching is consistently good and sometimes better.
- Standards are above average.

Areas for improvement

- Lesson notes need checking occasionally for quality and quantity.
- The marking of homework could be more detailed and more constructive to monitor student progress.
- Short-term targets, which are monitored, could help individual students to make better progress.

111. A very large number of students start sixth form physics in Year 12, typically around 30, and a large proportion continue in Year 13. GCSE results of the students are well above average, giving them a good foundation for sixth form study. The present Year 12 physics class includes a large number of very able students.
112. At A level, examination results over the past few years have been close to the national average and often above it. In 2001, standards were above the national average, with most students gaining at least a pass grade, and one third a grade A. In the 2002 examination, most students passed while the number achieving A or B grades was close to the national average. At AS level in 2001 most candidates passed and over one half attained A or B grades, which is above national

averages. In 2002 about one third of candidates achieved A or B grades, while one fifth were unsuccessful.

113. Given their attainment on entry, the students' achievements are good, particularly in the high attaining AS-level classes, where many students are on target to achieve good or very good examination grades. The Year 13 A-level classes have some high attaining students, but a wider range of overall ability. The standards of work seen were above average, although the written work was variable. Generally students take notes from the board during the lessons and some supplement their notes with independent research from sources suggested by their teachers. Most students take care with their written work, but some could be better organised. Some have gaps that need filling in to provide a valuable revision resource, particularly where numerical calculations are incorrect or incomplete.
114. The quality of teaching is good, often better. Teaching staff showed technical competence, enthusiasm and a dynamic approach, maintaining pace. Video is being used to show the applications of physics in areas beyond the school's ample equipment provision. Computers are used for experimental measurement and simulation; impressive use was made of a laptop computer when used by a teacher for a simulation of steam engines working. Practical demonstrations were used well; for example, to demonstrate the diffraction of different kinds of waves passing through a gap. Marks for tests at the end of each topic are used in half-termly progress reviews. The marking of homework problems is not detailed and constructive enough to help students to learn from their mistakes and it is not used to set short-term targets.
115. Learning was good or very good in all the lessons seen. The students enjoy the subject and show enthusiasm and knowledge of current work. The teaching style encourages them to respond well in class; for example, in explaining their knowledge of oscillating masses on springs to the rest of the class or in analysing the mode of vibration of a violin string. They concentrate well, showing a good knowledge of physics principles and the ability to discuss problems in small groups. Manipulative skills are developed in setting up current balances, for example. The early end to the school day allows the teachers to give individual help to students outside the lesson time.
116. Physics students display very positive attitudes in the classroom, where they have a keen involvement in the subject. They appear to enjoy the subject very much, and they show enthusiasm and interest for it. They show respect for the knowledge and expertise of their teachers. They are maturing well, and gaining confidence through speaking out in class. Many are planning to study physics or related courses at university.
117. The management of science and sixth form physics at A and AS levels is very good. Useful schemes of work have been produced and lesson plans are impressive in their detail, although lacking in risk assessment details. The department handbook is a detailed and useful document. Subject development planning is good. There is good access to ICT to support learning, and there is very good technician support.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Product design.

Overall the quality of provision in product design is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Standards are improving.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good and this creates very good conditions for learning.
- Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and provide good individual support for all students.

Areas for improvement

- Increase the use of ICT within the coursework of students in order to demonstrate their awareness of using industrial manufacturing techniques.
- Improve the planning to meet the needs of individual students more effectively.

118. Standards of work by students currently doing the product design course are broadly average. Although the A-level results in 2001 were below the national average, the results in 2002 improved slightly with a significant improvement in the grades at AS level. Achievement overall is satisfactory. The improved AS-level results in 2002 and the standard of work seen during the inspection, indicate an improving trend that reflects the department's recent work to raise standards.
119. The quality of the work seen during the inspection is now in line with the national average, although a significant number of students are working at above average levels. The students currently completing the second year of the A-level course are showing significant improvements in the standard of work compared to standards achieved in previous years. The coursework is closely linked to the examination mark scheme and this ensures that all the important aspects of the examination courses are covered. Teachers provide good opportunities for students to develop their basic skills in using resistant materials as many students have worked in other specialist materials prior to starting the product design course. Their graphics skills are well developed and the standard of presentation in coursework is improving. Students use the design process well to show each stage of their developmental work. They consider both standard production processes as well as mass production possibilities. However, their basic skills in using computer aided control and computer aided manufacture are underdeveloped as a result of inadequate resources to support this work in the department. Students' ability to follow the design process has enabled them to work more independently and teachers support them well on an individual basis.
120. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13 is satisfactory overall, although some very good teaching was seen during the inspection. Teachers place good emphasis on improving standards. Lessons are well structured, with a good mix in teaching the whole class and work with students individually. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and, as a result, students are supported and guided effectively. Lessons are well planned to enable students to develop their basic knowledge and skills. However, as a result of many students joining the course from different material areas, planning does not provide sufficient opportunities for students to work in a wide enough range of materials and specialisms. This limits the students in applying their strengths based on their experience and knowledge gained at GCSE level. For example, there are limited opportunities for students to design and make products in systems and control for those who did electronics at GCSE level. As a consequence, students are designing products from a lower knowledge base with fewer opportunities to develop the more advanced skills in the materials with which they are already familiar. In the more effective lessons, teachers use a range of resources to enable students to gain the necessary technical and practical skills as well as visualising the opportunities for designing. This was observed in a Year 13 lesson where the class was extending their skills and understanding in the design of packaging. Students were given a complex net and were then asked to construct a package from it. This enabled them to experience the construction of a complex package shape while gaining an understanding of the features to consider when designing their own. The teacher then used specialist computer software to show how a cone shape can be constructed. This was underpinned with mathematical concepts and calculations to increase the depth of learning. As a result, students were well prepared with the necessary skills to start their own designing.
121. In coursework, most students use ICT confidently to process and present data. Most students also use ICT well to improve the presentation of their work, although Year 12 students still have much to do in this respect. Good relationships between students and their teachers create a positive climate for learning. Students take their work seriously and are keen to do well. They discuss their work in depth with their teachers, and readily take on board the help and guidance they are given. Students commented that teachers offer a good level of help and support.

