

INSPECTION REPORT

ST CRISPIN'S SCHOOL

London Road, Wokingham

LEA area: Wokingham

Unique reference number: 110059

Headteacher: Mr A Biddle

Reporting inspector: Ian Stuart
19298

Dates of inspection: 3 – 7 March 2003

Inspection number: 249829

Full 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

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: London Road
Wokingham

Postcode: RG40 1SS

Telephone number: 0118 9781144

Fax number: 0118 9795224

Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr T Sharp

Date of previous inspection: 13 – 17 January 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Team members | | | Subject responsibilities | Aspect responsibilities |
|--------------|---------------------|----------------------|---|---|
| 19298 | Ian Stuart | Registered inspector | | What sort of school is it? The school's results and achievements; How well are the pupils and students taught? How well is the school led and managed? |
| 9724 | Brigid Quest-Ritson | Lay inspector | | Pupils' and students' attitudes, values and personal development; How well does the school care for its pupils and students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? |
| 22685 | Natalie Moss | Team inspector | English | |
| 22691 | Ray Woodhouse | Team inspector | Mathematics | |
| 2711 | Alan Jarvis | Team inspector | Science; Chemistry | |
| 27666 | John Dockrell | Team inspector | Modern Foreign Languages; French | |
| 19866 | Peter Austin | Team inspector | Art & design | |
| 22590 | Robert Castle | Team inspector | Physical education; Citizenship | |
| 10759 | Lynn Bappa | Team inspector | History | |
| 12475 | Stuart Johnson | Team inspector | Music | |
| 22491 | Lorraine Small | Team inspector | Design & technology; Information & communication technology (ICT) | |
| 15462 | Clifford Blakemore | Team inspector | Geography; Economics | |
| 20622 | Ann Sydney | Team inspector | Special educational needs; English as an additional language; Educational inclusion | |
| 4773 | Peter Gilliat | Team inspector | Religious education | How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils and students? |

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Crispin's School is an average size comprehensive school with around 1050 boys and girls, including 131 in the sixth form. Its roll has risen by nearly 50 per cent in the last five years and it is now oversubscribed. It is one of four secondary schools in Wokingham, two of which are single gender schools. It serves the area around the school, but pupils come from all parts of the town and beyond. The pupils come from a very wide range of backgrounds, which, overall, are somewhat more advantaged than average; although the number of pupils claiming free school meals is well below average, this does not reflect accurately the mixed socio-economic circumstances of the pupils. The number for whom English is not their home language is a bit above average, though only one is at an early stage of acquiring English. Less than five per cent of pupils come from ethnic minorities. The number with special educational needs is below average, though the proportion of pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need is similar to the national average. The attainments of pupils on entry have been very similar in each of the last five years and have been average overall. Illness and problems of recruiting teachers have caused a number of difficulties recently; some of these remain, though they are now less acute. The school is in the process of applying to become a technology college.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Crispin's is a good school with many strengths. It is a friendly and lively place, characterised by very good relationships and commendable efforts by teachers to help pupils to develop as well rounded and mature young people. Overall, teaching is good and, when pupils leave school, most of them attain standards better than would be expected from their starting points on entry. The rapid growth of the school and very considerable additions and changes to staffing have meant that the school has had to work exceptionally hard to ensure consistency in the application of the standards it expects. Generally, it has been successful, though there are occasions when this is not the case. Bringing cohesion to all aspects of the school's activities, especially in the monitoring of teaching and of pupils' progress, remains a significant challenge for the school. The school is very well led and there is good potential for further improvement. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teachers are enthusiastic, and relationships between pupils and adults are very good.
- The very good leadership of the headteacher enables the school to continue to make progress with clearly identified priorities for development.
- Most pupils achieve well because of their generally good attitudes to work and the good teaching they receive in most lessons.
- Formal and informal arrangements to induct and support new teachers are very good.
- Attendance is well above the national average.
- There is a thriving sixth form which is well placed for further development.

What could be improved

- Underachievement by some pupils, especially boys, is not always identified early enough nor tackled rigorously enough.
- Variations in the quality of teaching, marking and assessment mean that, at times, pupils do not benefit sufficiently from the overall good standard of teaching in the school.
- The roadways, car parks and exits at the front of the school are serious safety hazards for pupils at the end of the school day.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected over six years ago in January 1997. It was described as a successful and improving school with many good features. Since then it has changed very significantly as the number of pupils has grown. It has coped well with its growth, maintaining and, in most years, improving standards. Its improvement has been good. Criticisms of the curriculum in the previous report have been addressed to a large extent; however, pupils still do not attend a daily act of collective worship, and pupils who do not take information and communication technology (CT) in Years 10 and 11 are not assured of receiving their full entitlement to this area of the curriculum. Development and financial planning are now strengths of the school, and senior managers play an important role in linking with subjects areas as part of the school's evaluation processes. Although there are still variations in the quality of the teaching, it is better than it was six years ago, with very little that is now unsatisfactory.

STANDARDS

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

| Performance in: | compared with | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|------|------|-----------------|
| | all schools | | | similar schools |
| | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2002 |
| GCSE examinations | B | B | A | B |
| A-levels/AS-levels | B | C | * | |

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

* National comparisons for 2002 are not yet available

Standards in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2002 were well above average, as they have been in all recent years except 2001 when they were above average. English results have been above average and lower than science and mathematics. Over the last four years, standards have improved in line with the national trend. Pupils made good progress in relation to their attainment on entry to the school, though the gap between boys' attainment and that of girls is greater than that found nationally.

GCSE results in 2002 were well above average overall and showed a significant improvement on earlier years; as a result, the trend of improvement is above the national trend. Compared with their test scores two years earlier, pupils made very good progress overall. Although high attaining boys did particularly well, there was some underachievement amongst lower attaining boys; overall, the wider than average gap between boys and girls, noted in Year 9, is also apparent at GCSE. There are some variations between different subjects, though patterns over time are not consistent. ICT and business studies have performed particularly well, with the weakest results in design & technology. The school met its GCSE target in 2002. The target for 2003 is just as challenging and the school is just about on course to meet it. A-level results in 2002 were better than those in 2001. Moreover, in both years, most students made better than expected progress from their GCSE results.

Current standards are above average at the end of Year 9 and are well above average in mathematics and science. In some subjects where standards on entry were lower, present standards are average. However, in most cases, pupils are achieving well; in a few cases, where teaching is less strong, achievement amongst some pupils, particularly boys, is less good, often because of unsatisfactory behaviour. Standards at the end of Year 11 are also above average, and well above average in the separate science subjects, history, food and music; in several other subjects there is potential for standards to rise further before the end of the year. Overall, pupils are achieving well in Years 10 and 11.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

| Aspect | Comment |
|--------|---------|
|--------|---------|

| | |
|--|---|
| Attitudes to the school | Good. Most pupils enjoy school and know what is expected of them. They respond well in lessons and most want to do their best. |
| Behaviour, in and out of classrooms | Good. Nearly all pupils behave well or very well in lessons and around the school; there is misbehaviour in a few lessons, which disrupts learning. |
| Personal development and relationships | Very good. Relationships amongst pupils and with adults are very good. Pupils are friendly, open and pleasant young people. |
| Attendance | Very good and well above the national average. Unauthorised absence is low. |

Positive attitudes and very good relationships are notable features of the school. Most problems, including occasional instances of bullying, are dealt with promptly and effectively.

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 overall quality of teaching is good in all year groups. Differences in the quality of teaching usually reflect different teachers rather than different subjects or year groups, though teaching is somewhat stronger in the sixth form. It is good throughout the school in English, mathematics and science. The key skills of literacy and numeracy are well supported in the work of other subjects. Teachers typically have very good knowledge of the subjects, particularly in Years 10 to 13. In the best lessons they demonstrate their enthusiasm through well planned lessons that challenge and motivate pupils, encouraging their intellectual and creative development. High expectations and very good relationships are other factors that contribute to three-quarters of lessons seen during the inspection being judged good, very good or excellent. Only a small minority of lessons were judged to be less than satisfactory. Less successful teaching tends to be characterised by weaker classroom management and the neglecting of the differing needs of different groups of pupils in the class; as a result, pupils' learning suffers and they achieve less well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|--|
| The quality and range of the curriculum | Good overall. There is a broad range of subjects, which meet most pupils' needs. However, statutory requirements are not met for all pupils for ICT in Years 10 and 11. |
| Provision for pupils with special educational needs | Good. Teaching is very good for small withdrawal groups and sensitive support is given by teaching assistants. However, across the school, planning for special educational needs is inconsistent. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Provision for pupils with English as an additional language | Good. Most pupils whose home language is not English make good progress. Nearly all of them speak English fluently. |
| Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | Good in all these areas of pupils' personal development. Subjects show a good awareness of the need to foster these aspects of pupils' personal development. As a result, pupils are being well prepared to contribute fully as adults in the modern world. |
| How well the school cares for its pupils | Good. The school provides a caring environment in which all pupils are valued and well known to teachers. There are good procedures for child protection and welfare. |

Citizenship has been introduced successfully, and the course in personal, social and health education is valuable and, usually, is successfully taught. Inspectors are very concerned at the dangers faced by pupils as they negotiate through traffic on narrow roadways and car parks when they leave school. The school's partnership with parents is generally good with good quality information available. However, sometimes there are weaknesses in alerting parents sufficiently early when their children are under-performing in individual subjects or generally.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|---|
| Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff | Good overall. The headteacher provides very good educational direction and is well supported by the leadership team. There is a strong commitment by managers at all levels to raising standards. |
| How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities | Good. Governors bring a wide range of experience and expertise that benefit the school's development. They have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. |
| The school's evaluation of its performance | Good. The school has extensive data about its performance which is analysed fully. Not all subjects and teachers yet make full use of the information in their planning and teaching. |
| The strategic use of resources | Very good. There has been skilful use of funds, very well related to priorities for development. The school applies the principles of best value well. |

The school has experienced a period of significant difficulty in its staffing because of illness, staff promotions and other factors. These difficulties remain but are not as serious now. Positive strategies are already in place to recruit teachers for the next school year. Many staff are relatively new to the school and relatively inexperienced, but very good induction and support arrangements mean that they soon fit into the school and into its ethos. The school's external condition, which is the responsibility of the local educational authority, is shabby, and many parts of the building are 'tired', despite planned refurbishment, redecoration and many good displays. However, overall, accommodation and resources are satisfactory.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

| What pleases parents most | What parents would like to see improved |
|---|---|
| <p>The strongest questionnaire points, with at least 90 per cent support, were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's high expectations of the work pupils will do • The school's approachability when problems arise • The leadership and management of the school • The good progress pupils make • The way the school helps pupils become mature and responsible • Pupils' enjoyment of school | <p>Around a quarter to a third of parents expressed concerns on the questionnaire about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of information provided by the school about how individuals are getting on • The range of activities outside lessons • The way the school works with parents • The amount of homework set |

Comments from parents generally echoed the overall results of the questionnaire. Whilst most parents are supportive of the school, many thoughtful responses showed the frustrations of some parents in their perceptions of inconsistencies within the school, and in the quality of communications between the school and parents. Inspectors agree with the parents' positive views. References to inconsistencies have been made in this report. Homework is generally well used, though the quality of marking is variable. The range of activities outside lessons is good, though only a limited amount takes place during the short lunchtime. Overall information to parents is good, but sometimes identifying underachievement, and contacting of parents about it, is not done soon enough.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Numbers in the sixth form have risen significantly as numbers in the school have risen. There are now 131 students with more in Year 12 than in Year 13; about 60 per cent of Year 11 are now staying on to the sixth form. A good range of AS and A-level courses is offered, as well as an industry standard course in ICT, an advanced vocational course in business and an intermediate level GNVQ course in business. The number of courses available has risen in recent years and additions are planned for 2003. Apart from the GNVQ course, the normal entry requirement is five or more A*-C grades at GCSE. Attainment on entry is broadly average for sixth forms; one student has special educational needs. A small number do not speak English as their mother tongue.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

St Crispin's has a good sixth form which is cost-effective. Its presence enhances the life of the school generally, and most sixth formers are appreciative of the benefits it brings to them and their development. Overall, students' standards in the sixth form rise from average on entry to above average when they leave; their good achievement means that they obtain results better than would be expected from their standards on entry. Teaching and learning are good, with much that is very good or excellent. Sixth formers enjoy very good facilities for study and social recreation, and the leadership and management of the sixth form have a very clear view of ways forward to enhance opportunities for sixth formers in the future.

Strengths

- Students achieve well because of the good teaching they receive and the high levels of support provided by their teachers.
- Relationships are very good, and students have very positive mature attitudes.
- The sixth form is very well led and the curriculum is broad enough to meet most students' needs.
- There are very good opportunities for students' personal development, including taking responsibility and contributing to the wider school community.
- Students have a high opinion of their sixth form experiences.

What could be improved

- There are some gaps in the way attendance is monitored.
- Guidance about future options tends to be narrowly focused on higher education.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

| Curriculum area | Overall judgement about provision, with comment |
|-----------------|---|
| Mathematics | Good. Standards are above average with good achievement. Teaching is good, and often very good; lessons are well structured but do not always cater fully for the wide range of attainment in the classes. |

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Chemistry | Good. Teaching is good; the pace of learning is stimulating though learning objectives are not always emphasised enough. Students have very positive attitudes and standards are above average. |
| Economics | Very good. Students are achieving well above average standards because of very high quality teaching. The very good curriculum is enhanced by good links with the business community. |
| ICT | Very good. Standards are average but improving. Achievement is now good because the present very good teaching, with high quality guidance and relationships, is supporting individual students very well. |
| Physical education | Good. Achievement is good because students are well taught; standards are above average. Very good relationships also help learning, but the organisation of students' files holds back progress. |
| Art and design | Very good. Standards are above average and improving because of very good and excellent teaching, very good leadership and management, and the very positive attitudes of students. |
| History | Very good. The very good teaching is well planned and reflects very good subject knowledge and understanding of the way students learn. Standards are well above average with very good achievement. |
| English | Good. Standards are above average with good achievement. Teaching is good with very good relationships. Lessons are stimulating; students gain a good understanding of their set texts. |
| French | Good. Teaching is good with sustained use of French; students are mature and positive. As a result, achievement is good and standards are above average. |

Nearly all other sixth form courses, including general studies, were sampled. Standards are similar to subjects inspected in depth with most above average. Teaching and learning are good or very good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|--|
| How well students are guided and supported | Good. Procedures for assessing students' work are good, and the overall levels of support and guidance are good, helped by the very good relationships between students and their teachers. There is good careers advice, though for some students higher education is over-emphasised at the expense of other opportunities. |
| Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form | Very good. Senior staff and governors have a clear strategy for the development of the sixth form. The head of sixth form provides very good management of tutors and students, providing equality of opportunity for all students who can benefit from the courses; most subjects are well or very well led at sixth form level. Accommodation within the sixth form area is very good with plans for further enhancement of ICT and study facilities. Most subjects have adequate learning resources. |

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"> • Teachers are very accessible for help and advice • They enjoy the sixth form and recommend it to others • They are treated as responsible young adults and given good opportunities to take responsibility • The teaching is good • The school has helped them to settle well | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice about what to do after they leave • The range of activities and enrichments • Information about progress |

In conversations, sixth formers are very positive about the sixth form, the school generally and their experiences at the school. The inspectors agree with their views of the strengths of the sixth form. In these conversations, the concerns indicated in the questionnaire were not considered to be serious. There is a good range of activities and commendable opportunities for educational and cultural visits, and for other aspects of personal and social development. Although appropriate for most sixth formers, advice about future options focuses mainly on higher education with little on other options. Information about progress is generally good, but there are variations in the quality of the information and in the way assessment information is used to set targets that are helpful to students.

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

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Based on the results of the national tests at the end of Year 6 and cognitive ability tests (CATs) used by the school, pupils' standards on entry to the school are a bit above average overall, though still within the 'average' band. Standards have been similar overall for the last five years, though the overall position masks variations in different years in the proportions with particular scores. There have tended to be more pupils joining the school who are slightly above average than well above or well below average. Apart from 2002, English scores have been below those in mathematics and science. Differences between boys and girls on entry reflect national differences.
2. At the end of Year 9, results in the National Curriculum tests were well above average in 2002, as they have been in all recent years except 2001 when they were above average. Apart from results five years ago, which the school regards as freakish and unreliable, English results have been above average and lower than science and mathematics. The upward trend in results over the last four years has been in line with the national trend. The comparison with schools in a similar free schools meals category is unreliable because it does not accurately reflect the overall social and economic circumstances of pupils in the school; but, compared with their standards on entry, pupils have made good progress in recent years and are achieving well, though the gap between boys and girls has grown to be greater than the national difference.
3. GCSE results at the end of Year 11 in 2002 were well above average overall and showed a significant improvement on earlier years; as a result, the upward trend in improvement is above the national trend. Compared with their test scores two years earlier, pupils made very good progress overall and achieved very well. However, there have been variations in achievement both between different year groups in recent years and within year groups. In 2002, high achieving boys did particularly well, but there was some underachievement amongst lower attaining boys. Overall the gap between boys and girls was greater than that found nationally, though on entry it was no more than the national difference; this indicates that, overall, boys achieved less well than girls. Whilst the 2002 results showed very good achievement in Years 10 and 11, this was not the case in earlier years when achievement was satisfactory at the most.
4. There have been variations between different subjects in different recent years, though no clear patterns emerge. For example, pupils did less well in geography in 2002 than they did in their other subjects, but that was not the case in 2000 and 2001. In 2002, pupils did particularly well in ICT, business and chemistry compared with the other subjects they took, and less well in design & technology, art and double science. There has been a large gap between relative performance in science between those taking separate sciences who tend to do better in these subjects than in their other subjects and those taking double science who tend to do less well than in their other subjects. Results in the short course in religious education in 2002 were particularly notable with three-quarters gaining a higher grade from a very large entry.
5. In work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9, standards are above average overall and well above average in mathematics and science; however, in science, although levels of knowledge and understanding are high, standards in scientific enquiry are below average because too few whole investigations are undertaken. In most other subjects standards are above average showing good achievement in Years 7 to 9. Standards are average in art & design because many pupils come into the school with underdeveloped art and design skills, and standards in design & technology, geography, physical education are average with pupils achieving satisfactorily in Years 7 to 9. In modern foreign languages, standards are average, though achievement is good particularly because those beginning German in Year 8 are accelerating to the standards of first language learners. Standards in citizenship are average and are at the level that would be expected for a subject just introduced to the National Curriculum. Standards in drama are also average mainly because lack of continuity and shortage of time mean that that some pupils are not achieving as well as they would otherwise.

6. Whilst most pupils achieve well because of the high expectations teachers have of the work pupils will do, there are occasions when some pupils are underachieving. This is usually related to weaker teaching and management of pupils. Where there is misbehaviour, almost invariably there is underachievement, particularly amongst those who are misbehaving but also, sometimes, amongst others whose learning is disrupted. This underachievement is most prevalent amongst boys, especially average and below average attainers, though it does apply to some other pupils as well. Because these problems are sometimes not picked up soon enough, they get worse and there is some evidence that, when something is done, it involves putting pupils into a lower set; this does not solve the problem because these pupils are then not being challenged with work that is appropriate for their abilities and the situation deteriorates still further. As this problem affects more boys than girls, it is one reason why the gap in attainment and achievement between boys and girls increases in Years 7 to 9.
7. Generally, pupils are making good progress in extending their knowledge and understanding and in improving their literacy and numeracy skills. The good literacy and very good numeracy policies for promoting these skills ensure that most subject areas take their responsibilities in developing basic skills seriously; as a result, overall standards are above average in Years 7 to 9. These above average standards of literacy and numeracy continue into Years 10 and 11. The development of ICT skills is more variable, though very considerably improved from the position at the last inspection. In ICT lessons, attainment is above average with good achievement, but the use of ICT to support other subjects depends on how much use is made of computers. Whilst use is very good, for example, in music, it is unsatisfactory in art & design. Overall achievement in ICT across the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. It is good in Years 10 and 11 for most pupils who take ICT courses and can apply their knowledge and skills across the curriculum, but it is too variable for those who don't have the same opportunities. Pupils with special educational needs are making good progress in Years 7 to 9, and some individuals make very good progress both in their academic work and in their attitudes to work. In Years 7 to 9, pupils with English as an additional language achieve broadly in line with other pupils, with isolated examples of underachievement.
8. Standards in work seen by the end of Year 11 are also above average and well above average in the separate science subjects, history, food and music. From standards in the core subjects that were in the middle of the 'above average' category at the end of Year 9 in 2001, pupils have been making good progress overall, and there is potential for standards to rise further before the end of the year so that the school will meet its target with overall results again likely to be just into the 'well above average' category. Achievement, therefore, in Year 11 is good, and this sort of achievement is also occurring in Year 10.
9. Whilst overall achievement is good and standards are at least above average in most subjects, there are considerable variations both within subjects and between subjects. This is usually related to the quality of teaching and to pupils' attitudes to the subject or lessons. For example, in design & technology, overall standards are average with satisfactory achievement, but standards are well above average in food and above average in textiles as levels of motivation and enthusiasm are higher. Overall standards in modern foreign languages are average with satisfactory achievement, partly because of earlier staffing difficulties which have affected standards over the last two years; however, there have been some notable successes, especially the achievements of lower attaining boys. Experiments with single gender groups, changes to the course that is taught and the allocation of more experienced teachers to underachieving groups have led to significant improvements in standards by some boys and to their experiencing success in their language work. The well above average standards in history result from the ways in which pupils increasingly show independence in following lines of enquiry, use their knowledge to analyse and explain events, and structure their written work coherently. The picture in science is mixed, with well above average standards in the separate science subjects, but with a marked contrast in achievement between those doing separate science subjects, where achievement is good, and those doing the double science course, where achievement is unsatisfactory. In these classes, pupils are less clear about essential ideas, whereas others show a depth and breadth in

their understanding. In mathematics, a lack of concentration by some pupils, especially boys, is the main reason why some achieve less well than others.

10. Pupils with English as an additional language or with special educational needs continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11, particularly when there is additional support; in some cases, the value of the support would be greater if there was the continuity of having the same support assistant for each lesson. Many pupils with special educational needs achieve well and take a full range of GCSEs.

Sixth form

11. The minimum entry requirement for students taking advanced level courses in the sixth form is five GCSEs at A*-C. Of course, many students have much higher qualifications, but, overall, levels of attainment on entering the sixth form are broadly average in relation to the starting points of students embarking on advanced courses nationally. Those taking the GNVQ intermediate business course have lower qualifications which are also broadly average for those embarking on this and similar courses nationally. At the time of writing, complete national comparisons for 2002 are not available, but information provided by the school indicates very positive 'value added' between students' GCSE results in 2000 and their A2 results in 2002, with overall results significantly higher than 2001. Overall results in each of the three years to 2001 were broadly average, but, as in 2002, the value added picture for the 2001 results was also very positive. Encouragingly, this good, and often very good, achievement is found right across the ability spectrum with many students with very different starting points achieving equally well in relation to their respective starting points. Over a number of years, there have been variations in performance between different subjects, but none show any particular cause for concern; in many cases, the number of entries has been too small for reliable statistical conclusions to be drawn.
12. The positive picture shown by examination results is confirmed by inspection evidence with most students achieving well because of the good teaching they receive and the high levels of support provided by their teachers. Standards in subjects inspected in depth are above average; in history, they are well above average in Year 13 and, in French, they are average in Year 13 but above average in the much larger group in Year 12. Achievement is very good in history. It is also very good in art where students are rapidly moving forward from lower starting points and in economics where students are progressing quickly in this new subject area. The successful achievement by most students is reflected in the completion of their courses by virtually all students. Very few leave their courses during the year or, in the case of advanced level students, at the end of Year 12. The GNVQ course is similarly successful in retaining students for its one year duration; it is a relevant course that provides a good progressive pathway for some students after Year 11, and there can be good progression forward on to the advanced vocational business course afterwards for a number of students.
13. Students progress well in many areas of their academic work as a result of the good teaching and their very positive attitudes. There is a rigour to both their written and oral work as they develop their knowledge and understanding to cope with more demanding intellectual studies. For example, in English, most students can speak about their texts in a mature and adult manner, expressing their views clearly. In history, students produce well-balanced arguments with very good command of analytical skills. Most develop their research skills well, showing increasing independence in their learning and often using the Internet successfully in their research, though the use of ICT to support learning is variable in quality. Whilst the standard of essays and notes is generally above average, some students do not extend themselves beyond topics studied for examinations and sometimes, for a few students, weaknesses in their organisation and in the presentation of their files hold back progress over time. Overall, however, sixth formers are achieving well.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

14. Overall, pupils' attitudes to the school are good. The majority of pupils like the school and reflect this in their attitudes to their work. In lessons they listen carefully and show that they want to learn and do well. These pupils have good levels of concentration. They are well motivated, focus on the task in hand and make an effort to work at a good pace without wasting time. This interest and keenness was a feature in many lessons observed during the course of the inspection, for example in music lessons. There is however, a minority of pupils, mainly younger boys, who find listening difficult and bother to concentrate only for short periods. This minority is not well motivated, shows a lack of interest in written work and attains lower standards.
15. Standards of behaviour are almost always good in lessons. Pupils are friendly and polite. They know what is expected of them and respond well to the discipline of classroom routines. Whilst virtually all pupils behave well when they are well taught, the poorly motivated minority of pupils referred to above can be obstructive if not firmly managed and can take advantage of weaker teaching to misbehave. Standards of behaviour as pupils move around the school are also good, though slightly less so than in lessons. Pupils are usually considerate and patient in crowded areas such as stairs. There is little oppressive behaviour, although cases of bullying do occur. Most pupils are aware of the effect that their actions can have on others. The level of exclusions is low for a school of this size and reflects the good attitudes and behaviour and the very good relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and adults.
16. The quality of relationships is very good; they are a particular feature of the school and a significant aid to successful learning. In many lessons seen during the course of the inspection, very good relationships between pupils and teachers were noted as a factor in the success of the lesson. Pupils respond well to the opportunities that the school provides for their personal development. They appreciate the help and encouragement that they are given by their teachers. Several pupils interviewed mentioned how useful they had found their work experience. Co-operation between pupils is very good: pupils get on well among themselves and work well together in pairs and groups. They also take advantage of the opportunities which group work gives them to take responsibility for organising their own learning, for example in physical education lessons.
17. Attendance in the school is very good, well above average for schools nationally. The rate of attendance for the academic year 2001/2002 was 94.8 per cent compared with 91 per cent nationally. Authorised absence was 4.6 per cent compared with 7.8 per cent nationally. Unauthorised absence was 0.6 per cent compared with 1.2 per cent. These very good rates of attendance contribute to the standards that pupils attain and indicate that, in most cases, pupils believe that their education is a worthwhile experience.
18. Attitudes were also considered good in the previous inspection report, but both the quality of relationships and the level of attendance have improved since then. The strong provision for pupils' personal development results in these good attitudes and behaviour and in the very good relationships and levels of attendance.

Sixth form

19. Sixth form students have particularly good attitudes to the school and to the work that they do there. They are highly motivated. Students enjoy being in the sixth form and want to take part in as much as possible. In lessons, students join in eagerly in discussions and activities. They co-operate very well with each other. Students are take care in the way in which they present their work. They have a mature approach to their studies and have developed the skills that they need to work independently so they can make good use of the time allotted for private study. All students are expected to spend time helping others, whether within the school or the wider community. They are ready to take the responsibility of these opportunities which include acting as prefects, 'friendly faces' for younger pupils or as drugs counsellors taking PSHE lessons. Students also do much charitable work. Relations in the sixth form are very good, as in the main school. Students get on well among themselves and appreciate the help and support that they are given by their teachers and tutors. Attendance is good.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20. Teaching has improved since the last inspection. It is good throughout the school and in the sixth form, though it is somewhat stronger in the sixth form. There are, however, significant differences between the best and the weakest teaching. However, excluding the sixth form, in nearly seven out of every ten lessons, teaching was judged good or better, with nearly three in ten being very good or excellent. Excellent teaching was seen in one English lesson in Year 7 and another in Year 11, a geography lesson in Year 9 and another in Year 10, a Year 7 ICT lesson, a music lesson in Year 9 and an art lesson in Year 10. Unsatisfactory or poor teaching was seen in six out of the 136 lessons observed in Years 7 to 11 – between four and five per cent. Whilst this is a relatively small proportion, a number of other lessons had weaknesses that restricted learning to barely satisfactory. Tackling inconsistencies in the quality of teaching so that all aspires to that of the best will ensure further improvement in the learning and achievements of pupils.
21. There is a very close link between the quality of teaching and learning; one of the major strengths of much of the teaching is teachers' subject knowledge. This often inspires pupils through the teachers' infectious enthusiasm. This is notable, for example, in the best lessons in art and music where individual support and expert advice raise pupils' aspirations. On the few occasions when teachers are less secure in their subject knowledge or less confident in their approaches to the subject, this has a noticeably negative impact on learning.
22. In most lessons, teachers manage pupils well and establish good, productive relationships. Indeed, the high quality of relationships is a major factor in helping most pupils to achieve as well as they do. Teachers also have high expectations of what pupils will achieve. As a result, most pupils have good attitudes to learning. Where teachers have high expectations, their lessons are invariably well-planned with a variety of teaching styles and learning methods that engage pupils' attention, resulting in a fast pace of learning and the rapid development of creative and intellectual skills.
23. Less successful teaching is often characterised by weaker classroom management and less effective planning, which usually means that the needs of different groups of pupils are not sufficiently catered for. There is a tendency in some lessons for teachers to rely too much on setting arrangements to provide, in themselves, sufficient means to cater for different groups, whereas, in practice, there is often a wide range of attainment within a set. The situation is sometimes made worse by the placing of higher attainers in lower sets because of their poor behaviour rather than because they are unable to cope with the work in the higher set. If such pupils, usually boys, are not sufficiently challenged, they usually react to their boredom by disruptive behaviour. The failure to successfully meet the needs of all pupils within a class is the single most important factor in adversely affecting learning and, hence, the achievement of some pupils. The swift identification of these problems when they first arise, typically amongst lower attaining boys in Years 7 and 8, and the adoption of positive strategies involving the class teacher, subject manager, tutor, head of year and parents is the key to the effective teaching and learning of such pupils.
24. Homework is generally well used by teachers to support learning. Sometimes, however, it is merely used to finish off work, rather than an opportunity to take learning further forward and provide different and challenging tasks for different groups of pupils. When the latter occurs, pupils' learning proceeds rapidly. The same applies to marking and the checking of pupils' progress in files and notebooks. Pupils learn best when they are challenged by stimulating teaching, and when their work is marked in ways that indicates clearly what they can do and what they need to do to improve further. This often happens, but some teachers' marking is less good than their teaching and there are a few teachers whose lack of rigour in both teaching and the checking of work means that pupils lose motivation and their learning suffers. Some teachers, whilst conscientious about marking and testing, are less good at checking understanding on an ongoing basis in lessons; this means that a lack of understanding or underachievement are not picked up immediately. When the work is marked or the test is done, it may be done retrospectively and too late for remedial action to be taken.