122. The management of the subject is satisfactory. The head of department has rightly focused on raising standards and this is beginning to show in the improving standards. Schemes of work are well planned and teachers work well as a team. Systems to monitor student progress are good with regular opportunities for students to discuss work with teachers. The subject is well supported by the departmental technician who makes a positive contribution to the efficient running of the course. The course is now well established and improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

Home economics

The quality of provision for the home economics course is **very good**.

Strengths

- The achievement of students doing the AS and A-level courses are very good as a result of the very good teaching and support they receive.
- Very good relationships between staff and students lead to positive attitudes and a very good learning environment.
- The work is well structured and meets the needs and aspirations of individual students.
- The management of the course is 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

- Increase the use of ICT to enable teachers to enable students to experience opportunities in using computer aided manufacture and computer aided design.

123. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above average in Years 12 and 13. This is a significant improvement on the below average A-level results achieved by students in 2001. The above average standard of work seen during the inspection, is in keeping with the very high grades achieved by students in the AS-level examination in 2002. This represents very good achievement when compared to the above average standards students achieved by the end of Year 11.

124. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were above average, and students' achievements are good. Students showed a good understanding of health issues in relation to nutrition, food preparation and production and overall well-being. Coursework shows that students build their knowledge through structured lessons, discussions, reading and research of the topics being studied. They apply this information well when they produce their final coursework. Students follow the guidance provided by the teachers very well and structure their work closely to match examination requirements. Students show increasing levels of independence in their work as they progress through the course. Planned visits and speakers are well integrated by the teachers into the course and students benefit from these community links. Their coursework also shows a good level of research, and is well structured.

125. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons are very well planned and teachers well organised. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and, as a result, teaching is focused on the most relevant and worthwhile learning experiences for the students. Students benefit from guidance and support that is very well matched to the needs of individuals. Teachers set clear objectives for lessons to guide students with their coursework, and cover the basic skills and knowledge to a good level, explaining issues clearly. Planning is good and enables the students to learn through a wide range of activities and tasks. Monitoring of students' progress is thorough. Analysis of outcomes effectively consolidates the learning. In a Year 13 lesson observed, students were experimenting to assess the effects of different ingredients in the process of making bread. They worked in groups, made a variety of dough and set up methods to evaluate the quality of each product. This effectively helped students to see the differences; for example, in using flour with high gluten compared to other types of flour. The careful analysis and evaluation of the outcomes raised the students' level of understanding in developing products of their own. Most students demonstrate good skills in numeracy and are confident in analysing and using statistical data. Students produced good statistical analysis of their work; for example, on non-starch

polysaccharides. Students apply a very good range of literacy skills and present their work to a good level. However, evidence from student folders indicates that many find note taking more difficult. Students often use ICT well to present their final coursework. However, the use of ICT for computer aided manufacturing processes is underdeveloped. Teachers establish very good relationships with the students, which creates a very good learning ethos in which there is mutual respect. Teachers are sensitive and very supportive of the needs of individual students on the course.

126. Management of the subject is very good. The course is now well established, is becoming popular amongst students and standards are now improving. Teachers work very well together as a team, and the subject has a strong capability to improve even further.

BUSINESS

Business studies was inspected in detail, but economics was also sampled. In economics, examination results in 2001 were high at AS level and above average at A level, but with a very low number entered. One lesson was observed in which teaching was very good, as a result of which standards seen were well above average.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Standards in 2001 were above average; students achieve well.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and recent experience of placements in business.
- Management is good and available resources are used well.
- The quality of information available for teachers and students is good.
- The school has good links with local businesses and the Thames Valley Education Business Partnership.

Areas for improvement

- Computers are not used as a regular part of teaching and learning in the classroom.
- Students should take a more active role in lessons.
- ICT resources and teaching space are limited and affect the quality of student experience.

127. In 2001 students achieved above average results and this good quality performance was repeated in 2002 in A level, although there were fewer high grades. Results at AS level were satisfactory overall, although some students are retaking papers in order to improve their grades. The recent trend has been for an improvement from average to above average performance in Year 13 and retention is good. In work seen during the inspection, standards were above average. Achievement is good in relation to results in previous tests or examinations and standards in the present A-level class are at the national average with girls tending to do particularly well.