25. The school has begun to use the Key Stage 3 National Strategy to improve the structure of lessons, and to develop students' literacy, numeracy and thinking skills. The school policies have raised teachers' awareness, and most teachers make good arrangements to teach literacy skills because they acknowledge its importance. Teachers have good guidelines for teaching numeracy skills, but there is some inconsistency in the application of the guidelines. Teachers are increasingly using ICT with pupils to support their learning. Although its use is very much better than it used to be, there are still many areas where pupils are missing opportunities to apply ICT skills in their learning and to benefit from an alternative approach. In mathematics, for example, its use is inconsistent, and, with only one computer in art & design, there is a lack of opportunity for pupils to use ICT to enhance their work. In science there is relatively little use. However, some use is made in history, and, in modern foreign languages, the use of computers is well established as a regular feature of teaching, contributing, amongst other things, to the successful teaching of lower attaining pupils.
26. A small number of pupils are withdrawn from classes for extra tuition for literacy and study skills in very small groups. Teaching in these groups is very good due to the teachers' specialist knowledge, very good assessment and individual programmes of work. Pupils learn well and make good progress because teachers check that the skills they have learned transfer to their work in other lessons. In full sized classes, pupils with special educational needs or with English as an additional language learn best when the teacher has identified these pupils, draws attention to new vocabulary, encourages a range of methods for recording work, gives a model of the type of answer required, and uses a variety of visual aids and lively activities with the pupils. Planning for pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language is very good in geography lessons in Year 10. Less successful lessons occur when pupils' special educational needs have not been identified in the planning, or literacy demands are high or when the lesson is so centred on the teacher that the learning support assistants are under-used.
27. Pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need are funded to have a learning support assistant in class with them for several hours each week. They give sensitive support, and promote independence. Although some are highly qualified, their impact on pupils' learning is sometimes reduced because support for individual pupils is fragmented and opportunities are missed for planning ahead of lessons. This is because they are not attached to either pupils or subjects, partly because they are mostly part-time.
28. There are many examples of very successful and less successful teaching in the subject reports. A few specific examples here illustrate the best practice that is found in the school. A highly challenging painting project on the theme of 'metamorphosis' brought out the very best in a class of Year 10 pupils taking art and design. A brisk reminder of the aims and objectives involved questions using prompts to ensure pupils' understanding. Their very positive responses showed that they had prepared ideas from earlier lessons, and knew how to research, analyse and evaluate the work of artists and their own work. They made excellent progress in the lesson because of the teacher's support and challenge and their commitment to their work. The teacher's excellent relationships with the pupils, her excellent use of time to give individual advice ensured that not a moment was wasted; all pupils were absorbed in their work throughout the lesson. An excellent Year 9 geography lesson about the nature of crimes in the community also started very briskly with the teacher setting the aims of the lesson and actively involving all pupils from the beginning. The teacher's excellent management of pupils, the great variety of activities and the excellent provision for pupils of different abilities in the class meant that pupils stayed on their tasks very well, sustained their levels of concentration and went forward at a very rapid rate. The use of the whiteboard, paired work, extra work for higher attainers, the use of glossaries for lower attainers and constant checking of progress by moving round the class and questioning pupils' understanding ensured excellent learning by all pupils. Marking of books was also excellent with appropriate correction of grammar and evaluation of the content of pupils' work.
29. A very different but equally outstanding lesson was taught by a visiting music teacher to two pupils learning to play the electric guitar. The lesson was well-organised, the choice of music appealed to the pupils and motivated them, and the teacher used his own very good specialist skills very effectively to demonstrate techniques. He also played with the pupils to create the sense of

performance for them. A tremendous amount was packed into 30 minutes with excellent pace and real improvement in performance. A Year 7 ICT lesson saw excellent learning by pupils about spreadsheets related to a project on tuckshops. There was very good questioning using a 'what happens if ...' technique, skilful use of the whiteboard, and very well organised practical work with individuals supported very well. Higher attainers had worthwhile extension tasks and the teacher was fully aware of the needs of lower attainers and two pupils with special educational needs. The excellent structure of the lesson enabled pupils to progress briskly at their appropriate levels and apply their knowledge and understanding independently. A Year 11 English lesson using an anthology of poetry was excellent mainly because of the teacher's very high expectations of pupils in a middle ability set. There was much variety in the pupils' activities, but a great strength was also the work the teacher did with the whole class, including reading some poems with expression and sensitivity, questioning pupils in a stimulating manner, and moving on a fast pace. A worksheet helped pupils' understanding when they worked in pairs, and the teacher also helped individuals and groups with humour, patience and graphic description. Above all, the teacher made pupils think about the poems. By the end of the lesson, pupils had made rapid strides in their understanding of the poems and of some of the issues the poems raised about contemporary society.

Sixth form

30. Teaching is good in the sixth form. It is good in all the subjects that were inspected, except art & design, economics and history where it is very good. Teaching was good or very good in individual lessons in subjects that were sampled. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen, and in only four out of 45 lessons observed in the sixth form was teaching judged less than good. In 16 lessons, it was judged very good or better, with three of these, one in each of art & design, history and physical education, being judged excellent.
31. Very good subject knowledge is at the heart of most teaching and this helps to build students' confidence. Teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm means that students' intellectual curiosity is stimulated and their understanding is thorough. This was very evident in a particularly good Year 13 mathematics lesson on the intersection of lines. The teacher was confident and knew his subject very well. Questions were very searching and the enthusiastic teaching, with obvious enjoyment of the subject, conveyed the fascination of mathematics to the students. The pace of learning was very good and the very good teaching techniques led to very good learning.
32. Teachers give students very good support and advice and create very good relationships. This means that students trust and respect their teachers and develop very positive attitudes. The quality of assessment and feedback is generally good. Much work is thoroughly marked and students are usually given detailed, helpful comments which help their learning significantly. In economics, students are well informed about the progress they are making on their courses, and students' work is very well monitored and assessed in English literature and chemistry.
33. Planning is a key factor in the quality of teaching, contributing much to the pace of learning. For example, in an excellent physical education lesson on factors affecting performance, a very good video clip gave a very focused start to the lesson, followed by a short quiz to motivate pupils and set the tone for the lesson. The lively approach with many different methods and excellent use of resources stimulated the students to high levels of learning even though it was the last lesson of the day. An important factor in the planning was creating many opportunities for students to be actively involved in their learning, developing their independence and self-evaluation. Encouraging students to be independent learners is a feature of much of the best teaching; in French, for example, students are encouraged to use the Internet regularly to research information for topics of the course.
34. The best lessons also encourage independent thinking and intellect challenge. This was well illustrated in an excellent history lesson when students debated the challenging motion 'Did Lenin beget Stalinism?' The debate generated much enthusiasm with lots of detailed knowledge aiding coherent and consistent arguments. The lesson gave excellent opportunities for debate which the teacher handled very effectively, stepping in only to channel the debate and encourage discussion.

35. There are few weaknesses in the teaching. In some subjects, such as art & design and chemistry, there is little use of ICT to support learning, though its use is effective in economics and French. Sometimes learning objectives are not emphasised enough by teachers. In some subjects, students are not yet sufficiently involved in assessing their own performance nor in identifying clear targets for improvement. Whilst there are many good examples of students' taking their own learning forward rapidly, sometimes they are not sufficiently encouraged to think and research independently. Overall, however, teaching is a strength of the sixth form, which, when coupled with the very good relationships and students' very positive attitudes, leads to good and often very good learning.

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

36. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is good. It meets the statutory requirements for teaching all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. The curriculum is enhanced through the provision of drama for all pupils and a second foreign language for some pupils. The value of drama is weakened by problems of continuity because it only occurs once in the fortnightly timetable cycle. The quality and range of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is sound; overall it meets the learning needs of nearly all pupils, with courses in business, child development and drama extending the range of courses beyond the National Curriculum subjects. In practice, all higher attaining pupils take three sciences; this means some restrictions in choice for pupils. Opportunities for pupils to choose courses, for example, in the humanities or in modern foreign languages are reduced, particularly if, in order to take ICT, it is one of the choices. Those taking three sciences who do not take ICT as one of their optional subjects do not always receive their full statutory entitlement to ICT Years 10 and 11, and those taking double science in Year 10 are unable to take a full course in ICT, though all do take the GCSE short course. These arrangements reduce the flexibility of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11; whilst the school's arrangements to advise pupils are good and some pupils take a very large number of subjects at GCSE, for some pupils, with particular needs and aspirations, the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 has some restrictions, and the school does not fully meet statutory requirements for ICT.
37. Although separate curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is relatively limited, no pupils with special educational needs are disapplied from the National Curriculum and, since the last inspection, there are more opportunities since the GNVQ business course was introduced. Indeed the quality of business courses at all levels in the school makes a very valuable contribution to the overall curriculum of the school and to the educational experiences of pupils and students who take the courses. There is evidence that exceptional arrangements are made on occasions to meet the particular needs of some pupils, but there are a few pupils in Years 10 and 11 who still have literacy difficulties and would benefit from a course more tailored to their needs.
38. Strategies for the effective teaching of literacy and numeracy skills are good with thorough policies in both areas which, generally, are being well implemented. Detailed sections about the school's provision for, and standards in, literacy and numeracy are found, respectively, in the English and mathematics sections of this report.
39. The school's arrangements for teaching personal, social and health education (PSHE) are good. A weekly period for all pupils, taught by tutors, makes good provision for sex and relationships education, issues of drugs misuse, careers education and aspects of citizenship. The curriculum is carefully planned and the sequence of topics is well matched to pupils' learning needs.
40. The school makes good provision for work-related education. The careers education element of the PSHE course ensures that pupils are well prepared for the decisions they need to make at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils have good access to careers guidance through the Connexions service and the school provides useful material to help pupils with individual career planning. Work experience is very well planned and organised so that pupils make the most of their placements.

41. The school's links with the community are good. Links with business and industry, such as local construction and ICT companies, provide good support for teaching and learning in the school. In business studies, for example, pupils benefit from visits to firms and speakers coming into school. Links with partner institutions are sound. Relationships with partner primary schools are good but links to ensure curriculum continuity are under-developed.
42. Provision for extra-curricular activities is good. The lunchtime homework club and GCSE revision classes, near the time of the examinations, give pupils good opportunities to consolidate and extend their learning. They also have good extra-curricular opportunities in music and drama through participation in rehearsals, concerts and productions. The physical education department provides a wide range of activities at lunchtime and after school; about one fifth of all pupils take part in these activities. A Christian Union group meets each week and a group of Year 11 pupils has just completed a six-week after school baby-sitting course. Most subjects arrange relevant educational visits to extend pupils' learning. Study and recreational visits abroad give some exceptional opportunities for some pupils to widen their experiences.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

43. The provision for pupils' personal development is good. The very good relationships in the school provide a supportive context for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. An audit of the ways in which different subjects can contribute to personal development has raised teachers' awareness of these aspects of pupils' education. Good improvement has taken place since the previous inspection, especially in the areas of spiritual and cultural development. However, the school has not yet refined its policy or identified gaps in provision.
44. The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual development. Many subjects provide good opportunities to develop spiritual awareness and insights. Pupils extend their thinking about beliefs and values when studying texts in English or topics like the First World War and the Holocaust in history and religious education. Work in art and music enables pupils to reflect on what they see and hear, as well as responding to topics in a personal way through their own creative work. Assemblies also make a good contribution by encouraging pupils to reflect on topics relevant to their own interests and experience. In one assembly pupils were encouraged to consider the implications of war for those who might be involved, and in another to reflect on the power and importance of sharing. Pupils attend one or two assemblies a week; not all contain an act of worship and, as no other arrangements are made, the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met.
45. Provision for pupils' moral development is good. The behaviour policy and the daily routines of the school successfully promote positive values, and help pupils distinguish right from wrong. Pupils have good opportunities to consider ethical issues and moral dilemmas in subjects such as English and the humanities. Work in PSHE, and in religious education helps pupils clarify their own moral values and think through some of the choices they will need to make in life.
46. Pupils' social development is also good. Pupils have many opportunities to develop social and collaborative skills in lessons, for example when working in pairs or small groups. Pupils are also given good opportunities to take on responsibility and show initiative. Year Councils, made up of elected representatives from each tutor group, contribute ideas and suggestions to the main School Council. In some years, social committees help tutors organise events such as discos, ice-skating and bowling. Pupils collect money for charity on a regular basis and organise a wide range of fund-raising activities. In the autumn term the school raised £1200 for cancer research.
47. Good provision for pupils' cultural development, including preparing them for life in a multicultural Britain, enriches their learning. Opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of different cultures in this country and overseas are well provided in subjects such as English, music, art, modern foreign languages and the humanities. For example, pupils learn about aspects of Asian culture through work in music and about pre-colonial African society in history. Cultural interests and horizons are extended through the school's good extra-curricular programme of sport, music,

drama and other activities. Pupils are also given a wide range of opportunities to go on educational visits in this country and on trips and visits abroad.

Educational inclusion

48. There are a very small number of settled travellers and children looked after by the local authority. Although there is a higher than average number of pupils identified as having English as an additional language, there are no refugees. There are very good procedures to ensure inclusion. Data on achievement is analysed by race and gender as well as for minority groups and this allows under-achievement to be identified. There is no evidence of any race inequality, and pupils whose home language is not English are well supported, with a deputy head taking the lead in ensuring appropriate provision. However, there is evidence of under-achievement of boys in some subjects in Years 7 to 9, related to behaviour and attitude, and this issue is a major challenge for the school. Data on the progress of pupils with special needs has been collected and is analysed by the special needs co-ordinator.
49. There are very few exclusions. This is because pupils with behavioural difficulties are supported well by the pastoral system, the special educational needs department and a peripatetic Behaviour Support Team, which has provided training for staff. However, there is some evidence that bottom sets in some subjects contain some pupils with behavioural rather than academic difficulties. This is unsatisfactory because the work in these sets is sometimes not sufficiently matched to the needs of these pupils, often exacerbating the behavioural problems, increasing under-achievement and disrupting the learning of pupils who are properly placed in these sets.
50. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and useful strategies have been circulated to subjects. There is no longer a co-ordinator and this has led to inconsistency in subjects' provision. Provision is very good in the history department and is an example of good practice worthy of adoption at whole school level.
51. The older parts of the school do not give access to pupils with physical disabilities. The school has yet to prepare a plan to conform with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act.

Sixth form

52. The quality and range of learning opportunities in the sixth form are good and the curriculum meets statutory requirements. There is a good range of AS- and A-level subjects which is gradually being extended as the size of the sixth form increases; media studies were introduced this year and drama is being offered for first time next year. The school also offers business courses both at GNVQ intermediate level and at AVCE level; these courses provide good continuity of provision from Years 10 and 11. The provision of a network managers' course is a good response to local needs where ICT skills are in great demand. The school works hard to make the best arrangements possible for students to follow courses that meet their individual needs and interests.
53. The school makes good provision for enrichment activities in the sixth form. The general studies course, which is taken by all students and includes provision for religious education, helps to widen their knowledge and understanding of contemporary issues. The weekly personal and social education lesson also extends their learning and supports their personal development well. Students have appropriate access to careers guidance. There is good provision of information on continuing education and links with higher education institutions are strong; however, provision of information for students who may not wish to continue with formal education is less strong as there is an assumption that progression further within education is the norm.
54. The provision for students' personal development is good. A large number of subjects make a positive contribution to students' spiritual and moral development. In English, for example, teaching on literature and poetry contributes well to this aspect of students' education, as does work on philosophy and ethics in religious studies. The general studies course raises students'

awareness of ethical issues and moral dilemmas through work on topics such as globalisation and the power of big business.

55. Students' social and cultural development is well supported and extended through the provision of a wide range of opportunities and activities. Community service, undertaken by sixth formers within the main school, provides them with particularly good opportunities to take responsibility and show initiative. They organise a homework club for younger pupils at lunchtime and help in some lessons. For example, in a Year 8 PSHE lesson trained sixth formers taught a very effective lesson on issues of drugs misuse. Some sixth form students are also trained to provide a counselling service for pupils. Students have responsibility for organising the School Council and the Charity Committee, as well as undertaking prefect duties around the school. Students' cultural interests and horizons are successfully extended through participation in the school's extra-curricular programme of music, drama and sport. Students are also able to go on a wide range of educational visits, such as the sixth form trip to Russia or the visit to Euro Disney in Paris by the business studies students. Last year a group of sixth formers went on a World Challenge expedition to Mexico.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

56. The school works hard to provide a safe environment for pupils and standards of care in the school are good. However, the exits, car parks and roads at the front of the school cause serious safety hazards for pupils and students as they leave at the end of the school day.
57. New pupils are given lots of help to settle in: induction procedures are particularly thorough. Pupils interviewed commented that, despite initial apprehension, they settled in quickly. There is also a successful separate, longer, programme designed to help vulnerable pupils adjust to secondary school life. Tutors and heads of year know pupils well. Their knowledge also contributes to the good standards of care in the school.
58. Routine procedures to ensure pupils' health and safety in the school are good. Despite some difficulties caused by the age and condition of the buildings, there are few serious problems. The hazards faced by pupils as they leave the school are far more serious. Vehicles and pedestrians are not separated: there is limited visibility when pupils come out of school and they have to traverse roadways and a car park of moving vehicles making their way onto the main road.
59. The school has very good procedures to promote and monitor attendance. The electronic registration of all lessons allows pastoral and office staff to monitor attendance very thoroughly at all times. Good attendance levels are rewarded. These procedures contribute to the well above average levels of attendance in the school, which, in turn, enable pupils to do well. There are good procedures in place for child protection. As part of these, both a female and a male teacher have been trained. In addition to written guidance, all staff are briefed on procedures. The school's procedures to promote and monitor behaviour are very good. In the course of the past year these procedures were reviewed, with the specific aim of achieving greater consistency in the way teachers use them. There are clear stages for both the rewards given for good work and behaviour and the sanctions imposed for unacceptable behaviour. Considered overall, these procedures work well (despite some inconsistencies in application) and contribute to the good standards of behaviour in lessons and around the school.
60. Pupils' personal development is effectively monitored by tutors and heads of year. Planners are generally used well as part of this process. But, although most tutors monitor pupils' planners regularly, the use made of tutor time apart from this is very variable. Some periods consist mainly of social chat, others follow a more structured programme. Moreover, while the monitoring of individual pupils' personal development is largely effective, it is not integrated with the monitoring of their academic progress. That monitoring is currently the responsibility of subject departments and faculties. There is as yet no system to track academic progress across all subjects throughout the school year and link this to personal progress, behaviour and attendance. This lack of integration means that the school does not always identify under-achievement – that is when pupils are not doing as well as they should and could – early enough. The school recognises the

need to integrate these two types of monitoring. The absence of a joint system of monitoring means that the quality of academic and personal support and guidance can be no more than satisfactory.

61. Overall procedures for assessing pupils' attainment on entry and throughout their time in the school, and for analysing outcomes, are good; assessment information is used satisfactorily to guide curricular planning. However, the procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress on a day-to-day basis are unsatisfactory, partly because of weaknesses in some subject areas and partly because tutors and pastoral staff are not involved in a detailed way in monitoring academic progress and taking effective action. The school's assessment policy allows each subject to define its own assessment procedures and marking systems as long as they conform to certain requirements for whole school monitoring, and ensure compliance with statutory requirements. Most subjects have established good procedures, and they are very good within the special educational needs department. However, in mathematics and design & technology, the procedures are unsatisfactory.
62. In most subjects, the use of assessment to help in planning the pupils' work is at least satisfactory; in a few subjects, such as history, it is good, and it is very good in English and in special educational needs withdrawal lessons. In science and technology it is insufficiently used to influence curricular planning. The school has good central systems for recording pupils' academic performance. There is good analysis of assessment data to identify differences in the achievement of pupils, including by gender and ethnicity and also the performance of those pupils for whom English is an additional language. In subject areas there is also good practice in subjects such as physical education and modern foreign languages and very good practice in English. However in three major subjects, mathematics, science and design & technology, the monitoring of pupils' performance is unsatisfactory. In mathematics, assessment is not done sufficiently frequently; in technology the procedures are weak and marking is inconsistent; in science there is insufficient tracking of pupils' progress. With a few notable exceptions where practice is good, there is insufficient linkage to the National Curriculum assessment levels for pupils to know how well they are doing in relation to national standards. Furthermore, as stated above, tutors and heads of year do not, at present, play a sufficiently active role in obtaining an overview of pupils' progress in all subjects. The overall result is that, particularly in Years 7 to 9, underachievement is not identified early enough. However, the valuable good practice already being undertaken by some individual heads of year can provide a firm basis for future developments in the school's procedures.

Sixth form

Assessment

63. Assessment in the sixth form is good. Effective procedures are in place and these are well used to help in planning work that matches the individual needs of the students. A good level of individual attention means that the students' progress is well monitored. Assessment data is analysed and used to set targets and a good level of advice and guidance given. In English particularly, the assessment procedures and quality of advice and guidance are very good.

Advice, support and guidance

64. Students in the sixth form receive good advice, support and guidance. They are well prepared in Year 11 before deciding on courses, whether in the school or elsewhere. They are given plenty of information before applying. It includes a presentation for parents. All prospective students are interviewed. A three-day induction course is an important part of this preparation with taster lessons, team-work exercises and study skills. This induction helps students to settle quickly and very few students leave after the start of courses. There is good support too for students during their time in the sixth form. Individual discussions with tutors, timed to follow reports, help them to follow their progress. Students have a further interview with the head of the sixth form when they transfer from AS to A2 courses. There is good provision for personal support through the routine lunchtime sessions with the head and deputy head of the sixth form. At present are some

inconsistencies in the way in which attendance is recorded which leads to uncertainties in monitoring attendance. Because it is not always clear when students are in school, it is not always possible to ensure consistency in the overall quality of support offered to students. There is an assumption that students will continue into higher education and the guidance available presumes that students will follow this course. Those who do get good advice. There is extensive briefing on UCAS applications and preparation for life at university. The guidance for students who do not intend to continue in education is more limited; this means that they are not always sufficiently aware of all the options that are open to them.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

65. As at the time of the previous inspection, the school has a good partnership with parents. A large majority of parents think well of the school and what it provides for their children. However their support is tempered by concerns in some areas, usually caused by what some parents perceive as inconsistent practices. More parents than is usual returned the pre-inspection questionnaire and attended the meeting for parents. Most of these parents consider that their children like the school, that they are expected to work hard and that they make good progress there. Parents believe that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible. These parents say that they are happy to approach the school should problems arise. They also consider that the school is well led and managed. Some parents – between a quarter and a third of those who returned the questionnaire - have some concerns. They do not think that their children receive the right amount of homework. They do not consider that the school works closely with them or that they get good information about how their children are getting on. They think that the range of activities outside lessons is limited. Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. The amount of homework set is generally appropriate, though the way it is marked varies: not all marking is equally useful. There is a good range of activities outside lessons, though only a limited number of these take place during the short lunch period. Contact with parents and the information given to them is, on balance, good. However, sometimes the school does not identify when pupils are not doing as well as they should be nor tell parents about this soon enough. A parents' evening in the latter part of the school year may be too late for effective joint action by the school and parents to rectify the position.
66. Considered overall, the links which the school has developed with parents are good. It does endeavour to keep parents well informed of events at the school. This is achieved by an annual calendar, newsletters, letters from the headteacher, and an increasing use of the school website. Educational evenings for parents are held to cover specific topics, for example, drugs education or entry to the sixth form. The Parent Teachers Association (PTA) provides a forum for consultation in addition to running fund-raising events. The school seeks parents' views at the start of Year 7 and surveys them again at the end of the year to see if their expectations have been met. There is good general information. Both the prospectus and the governors' annual report contain much useful information about the school. The information that parents receive about their children's progress is more variable. There is a consultation evening for each year group and a full annual report. The quality of these reports is satisfactory, though not all subjects tell parents about their children's progress equally clearly. There are occasions when the school's procedures do not identify a lack of progress or notify parents of this in the intervals between reports. The value of the homework/contact diary as a regular, speedy and informal two-way communication between school and home is not always fully exploited. Whilst some tutors ensure that pupils use them very well to record homework, make comments for parents to see and respond to comments made by parents, others do not. The lack of consistency in the use of these diaries is a cause of frustration to some parents, and means that a simple and cost-effective aspect of the partnership between school and home is sometimes not used to its full potential.
67. Generally, however, parents contribute effectively to their children's learning. This can be seen in the very high levels of attendance at parents' meetings. All sign the home/school contract. Parents come readily to consultation evenings and school productions, though fewer attend curricular evenings and PTA events. The PTA shop provides a useful service, which pupils appreciate.

68. Sixth form students think very highly of the school. They expressed their views more strongly in conversations and interviews with inspectors than in the student questionnaire. In conversation, the concerns noted in the questionnaire were not thought serious. They consider that they are well prepared before starting their courses. They enjoy being at the school and think that they are taught well and receive good support. They particularly value the good relations they have with their teachers and appreciate the help that they are given if they have trouble with their studies. Students also like the many opportunities that they are given to take responsibility within the school and the wider community and the skills they gain thereby. They also enjoy the wide variety of educational and cultural visits.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

69. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. There is a very clear view of the strategic direction the school is going, and this is well communicated to teaching and non-teaching staff and to the vast majority of pupils and parents. This very good leadership, coupled with sensitive management of change, has enabled the school to improve and move forward successfully through many difficulties over the last ten years. For the first five years, the key tasks were clearly to halt the rapid decline in the school's roll, to establish confidence in the school, and to raise attainment. In the last five years, the key tasks have been to lead and manage very significant expansion of the main school and the sixth form, to widen opportunities for pupils and students without losing the traditional strengths of the school, to continue to raise levels of attainment, and, particularly recently, to manage very significant staffing changes and problems. It is testimony to the quality of the leadership and management of the school that, generally speaking, the school has come strongly through all these changes and is well poised to move forward further and to improve still further. The good school development plan, with a very clear set of priorities, and very good financial management provide a very firm foundation on which to build. Staff are well motivated and morale is good. A particular strength is the way that most new teachers have quickly absorbed the culture and ethos of the school; on occasions when this has not been the case, decisive action has been taken.
70. In the task of leading and managing the school, the headteacher is well served by other senior managers. Two able deputy heads have complementary strengths and well-defined roles so that lines of responsibility and accountability are clear. The senior leadership group performs an active role in reviewing performance across the school, and the linking of senior managers with particular subject areas is a good aspect of the school's management and support arrangements. The overall quality of leadership and management of other senior and middle managers, including heads of subject, heads of year and head of special educational needs (SENCO), is good. Day-to-day organisation of special educational needs and the oversight of pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need by the SENCO is very good; she has a strong commitment and a clear vision of her department's widening role in the school. There is also a strong commitment amongst heads of subjects and years to raising standards. Many heads of subject are new or comparatively new to the school, but all are making a positive contribution to the school. There is also plenty of talent amongst heads of year, some of whom are very keen and able to move more into the academic tracking of pupils' progress across the curriculum which, at present, is an under-developed area of the school's work. Another under-developed area of management is the observation and monitoring of teaching and the sharing of good teaching practice. Whilst observation of teaching occurs as part of the school's performance management systems and of monitoring newly qualified teachers, there is not yet a pervading culture in which rigorous monitoring of teaching, mutual observation at a detailed professional level and the sharing of good practice is central to strategies for raising the standard of all teaching up to the best current practice.
71. Systems to improve quality assurance of teaching, of the work of tutors and of pupils' academic progress need to be important elements of future plans to raise standards in the school further. Such systems are partly administrative structures and partly professional skills. To some extent, the school is under-managed at present with a small leadership group that may now be too small to fully cope with the necessary tasks within a growing school. But quality assurance is also a key task of middle managers who need the time, the expertise and the commitment to

successfully undertake this role. The school is rich in data ranging from information about attainment on entry to detailed analysis of examination performance at GCSE and A-level. The use to which this data is put, and the way day-to-day and regular assessments are undertaken and integrated into school systems, is variable. Improvements to assessment in some areas, drawing on existing good practice, and bringing assessment practices into a whole-school system of regularly tracking of pupils' progress and taking effective action where necessary is another key management task for further development. The use of modern technology can help to develop effective and time-efficient systems; these can successfully draw together the academic and pastoral sides of the school's work in ways that monitor pupils' progress, identify at an early stage potential problems, enable jointly agreed strategies to be implemented, and allow the prompt involvement of parents.

72. The governing body effectively fulfils its statutory duties and takes a keen interest in the school's work. Its committee structure enables it to function efficiently and enables governors to use their expertise and to develop their skills in the most sensible ways, except that the special educational needs governor is not on the curriculum committee where issues about special educational needs arise, and where she could bring a valuable contribution. Governors bring a wide range of experience and expertise that benefit the school's development. They have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They give much time to their role, including an annual full day when they look in depth at key issues facing the school. As a result, they have a clear view of areas for development, such as the sixth form, and, consequently, play a very effective role, with the headteacher, in shaping the direction of the school.