128. Attitudes to the subject are good and many students are choosing to take the subject at university. The approach clearly challenges and interests the highest attaining students while supporting those who encounter problems with some aspects of learning. Students are achieving well because of the good quality of teaching and of their own response. There is a clear focus on key skills. Teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, but do not always encourage students to think for themselves or to take an active role in lessons. The limited accommodation restricts the range of teaching and learning activities and computers are not available in the main classroom. As a result, computers are not used to support teaching and learning as much as they should be.

129. Students in Year 12 show a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of a business and of business theory. They understand the use of mission statements and show a clear understanding of the different aspects of marketing following a recent visit from the creative director of a leading high street retailer. Their written work shows a secure level of achievement and good basic

knowledge; for example, of breakeven analysis. In Year 13 students are able to apply this knowledge to a more theoretical approach in studying business strategy with case studies related to budget airlines. Average and higher attaining students show a clear grasp of the marketing strategies used by these companies and lower attaining students can give examples of the way in which the major airlines have tried to focus on specific market sectors. Some students in Year 13 clearly have the detailed knowledge and the higher levels of understanding to succeed at the higher levels while all have the potential to pass.

130. Students have good quality textbooks and resources produced by the department, they attend conferences, and visits and visitors contribute well to their understanding of the real world of business. Young Enterprise is well established in the school, there are good links with local industry through the Thames Valley Education Business Partnership and teachers have recent experience of business placements.
131. Assessment data is managed well. Its use ensures that students are clear about their strengths and about how they can improve. The department is well led and the introduction of new courses has been well managed. Planning is good and documentation is readily accessible. Improvement since the last inspection has been good particularly in the management of change and the raising of standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus was on computing, but the Year 12 key skills course was also sampled. Year 12 students working on the key skills course are achieving very well because they are given clear information about the criteria by which work is judged and have frequent discussions about their work, which help them to develop their knowledge of a range of software applications. The pace of lessons is good because students are motivated and encouraged to work independently.

Computing

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and, as a result, standards are improving.
- Students have good attitudes to their learning.

Areas for improvement

- Use assessment and discussion more to involve students in their learning.
- Develop lesson tasks and resources to support more independent learning.

132. The A-level examination results in 2001 were below the national average, but represented some improvement on the previous year with more students achieving the higher A and B grades. A-level results in 2002 show the trend continuing with one quarter of students gaining the higher A and B grades. AS-level results have remained broadly similar over the last two years with around one half of the students gaining the higher grades. Both male and female students achieved well in relation to their prior attainment.
133. Standards of work for current Year 13 students are average in relation to course expectations. Students achieve well given their prior attainment. They show a satisfactory understanding of the design and application of computer systems to solve problems. Their coursework illustrates sound understanding methodology in the analysis of a problem and design of computing solutions. In the lesson seen students made good progress developing their understanding of programming language as a result of the specialist teaching and were building effectively on their knowledge from Year 12. The teacher gave a clear presentation of the essential concepts and backed this up with a short practical task to consolidate understanding. Achievement is good, as students have in most cases developed their knowledge and skills from a low level at the start of Year 12. Students

get some comment about their work through tutorials, but need more regular marking and discussion as work progresses to help them to understand how to make further improvement.

134. Standards in Year 12 are average for this stage in the course. Overall achievement is good. Knowledge and understanding of computing is below average at the start of the course because most students did not have ICT lessons in Year 11 and have worked hard to grasp new concepts and knowledge. Students make good progress with their knowledge because they get good specialist advice and in the lesson seen most students achieved well developing their knowledge and understanding of databases. A few with prior experience completed the set task and could have made more progress if not constrained by the absence of resources to support independent learning.
135. Students have good attitudes to their work and current coursework shows care in preparation and presentation. Concentration and application are good. Lesson notes are made conscientiously and students work independently when given opportunities to do so.
136. Teaching is good overall. Teachers are familiar with new course requirements and this enables them to give accurate advice to students. Specialist knowledge is used effectively in the planning of lessons and concepts are taught systematically with questioning used to check understanding. The structured nature of lessons does sometimes mean that opportunities for more independent learning are missed because the focus is on completion of a set task rather than more independent problem solving. Assessment is not used rigorously to inform planning and challenge students.
137. The leadership and management of information and communication technology are good and have sought to improve provision across the school. There has been some improvement in examination standards over the last three years and improved resources with a new study area in the sixth form block. Since the previous inspection the introduction of the key skills course has improved the range of opportunities and there are plans to improve this further next year with the introduction of information and communication technology AS and A-level courses.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good and results in effective learning.
- Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment since none had the opportunity to take a GCSE course in physical education.
- Students' enthusiasm for the subject and their positive attitudes help to promote a positive learning atmosphere in lessons
- Support, guidance, assessment and the monitoring of students' progress through the course.

Areas for improvement

- Widening the variety of teaching styles throughout all the units of work.
- There are insufficient resources to enable teachers to broaden and enhance the quality of students' learning even further.

138. Physical education is growing in popularity as a subject choice for students. Between 1999 and 2001, results for GCSE A level were broadly in line with the national average. However, in 2001 there were no higher-grade passes. Provisional results for 2002 show that the 100 per cent pass rate was re-established and that the proportion of students attaining higher grade passes improved. Students perform similarly in physical education as in their other subjects. This represents good achievement since none had had the opportunity to study for a timetabled GCSE physical education course in Years 10 and 11. Comparisons between females and males are not

viable because of smaller numbers of females who take the course. In 2002, there was a 100 per cent pass rate in the AS-level examination, but only four out of the 17 students attained higher grade passes. This all represents very good achievement since students have not studied the subject prior to joining the sixth form.

139. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are as expected. Year 13 students, for example, are developing well their knowledge and understanding of exercise physiology, relating this well to specific sports and using terminology well. Through their studies in the history of sport students have developed a secure understanding of the phases of the development of sport over time. Their independent skills are securely developed as shown by the quality of their personal performance portfolios. There is some good use of ICT that helps them to present their work; for example, graphical analysis of training programmes. Year 12 students have made a secure start to the AS-level course and are coming to grips with the terminology and concepts as applied to; for example, the acquisition of skills. They are also deepening their knowledge and understanding of the muscular system in the anatomy and physiology unit of work. Students are achieving well.
140. The quality of teaching is good and results in effective learning and improving standards by the end of Year 13. This is an improvement since the last inspection where there was some unsatisfactory teaching observed. The teacher's enthusiasm, interest and very good knowledge and understanding of the different units of work ensure that students make good progress and develop their interest in the subject. As a result of this, students are positive about the provision and keen to do as well as possible. Their positive attitudes in lessons enhance the quality of the learning atmosphere. In a particularly effective Year 13 history of sport lesson, for example, students worked very well in small groups, actively engaging in discussion and listening to one another's views. Prompt and efficient starts to lessons ensure that students are quickly on task and a planned and structured variety of activities helps to keep them motivated. In a Year 12 anatomy and physiology lesson, for example, students were producing visual aids to show the movement within muscles when activity takes place. Teachers use questions effectively to challenge and stretch students' intellectual capacity and engage them in learning as in; for example, the recapitulation and introduction to a Year 13 exercise physiology lesson. Some teaching, though, is more teacher directed and tightly structured. Resources to help enliven lessons are insufficient, thus students are not always as involved in their own learning as they could be. At the end of some lessons, there is a tendency for the teacher to tell students what they have learned rather than to engage them in discussion to provide their perceptions. Students themselves are very adept at using ICT to present their work, however, there is insufficient planned access to ICT in lessons to help to broaden the quality of their learning. Students receive very good support and guidance to help them to produce their personal performance portfolio. Teachers mark students' work regularly, but the quality of some of their comments is sometimes inconsistent; students are not always being made fully aware of what they have to do to improve the standard of their work.
141. Physical education makes a good contribution to students' personal development and prepares them well to study the subject further should they opt to proceed to higher education. There are good quality procedures for the support, guidance and assessment of students. Since his recent appointment, the head of department has ensured a clear focus on improving standards and the quality of teaching from the team of relatively inexperienced teachers. Leadership is effective. Post 16 physical education was not reported on in depth at the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on the visual arts, although drama and media studies were also sampled. Provision in drama is excellent. Standards in examinations and in the work seen are well above average because of the very good and at times outstanding teaching. The leadership of the department is excellent and overall, students make significant learning gains and progress very well.

In music, results at A level have varied considerably according to the individual strengths of the often small number of candidates. One Year 13 lesson was observed where standards were judged to be in line with expected levels at this stage in the course. The teaching was good, informed by a good

understanding of how musical analysis is informed by practical activity and an active involvement of the students. Leadership of the subject is conscientious and effective.

Students make good progress in media studies and reach standards in line with national averages because of the predominantly good and at times very good teaching. The subject is well led.

ART

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

Strengths

- Standards in public examinations are improving.
- The specialist teaching is very good.
- The subject leadership and management are excellent.
- Students are highly motivated and confident independent learners.
- The systems and use of monitoring and assessment are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Information and communication technology is underused to support learning.

142. A-Level examination results in 2001 were in line with the national average for both male and female students. Over time results overall have been in line and above the national average. A-level results in 2002 show significant improvement for both male and female students with one half of those entered achieving the higher A and B grades. In 2001 the AS-level examination results were very good with all students achieving a pass grade and over one half achieving at the higher A and B grades. In 2002 AS-level examination results indicate further improvement with almost three-quarters of students attaining the higher grades. In relation to their GCSE attainment students achieve very well, broadening their knowledge and developing greater independence.

143. Standards of work for the current Year 13 students are well above average in relation to course expectations. In lessons seen students were highly motivated and confident independent learners as a result of the very good teaching that encourages students to experiment and explore ideas. Students have well-developed practical and research skills and apply these effectively to the development of imaginative and highly original artwork. They use a wide range of media and techniques in two and three dimensions and on different scales. Knowledge and understanding of artists and artistic conventions is well developed and students use these references effectively in the development of their own work. They respond to a wide range of subject matter from both direct observation and imagination and can explore mood and meaning in their imagery. For example, on the theme of 'inside and outside' one student explored the personal implications and emotions of inclusion and exclusion using mixed media whilst another developed paintings and collage inspired by sketchbook studies of mountains. Students use the Internet for research in addition to visiting galleries and exhibitions to broaden their experience of art. The lack of space for computer resources in the current accommodation means that few students use ICT to develop their artwork.