Staffing

73. The school has experienced a period of significant difficulties in its staffing because of illness, staff promotions and other factors. These difficulties remain but are not as serious now. There are currently sufficient teachers to teach the National Curriculum. Positive strategies are now in place to recruit teachers in areas where there are shortages for the next school year. Many teachers are currently not only new to the school but new to the profession. There are currently seven newly qualified teachers and one overseas-trained teacher as well as large numbers of others who have joined the school in the last two years. Consequently the induction and on-going professional development of teachers present challenges, but they are challenges that the school responds to fully and effectively. Teachers speak highly of the level of personal and professional support offered to them. Full records of in-service courses attended by staff are maintained, including an evaluation of the impact of in-service training on teaching and learning. The school's strategy for performance management and appraisal is satisfactory.

Accommodation

74. Overall the provision of accommodation is satisfactory. There is adequate accommodation for teaching but almost all subject areas have to do some teaching outside their specialist area. This limits the range of resources that can be used and the opportunities for display. The school's external condition is poor and many areas of the school look worn. There are ongoing problems with heating. The school has made a large investment in refurbishing and redecorating parts of the school. This has created attractive areas for science and drama, improved the changing areas in physical education and created office areas for a number of post holders. There is a clear programme to continue this work. In some areas of the school, the quality of display compensates for the unattractiveness of the building. Teaching in both music and physical education are affected by the proximity to the hall and the use of the gymnasium for examinations. In science the unsatisfactory quality of the laboratories that have not been upgraded restricts the learning opportunities of pupils who are taught in these laboratories. As stated earlier, there are problems of access to several areas of the school for pupils with physical disability.

Resources

75. The provision of learning resources is broadly satisfactory across the school. In English, art, geography, music and religious education, the provision of books and other learning materials is

good. There are good resources for the teaching of literacy within the special educational needs department. In no subject is there unsatisfactory provision; however, in mathematics, whilst all pupils are issued with good quality textbooks, there is a lack of equipment, such as three-dimensional models, to enliven lessons and to enable pupils to understand through practical activity. In science, where provision is generally satisfactory, there are shortages of books and some basic laboratory equipment. Deficiencies identified at the last inspection have largely been addressed. In religious education, where a particular weakness was noted, there is now a good range of artefacts, videos and textbooks.

76. Although the library is a pleasant and well-used room and has a number of modern computers for research purposes, it remains an area of some concern. The sufficiency of books for most subjects is just adequate but for some, such as mathematics and geography, it is unsatisfactory. The geography books are also of poor quality. The member of staff responsible for the library is identifying the shortcomings, including the need for more fiction, and is currently in the process of removing old stock and is making good use of the educational loan service. In the school as a whole, the ratio of pupils to computers that are less than five years old is low compared with national averages, but the school has improved its provision by upgrading the older computers. There is a very good, efficient and transparent system of allocating funding to subjects with a separate bidding system whereby funding for developments must be prioritised and linked to the whole school development plan.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

77. Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good; the quality of the leadership and management is a major contributory factor in the success of the sixth form. The head of sixth form provides very good management of tutors and students, and there is a distinct ethos within the sixth form which brings a sense of identity and purpose. This ethos successfully blends the growing independence of sixth formers and yet keeps what is best within the context of the whole school. It is an environment and atmosphere with which most sixth formers find comfortable.
78. Senior staff and governors have a clear strategy for the development of the sixth form which sees its expansion, but within the context of what the school can do well. So, for example, the focus will remain on AS and A2 courses, but with an expanding range; however, the highly successful business courses will continue to feature prominently as they provide good progression from courses in Years 10 and 11, and respond well to local needs. The emphasis on community service within the school for sixth formers, including their role as prefects and managers of year councils, is another example of the distinctiveness of the sixth form. Moreover, the management of the sixth form is forward looking with new systems for tracking sixth formers' academic progress and the use of sophisticated procedures for analysing performance.
79. Care has been given to providing good accommodation for the sixth form. The sixth form has a designated block, with rooms for teaching small groups, private study area and a small computer room, which provides a working environment appropriate for mature sixth form students. The provision and quality of a modern social area and common room are excellent, and, overall, accommodation for sixth formers within the sixth form area is very good. Much general teaching takes place in rooms of varying suitability in the main school, but, in art, there is a designated room with individual work stations so that students can leave their work out and return to when they wish; this is a first-rate facility.

Resources

80. Teachers delivering sixth form courses are well qualified and experienced; where necessary, they have access to good training programmes. Adequate learning resources are available to meet the needs of sixth form students in most subjects. In English, resources are good and, in economics, they are very good. In art and design, students are able to use high quality materials and there is a good supply of reference books for art history. Students have good access to ICT for independent

study and research. The school is upgrading computers to support newer software and this will improve facilities for sixth formers. Students are also able to share resources with the main school. The member of staff responsible for the library is currently seeking to improve the inadequate provision of specialist fiction and non-fiction books for sixth form study.

Efficiency of the school

81. The school's income broadly matches that found in similar schools nationally. Day-to-day financial management is very good. This helps to ensure that the principles of best value are well applied and that money is properly and efficiently spent and accounted for. The strategic use of the school's resources is very good. There has been skilful use of funds, very well related to the school's priorities for development within subject areas and in the whole school context. The school spends typical proportions of its income on staffing, and class sizes are similar to that found nationally. However, the average cost of a teacher is lower than usual because of the younger than normal age profile of teachers. Because of this, the school has chosen, as a matter of policy, to give most teachers slightly more time for preparation and marking than is often the case. This is entirely appropriate at this stage in the school's development, but it may be difficult to sustain in the longer term. The somewhat higher than average amount of the school's income spent on buildings is also entirely appropriate given the age and condition of the fabric of much of the school. The situation is not helped by the listed status of the building, but the school works well with the local education authority in planning improvements to the building.

82. The school has made good progress since the last inspection. Most pupils and students achieve well obtaining results better than would be expected from their starting points. Teaching is good and the quality of relationships is very good. Despite recent and some present difficulties that mean that the overall quality of provision is not as even as it would want it to be, the school is well placed to develop further. Given its level of income, its circumstances and its achievements, the school is judged to give good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

83. All the key issues in the main school are already identified within the current school development plan. The numbers in brackets after each issue refer to the relevant paragraphs in the report.

To improve further, the school should give attention to the following issues:

- (1) Ensure that underachievement by some pupils, especially boys, is identified early and rigorous action taken to support these pupils by:
 - a. strengthening regular assessment and monitoring arrangements in subject areas that track pupils' academic progress, including the use that is made of National Curriculum level descriptors and GCSE criteria;
 - b. involving tutors and heads of year more than at present in the monitoring of pupils' progress across the curriculum, including the more effective use of morning tutor time;
 - c. using modern technology to establish effective and time-efficient ways of easily accessing information about pupils' progress;
 - d. involving parents at an early stage when underachievement has been identified.(paragraphs 2, 3, 6, 9, 14, 23, 48, 49, 60, 61, 62, 65, 66, 92, 98, 101, 102, 108, 124, 126, 132, 138, 148, 153, 162)

- (2) Take further steps to help to bring all teaching, marking and assessment up to the standards of the best existing practice by:
 - a. rigorously promoting a culture in which the monitoring of teaching, marking and assessment practices by senior and middle managers is central to the school's work;
 - b. providing training and time for these tasks to be carried out at a high professional level;
 - c. sharing, in a detailed way, good practice through mutual observation and discussion.(paragraphs 6, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 70, 71, 99, 101, 108, 109, 113, 115, 124, 125, 126, 130, 132, 138, 149, 153, 158, 159, 162)

- (3) Enter into detailed talks and negotiations with all interested parties, including the local education authority, parents, pupils and students, to find ways to reduce to an absolute minimum the dangers faced by pupils and students when they leave school at the end of the afternoon.
(paragraphs 56, 58)

In addition, governors should consider including other areas for review when drawing up the action plan. These are: greater use of ICT to support learning across the curriculum (paragraphs 25, 100, 106, 111, 144, 145); the curriculum in Years 10 and 11, especially the need to meet statutory requirements for all pupils in ICT, and pupils' option choices in relation to their science choices (paragraphs 36, 37).

Sixth form

To improve further, the school should give attention to the following issues:

- (1) Take steps to ensure that attendance is recorded and monitored consistently.
(paragraph 64)

- (2) Review, in consultation with students, guidance arrangements for options after the sixth form, with particular reference to options outside further or higher education.
(paragraph 64)

In addition, specific areas for improvement are noted in subject reports.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

| | | |
|--|--------------|-----|
| Number of lessons observed | Years 7 – 11 | 136 |
| | Sixth form | 45 |
| Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils | | 61 |

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

| | Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|--|-----------|-----------|------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|
|--|-----------|-----------|------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|

Years 7 – 11

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|---|----|----|----|---|---|---|
| Number | 7 | 34 | 53 | 36 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| Percentage | 5 | 25 | 39 | 26 | 4 | 1 | 0 |

Sixth form

| | | | | | | | |
|------------|---|----|----|---|---|---|---|
| Number | 3 | 13 | 25 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage | 7 | 29 | 55 | 9 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

| | Y7 – Y11 | Sixth form |
|---|----------|------------|
| Number of pupils on the school's roll | 918 | 131 |
| Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals | 33 | |

Special educational needs

| | Y7 – Y11 | Sixth form |
|---|----------|------------|
| Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs | 26 | 0 |
| Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register | 88 | 1 |

English as an additional language

| | No of pupils |
|---|--------------|
| Number of pupils with English as an additional language | 45 |

Pupil mobility in the last school year

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

Attendance

Authorised absence

| | % |
|---------------------------|-----|
| School data | 4.6 |
| National comparative data | 7.8 |

Unauthorised absence

| | % |
|---------------------------|-----|
| School data | 0.6 |
| National comparative data | 1.2 |

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

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

| | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year | 2002 | 102 | 89 | 191 |

| National Curriculum Test/Task Results | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above | Boys | 70 | 81 | 82 |
| | Girls | 73 | 71 | 71 |
| | Total | 143 | 152 | 153 |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School | 75 (75) | 80 (82) | 80 (78) |
| | National | 66 (64) | 67 (66) | 66 (66) |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School | 42 (36) | 61 (56) | 50 (42) |
| | National | 32 (31) | 45 (43) | 33 (34) |

| Teachers' Assessments | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above | Boys | 70 | 86 | 75 |
| | Girls | 71 | 76 | 67 |
| | Total | 141 | 162 | 142 |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School | 74 (71) | 85 (78) | 74 (65) |
| | National | 67 (65) | 70 (68) | 67 (64) |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School | 43 (41) | 62 (49) | 41 (22) |
| | National | 32 (31) | 44 (42) | 34 (33) |

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

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

| | | | | |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
| | 2002 | 63 | 61 | 124 |

| GCSE results | | 5 or more grades A* to C | 5 or more grades A*-G | 1 or more grades A*-G |
|---|----------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified | Boys | 34 | 60 | 61 |
| | Girls | 41 | 59 | 61 |
| | Total | 75 | 119 | 122 |
| Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified | School | 60 (56) | 96 (90) | 98 (95) |
| | National | 50 (48) | 91 (91) | 96 (96) |

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

| GCSE results | | GCSE point score |
|-------------------------------|----------|------------------|
| Average point score per pupil | School | 46.7 (42.1) |
| | National | 39.8 (39.0) |

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

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

| | | For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations | | |
|----------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------|-------------|
| | | Boys | Girls | All |
| School | Number of candidates | 26 | 14 | 40 |
| | Average point score per candidate | 14.7 (13.2) | 14.3 (20.5) | 14.5 (17.5) |
| National | Average point score per candidate | 16.9 (17.8) | 17.7 (18.6) | 17.4 (18.2) |

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

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 | 958 | 28 | 1 |
| White – Irish | 2 | - | - |
| White – any other White background | 40 | - | - |
| Mixed – White and Black Caribbean | 2 | - | - |
| Mixed – White and Black African | 2 | - | - |
| Mixed – White and Asian | 5 | - | - |
| Mixed – any other mixed background | 8 | - | - |
| Asian or Asian British – Indian | 4 | - | - |
| Asian or Asian British – Pakistani | 2 | - | - |
| Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi | 0 | - | - |
| Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background | 4 | - | - |
| Black or Black British – Caribbean | 6 | - | - |
| Black or Black British – African | 5 | - | - |
| Black or Black British – any other Black background | 0 | - | - |
| Chinese | 2 | - | - |
| Any other ethnic group | 1 | - | - |
| No ethnic group recorded | 8 | - | - |

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|--|------|
| Total number of qualified teachers (FTE) | 61.1 |
| Number of pupils per qualified teacher | 16.8 |

| | |
|----------------|--------|
| Financial year | 2001/2 |
|----------------|--------|

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|---|-----|
| Total number of education support staff | 25 |
| Total aggregate hours worked per week | 495 |

| | £ |
|--|-----------|
| Total income | 2,734,130 |
| Total expenditure | 2,679,995 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 2735 |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | 67,538 |
| Balance carried forward to next year | 54,135 |

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|---|------|
| Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes | 73.1 |
|---|------|

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|-------------|------|
| Key Stage 3 | 24.9 |
| Key Stage 4 | 23.5 |

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

| | |
|--|------|
| Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years | 23.2 |
| Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years | 28.7 |

| | |
|--|---|
| Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE) | 0 |
| Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE) | 3 |
| Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE) | 1 |

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

| | |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Number of questionnaires sent out | 1049 |
| Number of questionnaires returned | 323 |

Percentage of responses in each category

| | Strongly agree | Tend to agree | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know |
|--|----------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| My child likes school. | 29 | 62 | 7 | 2 | 0 |
| My child is making good progress in school. | 31 | 60 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Behaviour in the school is good. | 14 | 65 | 12 | 2 | 7 |
| My child gets the right amount of work to do at home. | 16 | 53 | 24 | 5 | 2 |
| The teaching is good. | 17 | 68 | 7 | 1 | 7 |
| I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on. | 12 | 49 | 29 | 7 | 3 |
| I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. | 43 | 49 | 7 | 1 | 1 |
| The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best. | 43 | 51 | 4 | 0 | 2 |
| The school works closely with parents. | 14 | 52 | 25 | 5 | 4 |
| The school is well led and managed. | 38 | 52 | 5 | 1 | 4 |
| The school is helping my child become mature and responsible. | 30 | 60 | 4 | 1 | 5 |
| The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. | 12 | 43 | 25 | 6 | 15 |

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Comments from parents generally echoed the overall results of the questionnaire. Whilst most parents are supportive of the school, many thoughtful responses showed the frustrations of some parents in their perceptions of inconsistencies within the school, and in the quality of communications between the school and parents.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Standards of attainment are above the national average in both English language and literature.
- Pupils' achievements throughout the school are good overall and they have positive and enthusiastic attitudes to their work.
- Teaching in the subject is good, with some very strong features, so that learning is also good.
- The curriculum provides a good basis for pupils' work.
- Pupils' work is well assessed and the assessment is put to very good use in enhancing learning.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades is lower than would be expected from overall standards; some higher attainers are not yet reaching their full potential.
- Overall standards reached by boys are significantly lower than those of girls.
- Pupils have insufficient opportunities to work independently, rather than relying solely on what their teachers say.

84. The 2002 tests at the end of Year 9 showed above average standards. Over the last three years, pupils have exceeded the national average and there has been an upward trend in attainment since 1999 which has caught up with and risen above the national trend. The results show good value added as pupils pass through the school. Girls' results were higher than boys by a similar amount to that found nationally. At GCSE in 2002, pupils' results were above average in English and in English literature. Over three-quarters of the pupils gained A* - C grades and all pupils gained passes at A - G grades in both subjects. As in the Year 9 tests, the trend has been upward. However, the proportion gaining the highest grades is lower than would be expected, especially in English language.
85. Pupils enter the school with standards which are close to the national average in their literacy skills. Present standards in English are above average by the end of Year 9; they are rising well in Years 10 and 11 and are close to being well above average because of good provision in the subject and good teaching. This shows good improvement since the last inspection, when standards were judged to be satisfactory. Pupils' achievement is good in English by the end of Year 9 and is now very good by the end of Year 11.
86. Pupils benefit from good teaching in oral skills. They have many opportunities for practising speaking and listening, so that, by the end of Year 11, the majority are articulate, able to speak with authority in small groups and to collaborate well in discussion and debate. Pupils join in class discussions of the media work or the literary texts they are studying, and many are able to use a tone and vocabulary suited to varying purposes. This was clearly to be seen in a Year 10 lesson on the place of 'authority' in 'Romeo and Juliet', in which pupils explored the issue with relevance and fluency. Pupils become fluent in reading, taking advantage of challenging reading opportunities. For many, their understanding and comprehension of what they read are impressive and improve well as they move through the school. A Year 9 lesson on Macbeth as 'hero' introduced the concept of stereotypes well, encouraging lower attaining pupils to become involved with the text. Writing skills are less strong. Pupils write at good length and for a very good range of purposes, but there are often weaknesses in spelling and punctuation, sentence structure and paragraphing. This problem has been recognised and the development plan shows it as one of the immediate priorities for action.
87. Pupils work, generally, with enthusiasm and interest. They enjoy both the language work and their texts in literature. Pupils' good attitudes are a significant factor in helping them make very good

progress, especially in Years 10 and 11. They know that their teachers want them to learn and to succeed to the best of their ability and they come willingly to classes. They generally approach their work seriously and sensibly, keep a good level of concentration and listen well to their teachers. They have very good relationships with their teachers, relationships which are both warm and supportive.

88. There is a good range of learning opportunities for the pupils, teaching units of work which are broad and very well balanced across all the skills of literacy. Teachers ensure that pupils' personal development is well developed through the social, moral and cultural content of the curriculum. Every opportunity is taken to widen pupils' perception of the world around them and to help them to think for themselves about social and cultural issues. An excellent Year 11 lesson on poetry from other cultures both stimulated and provoked pupils into looking at aspects of life from a different perspective, through the teacher's graphic and emotive methods and exposition.
89. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, with the majority of lessons observed good or better, an improvement on the situation at the last inspection. A high proportion of lessons, particularly in Years 10 and 11, are very good or excellent. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject are extremely good; they are able to stimulate and enthuse their pupils, as well as imparting knowledge. They teach the basic skills of literacy with ease and enjoyment; they plan effectively, using effective methods, so that pupils are kept engaged by a variety of interesting tasks, and they have good expectations of the majority of their pupils. They know their pupils well and assess their work thoroughly and constructively, showing pupils how they could improve their work. Homework is regularly set, reinforcing learning done in class. The result of this good teaching is the effort pupils put into their learning, the pace and positive nature of their learning, their interest and their understanding of how well they are achieving, especially in Years 10 and 11. The quality of teaching has been enhanced by the consistent implementation and skilful use of Literacy Strategy practices, which have helped to improve results at the end of Year 9. Teachers ensure that pupils know what they are meant to be learning, making objectives clear at the start of lessons. The work done in lessons is reviewed and pupils' understanding of it assessed at the ends of lessons.
90. The subject is very well led and managed with the head of English bringing extremely clear direction and vision. His example to other teachers is inspirational, his insight into the subject's strengths and weaknesses exact and he leads by example. Despite absence and sickness in the subject in the last year, he has managed to continue to improve standards and to keep up staff morale, helped by his efficient deputy. Staffing is now stable, resources good and teachers all share a deep commitment to the welfare of the pupils and a determination to help them to achieve as well as possible. Policies reflect the high principles of the subject and its aims, in line with the school's. There is a co-operative and supportive ethos throughout the subject. Monitoring of the work of pupils and of teachers in the subject is regular and informed, the subject has drawn up in its development plan the right set of priorities to raise standards further and does not shrink from addressing perceived weakness.
91. Assessment procedures are very good, ensuring that pupils are given the most suitable intervention courses and help. Detailed tracking and prediction of every stage of every pupils' progress is undertaken and put to good use in the setting arrangements and in ensuring that pupils with special educational needs and the few who speak English as an additional language are nurtured to meet their full potential, and common assessment tasks have been introduced since the last inspection. This is a strong subject, well placed to continue the improvements in standards that have already been achieved
92. The subject now faces its main priority, that of raising the percentage of pupils attaining the highest grades at GCSE. Procedures are in place to stretch these pupils further and to extend their personal response and the scope of their written work. Hand in hand with this is the realisation that some pupils of high ability place too much reliance upon their teachers and do not increase their own independence of thought and research sufficiently. The raising of boys' attainment to match that of girls is also a priority. The subject is already experimenting with measures to address this problem.

Literacy

93. The development of literacy in English lessons has been managed effectively by the introduction of the National Literacy Strategy for Years 7, 8 and 9. The school has produced a full and purposeful policy to encompass literacy within the whole school. This policy covers the needs of all students, the monitoring of their work, with especial emphasis on the quality of writing. The literacy action plan for the current year includes an audit of pupils' work and a regular programme of meetings between heads of subject to follow the progress of the literacy initiative.
94. Most teachers provide good models for oral work, taking the opportunity to promote clear and sustained speech and good listening techniques. Reading is generally fluent and comprehension techniques are well emphasised. Although written work is frequently of good length and comprises a good range of activities, it is not always accurate in techniques such as spelling, punctuation and grammar.
95. Teaching and learning in literacy for pupils with special educational needs, or those who speak English as an additional language, are frequently good. Teaching is aimed at each pupil's specific needs. Teachers support these pupils well in lessons, through there are too few learning support assistants to give all the attention and help they need throughout the curriculum. Learning is also good for the higher attaining pupils.
96. Throughout the rest of the curriculum subjects, literacy is less well served, though still good, because of the way pupils learn in English. Many individual teachers are aware of the need to take every opportunity to promote literacy skills and do so with competence and frequency. Vocabulary for specific subjects is often well stressed and taught, styles of writing are beginning to be integrated in subjects other than English, such as the recording of scientific experiments and the use of banks of key words used in subject areas. The school is developing the widespread use of literacy well, though there is room for further consistent development.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average.
- Girls achieve well in Years 10 and 11.
- Teachers' planning is very thorough providing a sense of purpose in lessons.
- There is a very good school policy for the development of numeracy across the curriculum.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient monitoring of the work of the subject to ensure greater consistency.
- Pupils' work requires more regular assessment to identify any under-achievement more quickly.
- There is insufficient use of ICT and mathematical apparatus to enhance the learning of all pupils.
- The subject is not using the results of value added analyses to identify strengths in provision, or to remedy weaknesses.

97. When they enter the school, pupils' attainment in mathematics is slightly above average. Their results at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well above the national average. Overall standards were similar to those in science, but better than those in English, and represent good achievement in mathematics during pupils' first three years in the school. Results have shown a steady improvement in each of the last four years, with girls generally doing better than boys. Standards in the 2002 GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 are overall above the national average, and well above the national figure in the proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades. Girls performed much better than boys, even though this group of boys had gained better results in the national tests when in Year 9. Overall achievement in Years 10 and 11 was therefore satisfactory, but girls

achieved well compared with their Year 9 scores. In comparison with national norms, pupils do less well in mathematics at GCSE level than in most of their other subjects.

98. The results gained in national tests in 2002 are reflected in the standard of work seen during the inspection, both in lessons, and also in the scrutiny of pupils' books. Present standards are therefore well above average by the time pupils reach Year 9 with good achievement, and above average in Year 11 with satisfactory achievement since the end of Year 9. The scheme of work in Years 7 to 9 is well planned and provides full coverage of the National Curriculum, including the use of computers. Pupils are taught a wide range of skills, and an investigational approach is used where appropriate to increase pupils' involvement in their work. For example, pupils in a higher attaining Year 7 class were asked to investigate the probability of two heads, or tails, when two coins are tossed, and to reflect on how close their results are to the predicted outcome. They learnt how to record data, and the meaning of a probability of 0.25, or 0.3; very good learning occurred. In contrast, pupils in a lower attaining group in Year 7 concentrated less well, and showed less pride in their work, when calculating the area of irregular shapes. Their learning was only satisfactory as a result; there was insufficient use of mathematical apparatus to demonstrate the difference between area and perimeter. In Year 9, higher attaining pupils were able to use trigonometry confidently to calculate the length of a side in a right-angled triangle; they soon learnt how to select the correct ratio, and their standards were well above the norm. By Year 11, higher attaining pupils tackle simultaneous equations involving a quadratic term; most of the class concentrated well in order to eliminate one of the unknowns, and then to find the two solutions. The concentration of lower attaining pupils, especially boys, is more variable. In a Year 10 lesson about probability, for instance, a lack of understanding of basic arithmetic caused errors and led to pupils losing confidence. The lack of concentration of a significant minority of the class, especially boys, simply compounded the problem; these pupils made insufficient progress as a result. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, and they receive effective help from support assistants. This help would be even more effective if the same support assistant were to attend all the mathematics lessons for each class.
99. Teaching is good overall in both key stages, but varies from satisfactory to very good. Teachers have a good understanding of their subject. Their planning of lesson content is very thorough, both long-term through the scheme of work, and for individual lessons. As a result, lessons begin promptly, and with purpose. However, insufficient priority is given to the planning of activities through which pupils will learn, and to the use of mathematical apparatus to increase pupils' understanding. The display of lesson objectives is inconsistent, as is the use of a starter exercise to increase pupils' command of number, and their confidence with mental arithmetic. Better use is made of whole-class sessions to review what has been learnt in each lesson, and to reinforce key points. In most lessons, particularly in Years 7 to 9, there is a wide range of attainment. In the best lessons seen, all pupils were provided with work which challenged them to think, as in a Year 8 lesson about co-ordinates. In another Year 8 class, however, pupils spent too much time consolidating basic work, and the slower workers did not begin to tackle the more difficult questions. Though their work was neat and methodical, these pupils did not make sufficient progress. The management of pupils is good in Years 7 to 9, but satisfactory overall in Years 10 and 11 where a minority of teachers are not as confident. Most teachers consistently apply the strong and fair management strategies necessary to gain pupils' respect, however, and clearly enjoy their work. In a very good Year 10 lesson about 'trial and improvement' methods for solving quadratic equations, for instance, relationships were very good, and work was at the correct level for all pupils. They were not afraid of making mistakes, and asked when needing help; very good learning took place. The marking of pupils' work is variable across the subject. The best examples seen provide a good indication of the standard of work, and also suggestions about how to improve. The work in a minority of classes is not marked often enough.
100. Teachers of mathematics are aware of the national priority attached to the improvement of pupils' numeracy and literacy skills. There is good use of key words in many lessons, including spelling and saying these words, and reinforcement by repetition at the end of the lesson, as in a Year 11 revision lesson about parallel lines. There is not enough opportunity, however, for pupils to write in their own words, other than when recording the results of investigations. There is a very good school policy for the development of numeracy skills across the curriculum, but with a large

number of teachers new to the school its effectiveness requires closer monitoring. The use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning is not consistent across the subject. One of the mathematics rooms has an interactive whiteboard, but not all teachers are confident in its use, even when teaching ICT skills. Many teachers make good use of the school computer rooms, for instance to teach the use of spreadsheets, but the use of computers is not part of the experience of pupils in all mathematics classes, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

101. There has been a large turnover of mathematics teachers in the last year, including a new head of subject. Partly because of these changes, there is evidence of inconsistencies in marking, in assessment, in lesson structure, in key skills, and in the use of equipment. Good teamwork is beginning to develop, however, and the impact of the leadership and management of the subject is satisfactory overall. Priorities for the development of the subject as outlined in the development plan are not yet clearly embedded in the day-to-day work of the team. Assessment procedures require a review; formal assessments of pupils' work are too infrequent, and under-achievement by individual pupils is not identified quickly enough. Furthermore, insufficient time has been given to monitoring the work of the subject, especially the quality of teaching. Little use is being made of the wide range of data available about attainment in order to inform teachers' discussions, and to build on strengths, and overcome areas of weakness. Textbooks are generally up-to-date and of good quality, but the range and number of books in the library is poor.
102. Since the last inspection, standards in national tests at the ends of Years 9 and 11 have remained well above average, particularly for higher attaining pupils. However, the overall achievement of boys in Years 10 and 11 is only satisfactory. Insufficient time has been given to devising strategies to improve boys' performance at GCSE, including more use of equipment in lessons, and more regular assessments. The quality of teaching has shown some improvement, but there is still a need to increase the time given to the monitoring of teaching skills. While the use of ICT has undoubtedly increased, there is as yet insufficient impact on the work of all pupils. Homework is now set regularly, but does not always contain challenging questions for the higher attaining pupils in each group. The subject has therefore made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

Numeracy

103. The school has responded positively to the priority given nationally to the improvement of pupils' numeracy skills, and provision is good. Training for all teachers has taken place to raise their awareness of the issues for the school, and of the contribution that all subjects can make to the development of numeracy skills. As a result, and through a survey of each subject's numeracy links, a very good whole school numeracy policy has been formulated. Because of a large number of staff changes, the school repeated the staff numeracy training last summer term. However, there have been further substantial staff changes since then. The existing policy provides solid guidelines for teachers, but there has been insufficient monitoring of provision this year to ascertain the level of consistency in its application. For instance, while the overall standard of numeracy in the school is good, many pupils tend to resort to using a calculator too readily, or struggle to complete their calculations without it. The reinforcement of guidelines as to when teachers should expect pupils to undertake basic calculations without a calculator would therefore be helpful.
104. A number of subjects make a good contribution to the development of pupils' numeracy skills. In geography, pupils in Year 7 lack precision in plotting graphs of rainfall, but by Year 10 their standards have improved, and they plot accurate graphs of population statistics. In science, they use formulae, for example in Year 11, to calculate the critical angle for glass, and develop good habits in the use of units. Higher attaining pupils show good ability in manipulating formulae. Pupils also handle data frequently in design & technology such as tally charts, and the results of questionnaires. Further examples of the practical use of number take place in history, where pupils study graphs indicating the reasons for the growth of unemployment in Europe between the world wars, and in physical education in the measurement of changes in pulse rate. The school curriculum is therefore providing frequent and good opportunities for pupils to use and improve their numeracy skills.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is **good**

Strengths

- Standards in the single sciences taken at GCSE are well above average.
- Well established teaching routines provide a good basis for learning.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge and behaviour management in most classes enable pupils to achieve well.
- Good numbers of textbooks help learning

Areas for improvement

- Standards in scientific enquiry in Years 7 to 9 are below average because insufficient numbers of whole investigations are undertaken.
- Achievement in the GCSE double science course is unsatisfactory
- Assessment is not used to give pupils targets for learning nor to guide on how to reach them.
- Teachers do not always work closely enough together in their efforts to improve the quality of teaching and the curriculum.