144. Standards in Year 12 are above average for this stage in the course. Students are achieving well and have made good progress broadening their skills and understanding from Year 11 as a result of the very good level of monitoring and support provided by teachers. Progress with their research through the development of sketchbooks for experimentation and to record their observations and develop ideas is good. The teachers provide regular weekly comments on work and how to improve, and this enables students to reflect upon their work and achieve high standards.

145. Students have very positive attitudes to art, and lessons are characterised by purposeful activity. They develop very mature attitudes and as a result of teaching that encourages self-evaluation they develop very good independent learning skills. Opportunities for independent work are very good and are a strong feature of the way in which students are encouraged to work. Year 13 students, for example, all have their own personal work areas in which they can work during lessons and at other times. Students make very good progress overall as they are given freedom to experiment

and regular opportunities to discuss their work and identify areas for improvement. Most Year 12 students chose to continue with A-level examinations in Year 13 and many take up the opportunity to return to school during the evening for life-drawing classes to further develop their skills.

146. Teaching is very good overall and supports students in becoming confident and independent learners. Teachers communicate specialist knowledge clearly and through regular monitoring of work have good knowledge of students' individual needs and use this in the planning and organisation of lessons. Teachers have a broad range of expertise and are familiar with course requirements and this enables them to give accurate advice to students on what to do to improve their work.
147. The leadership and management of art and design are excellent and promote high standards and good learning through a very strong collaborative team approach. There is a shared vision and understanding with a clear focus on the development of imaginative and independent work. Staff work very effectively as a team to support students and give willingly of their time. They use the cramped accommodation very well and work hard to ensure that a broad range of opportunities is provided in lessons and through extra-curricular activities.

HUMANITIES

History, geography, sociology and religious education were inspected in detail.

Geography

The quality of provision in geography is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Teaching is very good and accounts for the high level of achievement by students.
- Relationships between teachers and their students are excellent.
- Assessment procedures are very good and are used positively to help students to make very good progress.

Areas for improvement

- The analysis of examination results needs to be refined.
- The use of ICT in both teaching and learning needs to be expanded.

148. Standards observed in the sixth form are well above average, and students achieve very well through the course. Results at A level in 2001 overall were above the national average and improved upon the previous year's performance. The proportion of students passing at grades A to E and at the higher A/B grades was above average, although boys' results at these higher grades were relatively lower than girls and below the national average. In 2002 the results improved again. The proportion of students passing at grades A to E was again 100 per cent and the proportion passing at the higher grades increased to very high levels especially for boys.
149. Students' attitudes are excellent. They are very positive and respond very well to the excellent relationships established with them by their teachers, whose effective use of humour to lighten, emphasise and exemplify makes students enthusiastic about their work. Students work well together and listen to each other's views with respect, albeit they may then discuss them critically. When presenting a group's opinions, they do so confidently and support those opinions appropriately with evidence. They are generally very articulate, but a minority tends to use immature language. This is reflected in their written work, wherein weak expression accompanied by spelling errors detracts from the overall quality of their work. Teachers' subject knowledge and awareness of examination technique is very strong and has an impact on students' interest and application. Consequently, students can use their own knowledge and understanding effectively to analyse sample answers on the effect of changes in sea level not only in terms of their content, but very importantly, the extent to which the language used conveys the information clearly. This

high level of subject expertise has enabled teachers to develop a major series of resources to supplement and complement their teaching in each module and to promote the high level of work they expect from their students. Using those high quality resources in relation to general reading and information often obtained from Internet web sites, students are developing very competent independent learning skills. They analyse photographic evidence very well recognising landforms correctly, explaining how they were most likely formed and identifying the evidence to support those explanations. This helps them to cope with the analytical nature of many of their assignments and individual fieldwork based investigations. Learning, therefore, is very good and achievement high.

150. Students achieve so well because the quality of the teaching is very good; a substantial proportion of it is excellent and at times inspirational. Lessons are planned very well to develop students' reading and thinking through a seminar approach. Teachers have high expectations and use a blend of open-ended and focused questions very effectively to challenge their students' thinking, develop their analytical skills and elicit some very perceptive responses particularly from the higher attainers. The assignments are demanding, fieldwork studies especially so, and lessons are conducted at a sharp pace that stimulates students' interest and enthusiasm. Students are given a substantial volume of individual tuition in out-of-school hours to recompense for absence or to reinforce work already done. This has a major impact on the final results gained by students, who readily acknowledge the value of this support. They are happy to have chosen to study geography and enjoy doing it.
151. The leadership and management of the geography department are excellent. The head of department has a very clear idea of how the department should respond to national changes and new school initiatives. He leads his departmental colleagues very effectively. They have a range of experience between them and work well together as a coherent team. Good delegation ensures shared ownership, and their combined work has produced excellent structured teaching resources for the AS/A2 modules that are followed. Documentation is thorough and the procedure for assessing students' work is of high quality. Although in need of minor analytical refinement, it keeps students informed of their level of work and targets for improvement and also informs future planning. The use of ICT in the teaching and learning processes is not fully developed, apart from students using the Internet for research, and that could be improved. River and coastal fieldwork studies are integrated effectively into the course structure to support students' personal investigations and to give a more dynamic understanding to their theoretical knowledge, evident in their very comprehensively annotated sketch maps of the Isle of Purbeck coastline. The work of teaching in the department is monitored both formally and informally.