105. In 2002 standards in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well above average. Achievement was good overall, but girls did better than boys. Overall, standards at the end of Year 11 in 2002 were well above average with good achievement because of the results obtained in the separate science subjects. Just under half of the pupils (the higher attainers) took the three separate sciences and gained an A*-C grade in each science, many with A or A* grades. Results were strongest in chemistry. Pupils did well, and often very well, in all three subjects compared with the other subjects they took. All other pupils took double science with a much higher proportion of the total number in the year group than normal being entered for GCSE, and nearly all were awarded D to G grades. Despite these successes, overall achievement in double science was unsatisfactory, for both girls and boys, in relation to previous attainment and compared with the other subjects the pupils took.

106. In present work, by the end of Year 9, well above average standards are being sustained, but could be even higher. Standards are well above average in pupils' knowledge and understanding of living things, materials and physical processes. This is because this aspect of the curriculum is taught well, being helped by teacher's very strong subject knowledge. All groups of pupils show increasing effectiveness in thinking more accurately and using scientific models to explain a range of scientific phenomena. For example, pupils used correct terminology when talking about respiration, use patterns to describe a variety of chemical changes and used abstract ideas when explaining how a variety of electrical circuits worked. However, standards in scientific enquiry are below average, despite good levels of practical work being undertaken. This is because insufficient numbers of whole investigations are undertaken, although pupils experience good levels of practical work which helps to develop their skills and safe working practices. Work in pupils' books is well presented but the range of writing remains narrow. Pupils have too few opportunities to express their own ideas. Pupils effectively use their numeracy skills to analyse and make sense of experimental data. Limited use is made of ICT to gather data in investigations, research information via the Internet and improve the presentation of work.

107. Well above average standards are also being sustained by the end of Year 11. However, standards could be higher in the double award science course for both boys and girls. Achievement in biology, physics and chemistry is good. These higher attaining students undertake practical work with confidence, use abstract ideas well, are proficient in calculations and can recall and use their knowledge very well to help explain new ideas. In lessons and work seen in Years 10 and 11, pupils showed a breadth and depth in their knowledge and understanding. For example, they confidently drew diagrams of how light passed through various kinds of lenses, represented common compounds by chemical formulae and used this idea to write balanced equations and recognised, predicted and explained changes in biological systems. Standards seen in the double award science sets of mainly average and lower attaining pupils are below the national average;

whilst achievement is satisfactory overall, it is unsatisfactory for some. The majority of pupils taking double science are less clear about some essential ideas. For example, in a Year 10 set, many found it hard to recall the different parts of the digestive system and in Year 11 many had difficulty in explaining what a physical state was and what atoms were made out of. Scrutiny of GCSE coursework shows that students in all courses followed are better at planning and obtaining evidence in investigations but less skilful in analysing and evaluating the data and in using ICT to improve the quality and rigour of work. Insufficient attention is given to highlighting the key ideas of science which have evolved over periods of time and the evidence behind some of the major theories. As a result, pupils' understanding of the impact of science in everyday life is under-developed.

108. Teaching and learning are good. Good teaching is a key reason why most groups of pupils do well, as is the pupils' good attitudes to work. Teaching is especially good in the GCSE biology, chemistry and physics courses where teachers' very strong subject knowledge and knowledge of the course requirements shine through. The methods used help pupils learn at a brisk rate and as a result they make good and, sometimes, very good gains in new knowledge and understanding, although their independence is limited. Teaching in the double science course, whilst satisfactory, lacks variety and is not as well pitched to what the pupils already know as it is in the single science GCSE courses. As a result of this, pupils do not learn new things as quickly as they do in the single science. The generally good teaching routines, questioning of pupils and effective management help provide a clear framework for learning. New ideas are explained well and pupils listen carefully and offer well informed answers to questions. The strength in "teacher led" approaches is also an important weakness in that it limits pupils using their own initiative and gradually developing independent approaches to learning. This is, for example, evident in the proportion of teacher guided and pupil initiated writing, such as in project work and in pupils talking through their own ideas. Although teaching is generally good, it has not improved since the last inspection, and best practice is not routinely shared. The one common weakness is that most teachers are not yet expert in setting clear goals for learning at the start of the lesson and checking to see at the end of the lesson what new things the pupils have actually learnt. Where these strategies are being used well, they are having a positive impact on learning. Pupils' learning is hindered because they are set no scientific learning targets nor given guidance on what they need to do to reach higher standards. Although there are satisfactory arrangements for seeing how well pupils are doing through regular testing, pupils are not involved in assessing how well they are doing. Teachers do not routinely review pupils' work together to identify what has worked well or not as well as it could. Pupils' class books lack the guidance need to help them reach the next higher level. Homework is regularly set.
109. The potential for development and improvement is considerable. The new head of science is leading and managing the department well and starting to tackle some longstanding issues that have limited higher standards being reached by all pupils. As a result, some shoots of better practice are emerging in the use of writing frames to structure pupils' investigative writing, in new approaches to teaching in some classes, and in improvements in the use of ICT. Good numbers of textbooks help pupils' learning. However, there is still insufficient monitoring of teaching in science with a focus on further improving the mostly good teaching, and this remains a barrier to higher standards. In addition there is scope to better manage the weaker teaching evident in part time and more inexperienced teachers. High standards have been sustained since the last inspection but previous weaknesses in assessment, pupils' writing and investigative work remain, and progress has thus been unsatisfactory over a period of time. A major reason for this has been that too few developments have been collectively worked on by all teachers and teamwork has not been as high as previously reported.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Some very good and excellent teaching has a significant impact on raising standards.
- Good leadership and management provide a clear educational direction for the subject.
- Pupils' learning is enhanced by their positive attitudes.

Areas for improvement

- Not all teaching matches the quality of the best and is inconsistent.
- Assessment and marking procedures are not applied consistently.
- There are few opportunities for pupils to use ICT in the subject.

110. Teachers' assessments in 2002 graded most pupils at the end of Year 9 as below average. GCSE results in 2002 were broadly average and better than those for 2001. Girls' results were well above average; they achieved very well in relation to prior attainment and did better than boys by significantly more than the difference between girls and boys nationally. The number of boys who sat the examination was very small and, overall, their achievement was poor.
111. Standards in Year 9 are broadly average. When they enter the school in Year 7, many pupils' art and design skills are underdeveloped. By Year 9, although progress is not consistent in all classes, most pupils have achieved well in their technical skills and in their use of the subject language when writing about art. A significant minority, however, remain below what is expected. The achievement of all pupils in the use of ICT is unsatisfactory because of limited opportunities to use ICT in art.
112. In Year 11, standards are above average and pupils, overall, are achieving very well. The work of some girls is well above average. Schemes of work in Year 10 reinforce the consolidation of essential skills and techniques. Where these are followed rigorously by the teachers, most pupils, including those with special educational needs, build very well on their prior learning. This means that, by the time they reach Year 11, most pupils are prepared to take on challenging ideas; they understand the importance of thorough research, can experiment adventurously with materials and produce large scale, confident paintings and sculptures. Pupils' knowledge of art is good and they make good links between their historical studies and their creative work. Some pupils use ICT for homework research purposes but their achievement in the creative uses of computers is unsatisfactory for reasons already explained.
113. Teaching is good overall but it is inconsistent. Evidence from looking at pupils' work indicates that sometimes it is unsatisfactory. In one Year 9 lesson, although pupils learned well because of some good planning by the teacher, the same pupils' sketchbooks showed that their learning and progress over time have not been satisfactory. Much of the work was incomplete and there was minimal evidence of marking to help pupils improve. In about half of the lessons teaching is very good or excellent. These lessons are orderly and productive and have a significant impact on pupils' learning and progress. The teacher provides appropriate levels of challenge and varies the way themes and subjects may be interpreted so that the needs of all pupils are met. In one excellent Year 10 lesson, pupils' work showed that they were already above average in relation to GCSE requirements and all pupils, including those with special educational needs, made excellent progress with their paintings because of the individual support and expert advice they were given.
114. Pupils, attitudes and behaviour are, overall, good. Where teaching is best they are very good and often excellent. In these lessons pupils feel valued; they know that they are expected and helped to do their best and they are co-operative and keen to learn. The work of some pupils, including homework, indicates that these positive attitudes are not consistent and that unsatisfactory teaching has contributed to some carelessly completed work.
115. Leadership and management of the subject are good with some very good features. The head of subject is relatively new to the school but is providing clear educational direction, sets the highest personal standards in her teaching and inspires pupils to achieve at very high levels. However, although very good support is given to teachers, including a temporary teacher, the monitoring of

teaching, and its subsequent impact on standards, are not yet fully effective because of the lack of shared commitment to improve. Assessment procedures, which overall are satisfactory, are not applied consistently and not enough use is made of prior attainment information to inform curriculum planning. One very good feature of the curriculum is the teaching of a range of printmaking techniques. This has contributed to some very exciting work in Years 8 and 9 that enliven the school corridors. The subject has only one computer and the statutory curriculum is not met because of the lack of opportunity for pupils to use ICT. Whilst improvement since the last inspection is no more than satisfactory overall, there have been notable improvements recently in many areas of the subject's work, particularly in Years 10 to 13; bringing the qualities of the best teaching and work to all that the subject does is the key challenge for the future.

CITIZENSHIP

Overall, the quality of provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**

Strengths

- Citizenship has been successfully introduced following an analysis of existing provision; the oversight for its development by a deputy head teacher has given it direction, leadership and status.
- Enrichment and extra-curricular activities are strong; they begin to involve pupils in the wider and more practical aspects of citizenship both at school and in the local community.
- The personal, social and health education course (PSHE) and the humanities subjects make good contributions to citizenship.

Areas for development

- The lack of a structured programme for monitoring and evaluation of teaching and the coverage of citizenship means that the quality of what should happen is not yet assured.
- Structured assessment procedures are not yet in place to check the progress that pupils are making.
- Some subjects are less active than others in promoting citizenship and making their contribution to the subject more explicit.

116. Although some features of the citizenship programme have been taught across the curriculum for some time, citizenship as a distinct subject has only been introduced in the last year. By the end of Years 9 and 11, standards are average; they are largely what might be expected at this early stage of development. History, religious education, geography and PSHE have begun to take an active role in the promotion of citizenship. In work seen during the inspection, pupils are beginning to acquire knowledge and understanding of different aspects of society, for instance, in human rights and conservation issues. English and drama make positive contributions, mainly through discussion; at times, art, physical education and ICT teach elements of citizenship. However, some subjects, like mathematics, science, design & technology and music have yet to contribute significantly to the subject. Throughout the school where citizenship is taught, pupils achieve well.

117. In lessons where elements of citizenship were covered, pupils showed a good knowledge and understanding of different aspects of society; this was demonstrated well in a Year 7 drama lesson on bullying and physical abuse. In a Year 9 history lesson on the Russian Revolution, lower attaining pupils' showed some very basic understanding of capitalism and Marxism. Year 10 and 11 geography pupils understand environmental issues like ozone depletion and conservation of the rainforests; they are aware of the consequence of not taking action on these issues. Year 11 pupils, as part of their PSHE course, rapidly demonstrated very good understanding of the purchase of shares through the Internet. By the end of Year 11, pupils work successfully in pairs and small groups when discussing issues like rights of the consumer and money management. High attaining Year 11 pupils consider the advantages and disadvantages of risk investment. Co-operative work was well exemplified in a Year 11 lesson as pupils shared computers in creating a shares portfolio, successfully using their numeracy skills.

118. Pupils have good opportunities to participate in school activities and take action within the local and wider community, for example, through Young Enterprise, work experience in Year 10 and the

Russian visit. Extra curricular activities are good and many pupils take full advantage of these opportunities. In physical education alone over one fifth of the school participate. Pupils involved in inter-school matches are well involved in taking responsibility as team members or captains. Enrichment activities and events are a strong feature and successfully support the citizenship programme. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, are integrated well into both lessons and activities. Drama, musical productions and the talent show involve a wide range of pupils in both participating and work behind the scenes. Pupils are also involved in charity work, for example, fund raising from a non-uniform day.

119. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is good. Teachers demonstrate at least good subject knowledge and understanding, as seen in a Year 11 lesson on safety when undertaking "Do it yourself jobs" in the home. Teachers have high expectations and plan lessons well. For example, in a Year 11 religious education lesson on discrimination and prejudice, lesson objectives were made very clear to pupils at the start of the lesson. Teachers also have good classroom management skills, which allow all pupils to learn successfully. As a result, pupils have a positive attitude towards their studies and enjoy discussing and debating major issues in society. Lessons have a variety of planned and structured activities. Year 8 pupils are well motivated in PSHE as they study local government within the Wokingham area. Pupils respond well to the different approaches. Many like discussion; this was well exemplified in a Year 7 English lesson on bullying. Pupils show a good awareness of the possible impact of the media and Internet in society and quickly identify where high technology can increase effectiveness. Overall, pupils have positive attitudes to citizenship and enjoy the subject.
120. Citizenship is well led and managed; the effective work of a deputy head gives good direction, leadership and status to the subject. The recent analysis of citizenship across subjects has enabled areas of citizenship to be included through PSHE. However, due to a wide range of staff teaching PSHE, there are some inconsistencies in the programme. The school council enables pupils to participate in decision making related to the school, though recently it has been less active than in previous years. Prefect and monitor systems give opportunities for pupils to be involved in worthwhile and practical citizenship. However, within the curriculum, most subjects still need to be more explicit about when they are promoting active citizenship. Although subjects have identified what contributions they can make to citizenship, it is not yet sufficiently embedded in either planning or teaching, though the PSHE programme and humanities subjects strongly promote citizenship. More monitoring, evaluation and the development of assessment procedures will enable the school's work in citizenship to develop further.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

The overall provision for design and technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- GCSE results in food technology and textiles are well above average.
- Pupils develop a good range of skills in both designing and making.
- Teachers provide very good individual support for all pupils.
- Good relationships between pupils and teachers create a good climate for learning.

Areas for improvement

- Procedures for marking and assessing pupils' work are not strong enough to ensure pupils are informed about how well they are doing and nor to link this to set targets for improvement.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to experience work in computer aided manufacturing.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning is not effective enough as a way of raising standards further.

121. Standards at the end of Year 9 are broadly average overall. Teachers' assessment of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 in 2002 broadly matched the standards seen during the inspection. When pupils join the school in Year 7, they have average skills in the subject; their achievement overall in design and technology by the end of Year 9 is satisfactory. In food and textiles achievement is good. Pupils develop a good range of skills including designing and making products in food,

resistant materials, textiles, graphics, and electronics. They respond very well to interesting projects in lessons and are self-motivated to follow the guidance provided by the teachers. Pupils are taught to use the design process, which enables them to show the stages of how the products they design have been developed. However, their drawing skills are undeveloped which lowers the detail and accuracy of their work at this stage. The application of the design process is stronger in food and textiles. All pupils use ICT well to research and present information.