History

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching ensures very successful active learning by students.
- Students' very positive attitudes promote very good achievement.
- Very effective leadership and management have contributed to rapid improvement.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of teaching is not consistently high across the department.
- Data from assessment is not yet used sufficiently to set specific learning targets for individual students.

152. Students' overall performance in A-level examinations was in line with national averages in 1999 and Year 2000, and above in 2001. However, results at the higher grades have been consistently below average, and in Year 2000 students did less well in history than in their other subjects. Results in the new AS-level examination in 2001 were at the national level and in 2002 candidates taking the A2-level examination met their predicted grades. Students taking the AS-level examination in 2002 exceeded their predicted grades.
153. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are above average and students' achievements since the start of Year 12 are good. They have a firm grasp of the topics they are studying and can analyse relevant issues and questions successfully, as seen in lessons on Elizabeth I's relationships with parliament and on Richelieu's exercise of power in 17th-century France. Students' written work is usually clear, effective and well argued. They have made very good progress in improving the structure of their essays and providing sufficient evidence to substantiate their arguments, although these remain areas of difficulty for some students. Year 12 students have made a good start to the course and standards of work seen are average. They are beginning to research and evaluate historical material effectively, as seen in some work on the social reforms of the 1906 Liberal government. Their achievement, thus far, is good.
154. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good, although it is not totally consistent across the department. Teachers' very good subject knowledge and their enthusiasm for history successfully motivate students. Teachers usually plan lessons very thoroughly so that students are very clear about the direction of the lesson. In a Year 13 lesson students made rapid progress in understanding the conflicts between Elizabeth I and her parliaments through very well-organised group work supported by very carefully prepared resources. Teachers usually use methods that ensure that students are actively involved in the lesson. In a Year 12 class students worked very hard and very effectively in groups to research and share historical information. In a Year 13 lesson students demonstrated very good learning in a series of PowerPoint presentations on aspects of Richelieu's rule in France. However, learning is less effective when teaching relies too much on providing information and when students have few opportunities to participate. Very good marking helps students to improve their work. Students work well on their own and make effective use of ICT. They enjoy history and are confident in debate and discussion. The attitude of students is very positive and this helps to explain their very good achievement in the subject.
155. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good, especially the quality of teaching. Very effective leadership and management by the new head of department have contributed to rapid improvement in provision for the subject. A review of teaching and learning in the department and close collaborative working has had a very positive impact on the quality of teaching in the sixth form. Assessment procedures have been strengthened and information from assessment is beginning to be used more effectively to support students' learning. However, data from assessment is not yet used sufficiently to set specific learning targets for individual students, but the department is planning to address this issue. History is an improving subject at sixth form level and is well placed to raise standards even further

Religious education

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

Strengths

- The introduction of A-level work has been well managed over the last two years.
- Teaching is good and students achieve well.
- Students are well motivated and have very positive attitudes.

Areas for improvement

- The teaching arrangement, whereby groups have three teachers, discourages the effective continuity of learning for students.
- Data from assessment is not yet used systematically enough to help students to improve their work.

156. In recent years there has been no A-level work in the school. However, in 2001 16 students took the new AS-level course and attained results above the national average. In 2002 candidates taking the A-level examination exceeded their predicted grades, whilst those taking the AS-level examination met their predicted grades.
157. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are in line with national averages. Students achieve well and make good progress during the course. They are mastering the content of the course effectively and are developing their thinking on philosophical and ethical issues successfully. In a lesson on conscience, for example, students showed a sound understanding of the concept as defined by different thinkers, and higher attaining students were quick to identify relevant issues and examples. Students are generally confident and fluent in discussion and their written work demonstrates good progress. Essays are usually well argued and appropriately structured, although in some instances students have difficulty in selecting relevant evidence and examples to support an argument or justify a point of view. Year 12 students have made a good start to the course and standards in work seen are above average at this stage. They are beginning to understand ethical theories and in work on virtue ethics, for example, they were able to probe its strengths and weaknesses effectively.
158. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, and sometimes very good. Teachers' good subject knowledge and increasing familiarity with the course material successfully motivates students and encourages them in their learning. Teachers usually plan lessons thoroughly. Key themes and ideas are effectively highlighted and emphasised for students, as in a philosophy lesson on conversion experience in religion. However, learning objectives are sometimes insufficiently focused to ensure maximum progress during lessons. Teachers use a reasonable mix of methods and when teaching is particularly good, students are provided with a wide range of questions, tasks and resources, which stimulate and challenge their thinking. In one Year 13 lesson, for example, very effective questioning and carefully planned work in pairs, well supported with good course handouts, helped students to make rapid progress on the place of conscience in ethical thinking. On some occasions progress is not so good because teaching relies too much on providing information without giving students sufficient opportunity to work on material through activity and discussion. Very good marking gives helpful guidance to students on how they can improve their work. Students make effective use of ICT to extend and consolidate their work. They are well motivated and have very positive attitudes, which helps to explain their good achievement in the subject.
159. The leadership and management of sixth form religious education are good, and since the previous inspection the subject has been successfully established at A level. The philosophy and ethics course is well matched to the interests and background of the students, and has attracted increasing numbers since its introduction just over two years ago. Teaching groups are each taught by three teachers; an arrangement that discourages continuity of learning for students. Regular and formal consultation between staff is not fully in place and data from assessment is not systematically collated and used to set specific learning targets for individual students. RE is now a popular subject for sixth form students and the department is well placed to address these issues, develop its practice and raise standards of attainment.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- Students achieve very well; the A-level results are well above average and improving further.
- The quality of teaching is very good and results in very effective learning.
- Students are very enthusiastic about the subject and, consequently, there is a very good learning atmosphere in lessons.
- The support, guidance, assessment and monitoring of students' achievements are very good.
- The contribution of the subject to students' personal development is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not have sufficient planned opportunities in lessons for the use of ICT.
- There is a lack of variety in the teaching and learning methods used, particularly at the start of Year 12.

160. Sociology continues to be a popular and successful choice for students. Between 1999 and 2001, results for GCSE A level were consistently well above the national average. Provisional results for 2002 show that the 100 per cent pass rate was maintained and that the proportion of students attaining higher grade passes improved even further. Students perform better in sociology than in their other subjects. Comparisons between females and males are not viable because of the smaller numbers of males who take the course. In 2002, there was a 100 per cent pass rate in the Advanced-subsidary course and 88 per cent of students attained higher grade passes. This all represents very good achievement since students have not studied the subject prior to joining the sixth form.

161. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are well above average and students achieve very well. Students have a good understanding of the two major theoretical perspectives in sociology and use sociological terminology well. They confidently discuss, for example, how religious beliefs can be measured and evaluate research concerning the secularisation of our society. Their own research skills are well developed and all are well on the way to completing their individual research project. There is some very good use of ICT that helps them to present their research findings; for example, graphical analysis, and they produce well-structured essays. Year 12 students have made a good start to the Advanced-subsidary course and are coming to grips with the sociological terminology and concepts as applied; for example, to gender and achievement. Students are achieving very well.

162. The quality of teaching is very good and results in very effective learning and success in examinations. The teacher's enthusiasm, interest and very good knowledge and understanding of the subject ensure that students make very good progress and develop their interest for learning. As a result of this, students are very positive about the provision and keen to do as well as possible. The teacher refers effectively to appropriate contemporary and established sociological research as well as to different theoretical perspectives – this deepens students' knowledge and understanding further and develops their sociological thinking. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students were considering which research was effective in supporting the concept that they were living in an increasingly secular society, as well as research that suggested that this was not so. Their very positive attitudes in lessons enhance the quality of the learning atmosphere, thus all are able to make very good progress in their studies. Students work very well in small groups, actively engaging in conversation and listening to one another's views. The teacher's very effective directed questioning, particularly in Year 13 lessons, stretches students' intellectual capacities and engages all of them well in discussion that draws on their own experiences as well as on the sociological perspectives they have learned. In a Year 12 lesson, though, more effective use could have been made of open questions to ensure that students were able to develop further their communication skills by; for example, being asked to provide evaluative comments. Although students themselves are very adept at using ICT to present their work, there is insufficient planned access to ICT in lessons to help broaden the quality of their learning. Students receive very good support from the teacher to help them to develop their understanding and use of sociological terminology as well as to help them to organise their individual research. Very good quality

marking ensures that students are aware of what they have to do to improve the standard of their work.

163. Sociology makes a very good contribution to students' personal development. There are very good quality procedures for the support, guidance and assessment of students. All know, for example, what they need to do in order to achieve their best. Leadership is very effective, with a clear focus on ensuring that standards remain high and improving the quality of provision even further. Sociology was not reported on at the last inspection.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

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

Strengths

- Standards in public examinations are above average and improving.
- Students' performance is carefully monitored and there is extensive support for their academic and personal development.
- The subject is well led and managed.
- Teachers have established strong relationships with students.
- Students have very positive attitudes to the subject and many are enthusiastic about their work.

Areas for improvement

- There is no formal mechanism for teachers to share their teaching expertise and so improve provision further.
- The accommodation is inadequate.

164. Standards attained in the 2002 A-level examinations were higher than the above average standards obtained in 2001. The publication of national benchmark information is likely to show that attainment is now well above average and this would be a significant improvement on the last inspection. Although there are many more female students than male, all attain equally well, as do those students from minority ethnic backgrounds. Levels of achievement in relation to past performance at GCSE are good. The AS-level results in 2002 were lower than in 2001, but all students obtained a grade and one half of them attained at grades A or B. Their levels of achievement were satisfactory.
165. The standards of work seen during the course of the inspection are well above average and the progress students have made is good. They are able to analyse and evaluate texts in detail and use supporting evidence appropriately. Effective use is made of contextual material to understand the historical, social and cultural influences shaping a text. This was seen in the analysis of the structure of the Bible story of 'Babel' to draw comparisons with the form of Brian Friel's play 'Translations'. Spoken and written work is fluent and students have a wide general vocabulary and a command of specialist terms. They learn well because of their positive approach to the subject and the care and time taken over assignments. Good use is made of computer technology for research and to improve the quality and presentation of written work. Although some students read widely and use critics' writing on set texts to help them to shape their own views, the practice is not widespread and is an area for improvement.
166. Teaching is good overall and sometimes very good. Teachers know their subject well and convey their own enthusiasm for literature to the students. As a result, they have their confidence and respect. Relationships are very strong and teachers give extensive individual support to students outside lessons. The range of extra-curricular provision enables students to broaden their understanding and enjoyment of the subject. In the best lessons seen the work was well prepared and interesting. Teachers had high expectations and students responded with critical work that was well researched and fluently presented. Very good use was made of questioning to challenge students to form their own views and judgements and there was effective use of plenary sessions

to consolidate learning. Year 13 students' understanding of the use of social observation in the work of William Blake and the modern writer Wendy Cope resulted from the challenging nature of the teacher's questioning and the effective use of the closing minutes of the lesson. There were a few occasions, however, when teachers did not make the learning objectives sufficiently explicit at the start of the lesson to give students a clear focus to their work. There were also times when opportunities were missed to promote discussion and so engage all students in a lively exchange of ideas.

167. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department provides clear educational direction to the work of his colleagues and he is well supported by an able and committed team who give generously of their time to extend provision beyond the formal lessons. Student performance is monitored and evaluated rigorously and, when appropriate, effective action taken to improve that performance. Teachers new to the department are well supported. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. The head of department sees all his colleagues teach, but there is no formal system for the dissemination of good practice.
168. There is a good capacity to secure further improvements in provision because teachers are self-critical and constantly seeking ways to improve their own subject knowledge and methodology.

Modern foreign languages

The focus of the inspection was on German, but French was also sampled. Results in French since the last inspection have been well above average and show a rising trend. One French lesson was observed. The teaching was good, the students' attitudes were excellent and their learning was also good.

German

Overall the quality of provision for German is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Attainment in both Years 12 and 13 is significantly above average. Students make excellent progress and the highest attaining students perform particularly impressively.
- Teaching ranges from very good to excellent. Lessons are very well planned and move at a demanding pace, and teachers have high expectations of students.
- Leadership and management are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Classroom accommodation is inadequate.
- There is an imbalance in the numbers of boys and girls taking German.

169. Results at both AS and A level are very good and have been improving in recent years. They are significantly higher than national averages; high proportions of students gain grades A and B. In 2001, 72 per cent of students gained grades A and B compared with 40 per cent nationally. Many more girls than boys take German, although the results obtained by the two groups are broadly similar. Since the last inspection boys' results have improved more rapidly than those of girls. Overall numbers opting to study German in the sixth form are very high – significantly higher than the numbers found in similar schools - and show a rising trend.
170. Standards seen during the inspection were very high. The higher attaining students perform at a level rarely found in this age group, and other students aim for, and reach, demanding standards. Students are able to use complex language accurately. They pay attention to grammatical details and use good pronunciation and intonation. The highest attaining students display an outstanding range of vocabulary and are fluent in producing German themselves – both written and spoken - and in understanding complex language used by others. They display gist and detailed understanding of demanding texts in both Years 12 and 13 and can manipulate the language accurately.

171. Attainment in both years is well above average. All students appear to make good progress and the higher attainers are 'on track' to reach the highest grades in their examinations.
172. Teaching ranges from very good to excellent and is judged excellent overall. Teachers have very high expectations of their students and know them well. Students speak in very positive terms of the rigorous demands that teachers make on them and of the sense of success that they thus enjoy. This spurs them on to even greater achievements. Teachers use a wide range of techniques in lessons ranging from teacher-led activities for the whole class to group work, pair work and individual work demanding a deep level of thinking on the part of the students. They use visual aids, and tape recorders to bring the language alive for students. They employ different styles within lessons to ensure that all students remain interested and motivated. They produce large quantities of their own materials so that they can tailor their teaching to the precise needs of their students. Two foreign language assistants give extra help with oral work. Teachers' own command of German is excellent and they conduct lessons predominantly in German, although English is used when appropriate to maintain momentum and ensure that no student becomes left behind. Teachers reinforce grammatical points as they arise naturally during lessons and thus ensure that students' knowledge and understanding are constantly consolidated.
173. Students' attitudes are consistently excellent both towards their teachers and each other. They engage well with sensitive issues such as the problems of young offenders in society or drug addiction, and are willing to put forward their views and listen to those of others. They ask for help when needed, often in German.
174. Leadership and management are excellent. Teachers follow detailed schemes of work, which ensure that requirements of the examinations are more than adequately covered. The department has a marking policy in place, and evidence from students' folders shows that this is effective in helping students to see precisely what they have to do at any stage in order to improve their performance. Teachers use information from students' assessments to tailor their teaching effectively. The head of languages monitors the work of the department in various ways such as observing staff teach and checking students' work. The department has targets in place for the current year and these seem likely to be met.
175. Resources are very good. The department has a large stock of commercially obtained as well as home-produced material and students have access to foreign language books and magazines. The department has recently invested in a supply of laptop computers, but as yet their use is underdeveloped. Classroom accommodation is inadequate. Teachers do not have their own classrooms and often have to carry a large amount of equipment and teaching aids around. This causes undue wear-and-tear on the equipment and inhibits the activities that teachers can provide for students. Teachers work hard to compensate for this, but standards would be higher if the accommodation supported teaching and learning more effectively.
176. Many more girls than boys take languages in Years 12 and 13. This situation occurs throughout the country, not just at this school. Teachers are aware of the problem, but as yet have no strategies in place to address it. It is an area that, if tackled, could enable this excellent department to reach even higher standards.