122. GCSE results in 2001 showed that the proportion of students achieving A* to C grades was broadly in line with the national average. The results improved slightly in 2002. Results were better in food and textiles. Overall girls achieved better than the boys. The work seen during the inspection of Year 10 and 11 is also of an average standard overall. Overall achievement is satisfactory for all pupils including those with special educational needs in Years 10 and 11. Although the products pupils design in electronics are of good quality, the standard of their design portfolio work is often of a lower standard than is needed for them to achieve higher grades overall. In the subject as a whole, pupils in design and technology refine their design and make skills in Year 11 and show greater awareness of industrial processes. In food and textiles, pupils now work at well above average standards and they show a higher level of detail and depth in both the designing and making stages of their coursework. The vast majority of pupils use ICT well to research information, handle data and increase the presentation of their final coursework. Good use of ICT was also seen in electronics where pupils develop and test the circuits they design themselves. However, lack of resources limits the opportunities for pupils to experience sufficient work in computer aided manufacture.
123. The overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. Some good, and one very good, lessons were seen during the inspection week. In good and very good lessons, teachers structure the work well and provide clear objectives to guide and support pupils in their tasks. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and this provides good opportunities for pupils to develop a good range of skills in all material areas. In food and textiles, pupils benefit from very good guidance both in Years 7 to 9 and particularly with examination coursework in Years 10 and 11. In examination groups, teachers create opportunities for pupils to discuss their work as a group as well as individually with the teacher and this provides very good support for pupils' learning at all attainment levels. Good relationships between pupils and teachers result in good conditions for learning where pupils feel confident about asking for help. As a result, all pupils made good progress in food and textiles.
124. Where the pupils are clear about the tasks, they respond well and in the majority of lessons seen, pupils were keen to do well and show good attitudes to their work. However, in material areas other than food and textiles, pupils are not monitored rigorously enough, for example, to meet GCSE coursework deadlines nor receive sufficient detailed written feedback on how well they have completed sections of their coursework. Moreover, marking is less informative and the quality of feedback to pupils about their progress with coursework is less often and less detailed. As a result, many pupils work at a slower pace and do not follow the design process in as much detail as pupils in food and textiles. In some groups there is little time before the final examination coursework deadline date and folders have not been marked. This restricts the time and opportunity for pupils to make improvements. Pupils themselves feel they will miss the chance to upgrade their work at this late stage. Although the marking in food and textiles is of very good quality, it is inconsistent and often unsatisfactory in other areas of the subject where some folders seen are often completely unmarked particularly in Years 7 to 9. Because of this, pupils have very little idea of how well they are doing.
125. In some lessons, work does not fully match the needs of the pupils and planning for the individual learning needs of pupils is inconsistent across the subject area as a whole. However, teachers do encourage pupils to use ICT; they effectively use desktop publishing software to present information, handle data and analyse the nutritional content of food.
126. Leadership and management of the subject area are satisfactory. The head of design and technology maintains good working relationships within the subject area, and teachers work hard to maintain high levels of efficiency. Although there is some monitoring of teaching and learning, it is insufficiently rigorous to ensure that marking, assessment and teaching are consistent across

all material areas. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory and has resulted in improved planning; standards have been broadly maintained, though there is still too wide a variation in the quality of teaching and learning across the subject area. There is good technician support and technicians make a positive contribution to the overall levels of provision.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Good teaching in Years 10 and 11 leads to pupils achieving well and reaching above average standards.
- Pupils' knowledge of places is extended through good fieldwork opportunities throughout the school
- Good leadership and management of the subject are leading to improved provision and rising standards from a low base a few years ago.

Areas for improvement

- The day-to-day marking of work does not inform pupils enough about how well they are doing and how to improve.
- Teachers do not make enough use of assessment information to monitor progress as part of strategies to raise standards.

127. Results in the 2002 GCSE examination were broadly in-line with the national average. Boys and girls achieved similar standards but pupils did less well in geography than they did in the other subjects that they studied. The results were a decline on the well above average results achieved in 2001.

128. The standards of work seen during the inspection in Years 7 to 9 are average. This represents satisfactory achievement given pupils' standards when they entered the school. Many possess a sound range of geographical skills. They can use the atlas and read grid references on maps to locate places. Pupils' numerical skills are also sound. Pupils know a range of technical terms such as 'ecosystem' and 'deforestation' and can use them in context in writing about the tropical rain forests. Written work for the majority is good, with attention to grammatical accuracy but average and lower attaining pupils do not give enough detail in answers. On some occasions pupils successfully use computers to research and present information. On many occasions however, not enough use of computers is made because of limited access to the computer suites during lessons.

129. The standards of work seen in Years 10 and 11 are above average. This represents good achievement given their standards at the end of Year 9. Pupils build on their geographical skills and use maps and diagrams effectively to complement written explanations. The illustrative work of a minority however, is lower than normally seen because they do not take enough care and label work clearly. Pupils are knowledgeable about global issues. In a Year 10 lesson for example, pupils drew graphs of population patterns by age in contrasting regions and used terms 'infant mortality' and 'birth rate' to describe and explain reasons for differences between countries. Higher attaining pupils wrote good explanations about the differences between India and Britain. The work of other pupils however, is not of such a high standards because they do not give reasoned and detailed answers. In the minority of cases standards are lower than expected because work is left unfinished.

130. Overall, teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9. However, there is some good teaching and, in one observed lesson, teaching was excellent. The aims of lessons are explained to pupils and most teachers plan lessons carefully. They regularly consolidate work previously covered and it enables pupils to improve their understanding of topics. In the excellent Year 9 lesson, learning was very effective because the teacher had clear strategies to meet the needs of pupils of different attainment and planned resources to support them. Pupils with special educational needs and for those who are at an early stage of learning English achieve very well because of additional adult

support and materials that helped them better understand what had been taught and achieve the writing tasks. Occasionally however, the learning of such pupils is not always so well met because the learning support assistants are not well used and teachers do not guide learning enough. In most lessons learning is good because teachers manage pupils very well, relationships are good, and most pupils are keen to learn. On some occasions the behaviour of a minority of pupils, more boys than girls, is poor and the teacher's behaviour management strategies are not effective with the result that pupils do not make enough progress.

131. Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11 and this leads to pupils achieving well. Some teaching is outstanding and this results in excellent learning. Teachers are well qualified, with a good range of experience and this has a good impact on learning. Teachers make good use of resources to support learning. Good quality copied materials help teachers meet the different learning needs of pupils and new books enable pupils to reinforce learning at home. Learning is most effective when teachers have high expectations of pupils' efforts and set challenging tasks for them. In an excellent Year 10 lesson, for example, the teacher provided materials to support pupils with special educational needs and extension tasks to challenge higher attainers. The teacher closely monitored pupils' learning and made full use of additional adult support to help lower attaining pupils. As a result all pupils learned new skills in the plotting of 'population pyramids' and made excellent progress in understanding about world population issues. There is clear policy for assessing pupils' work and is followed by most teachers so that pupils generally know how well they are doing. There are however, inconsistencies of application and quality of evaluation. On the one hand much of the marking provides pupils with full evaluation of the quality of the work and how to improve, but other marking does not inform pupils well about strengths and weaknesses or set targets for improvement.
132. The leadership and management of the subject are good overall. The recently appointed subject leader is giving very good direction for development of the subject and has made swift progress in writing schemes of work, establishing policies and subject practice. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are good, but are not yet being used enough to set learning targets to National Curriculum levels and to monitor pupils' progress. The curriculum provision is good and well enhanced through fieldwork experiences for all pupils. All teaching is by subject specialist teachers and excellent support is given to newly qualified teachers so that they quickly settle into the life of the school. Although much teaching is in specialist rooms, nearly half of lessons are not and this reduces the range of resources that are used in some lessons and sometimes adversely affects learning.
133. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. GCSE results have improved over time and the standards of pupils in Year 10 and 11 are now above average because the teaching is better. The book resources have improved and are now sufficient for needs.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Standards at GCSE are well above average.
- Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11; lessons are enthusiastically taught and enable pupils to learn effectively.
- Teachers work well as a team. Morale is high and there is a clear commitment to raising standards further.
- Most marking is of a high standard.

Areas for development

- Not all teachers keep up-to-date with all their marking.
- Teaching strategies do not always ensure that boys persevere with difficult tasks.

134. When pupils enter the school, standards are average in history. In 2002, teachers assessed standards as above average at the end of Year 9. In relation to standards at entry, this represents good achievement. At the end of Year 11, the percentage of pupils attaining GCSE grades A*-C in

2002 was well above average. The proportion of pupils achieving a pass grade was above average. In relation to their test results two years earlier, this also represents good achievement.

135. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average at the end of Year 9 and achievement is good. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of a range of historical facts, situations and characters. For example, pupils in Year 8 show a good understanding of the causes of the English Civil War. They understand that historical situations have both causes and effects. Pupils with special educational needs develop their understanding of topics at a steady rate and, with effective support, continue to improve their work. Pupils are beginning to work with sources of historical evidence to generate description and explanation, although in some lessons there is scope to provide more opportunities for them to do this independently. The subject has worked hard and successfully to improve the writing skills of average and lower attaining pupils so that their work is carefully structured. Higher attaining pupils write accurately and at length. Skills learned in these years provide a good foundation for the GCSE.
136. At the end of Year 11, standards are well above average and achievement is good. GCSE pupils plan their written work and use specialist vocabulary well. Pupils use their good understanding and knowledge of a range of historical facts, situations and characters to form sensible opinions and evaluations. This was evident in a Year 11 lesson where pupils recapped their knowledge and understanding of the suffragette movement. They showed a good understanding of the differences between suffragettes and suffragists and of how opinions at the time differed. Pupils make good progress in lessons and over the two years of the course. This is evident from the way in which pupils increasingly show independence in following lines of enquiry and use their knowledge to analyse and explain events and changes. Written work is increasingly structured and sustained. It shows increasing attention to detail. Lower attaining pupils and those with special needs make similar rates of progress as those of their peers. In some lessons, particularly those where girls are in a majority, boys show some lack of confidence and do not always persevere with difficult tasks. However, more boys are now beginning to choose history as a GCSE subject so that classes are becoming less unbalanced in terms of gender.
137. Pupils throughout the age range make some use of ICT to develop their skills in history. During the week of the inspection, for example, Year 10 pupils used computers to make graphs of election results in pre-war Germany.
138. The quality of teaching is good overall with some very good features. It is very good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils learn very well as a result. Teachers are enthusiastic, committed and work well as a team. They explain things clearly and ask questions that build on pupils' answers, thus extending and reinforcing their knowledge and understanding. Lessons have well-established routines and teachers make sure that pupils are clear about what they have to do. Their expectations are generally appropriately high and most lessons are pitched at the right level. Homework supports pupils' learning well. Most marking is thorough and helpful, with comments that show pupils what they have done well and what they need to do in order to improve their work. Occasionally, however, teachers leave work unmarked for too long; this results in the standards of some pupils, particularly low attaining boys, slipping. Teachers work very hard to establish clear expectations of behaviour and, as a result, pupils work hard in lessons and enjoy their tasks.
139. This is a very well managed department. The new head of subject has a clear view of the priorities and has made a very good start in taking action to achieve them. Teachers work well together and are keen to share their expertise in order to improve standards. Teaching and learning strategies, for example, are discussed in every faculty meeting; the current focus is on thinking skills. There are good procedures now in place for the assessment of pupils' work. Subject documentation, much of which has been written or rewritten since the arrival of the new head of subject a year ago, is thorough and useful. History makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. One class in Year 9, for example, researched a pre-colonial African society as part of its work on the slave trade and then completed a homework task on a black person who had made a significant achievement in society. Pupils were engaged in this task and chose characters as diverse as Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Lenny Henry. Although there are not enough specialist rooms, the head of subject ensures that younger teachers are given

permanent rooms, while more experienced teachers have to teach outside the department. This is an admirable example of sensitive leadership. The specialist rooms contain very good displays of pupils' work and other materials. In one classroom, for example, the teacher has a historical 'events of the day' display on the door. These displays stimulate pupils' interest in the subject and are one example of the very good progress the subject has made since the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Overall, the provision for information and communication technology is **good**

Strengths

- GCSE results are well above average.
- Good relationships between staff and the pupils create good conditions for learning.
- Systematic planning and structured lessons are having a good impact on teaching and learning.
- The school has funded significant increases for computer resources and this has had a good impact on learning.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment processes are not effective because they do not use pupils' prior attainment to plan for pupils' individual needs; they do not link ongoing assessment to National Curriculum levels nor the setting of targets.
- The development and use of ICT in all subjects across the curriculum are not consistent, and the school curriculum in Years 10 and 11 does not ensure that all pupils receive all statutory requirements
- Pupils do not experience work in computer aided manufacture in all years.

140. Results of the teacher assessments of Year 9 pupils in 2002 were broadly average. The GCSE results in 2001 were well above the national average and increased further in 2002. There has been an improving trend over the last three years although the number of pupils entered for the examination in 2002 was much fewer. Overall, pupils performed better in ICT than they did in other their other subjects.

141. Standards of work seen during the inspection show that present pupils by the end of Year 9 are now reaching above average standards, having entered the school with ICT skills that were just above average. By the end of Year 9, pupils increase their range of skills and knowledge of ICT; their overall achievement is good. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, develop skills in desktop publishing, the use of specialist presentation software and electronic forms of communication. They use successfully scanners and digital cameras. Pupils gain a good level of confidence when they use a variety of software in specialist ICT lessons.

142. Standards of work in Years 10 and 11 for pupils taking the full GCSE course are well above average and above average for those taking the short course. The portfolios of pupils' work seen during the inspection show evidence of a broader range of skills and the work well reflects the set criteria needed for the examination coursework. Pupils' skills in using databases and spreadsheets increase in complexity and depth. Achievement overall is good as pupils improve their standards in both the GCSE full and short courses having started at average standards.

143. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Specialist teachers have good knowledge of the subject and pupils are guided well in their learning. Teachers prepare well for lessons and follow a structured approach, which provides pupils with the opportunity to work through the set tasks systematically. Teachers use the schools' intranet very effectively to outline the tasks for pupils in lessons. As a result, pupils follow this structured approach well and this is having a good impact on developing their independent learning skills. Teachers are enthusiastic for pupils to master a wide range of skills. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and this creates very good conditions for learning. Teachers provide a good level of individual support, which ensures all pupils progress well with set tasks. Work for lessons is well planned but present schemes of work provide only limited guidance for teachers to plan activities which are fully

matched to the needs of pupils with special educational needs and those who need additional challenges. Work is well marked and this provides good feedback to pupils on what they have done well and how to improve their work further. Teachers provide good opportunities for pupils to enhance their range of technical vocabulary and emphasise key words well. An example of this was seen in a Year 7 lesson where pupils completed a crossword, which was published on the schools' intranet to consolidate some of the spellings of words learned in the lesson. As a result, pupils use a good range of vocabulary in their work and when they explain what they are doing in the lesson.

144. The sufficient use of ICT in other subjects across the curriculum cannot be fully assured; similarly, the provision of sufficient ICT for pupils not taking an examination course in the subject in Years 10 and 11 cannot be assured because there are no specific requirements for other subjects to cover particular areas of statutory requirements. However, in the vast majority of subjects, the use of ICT is satisfactory or better. It is unsatisfactory in science, art & design and design & technology. There is very good use of ICT in music where pupils use a specialist programme to compose their own music. Although there is some good use of ICT in mathematics, its use is inconsistent in amount and quality. ICT is well developed in physical education where pupils use the internet for research and homework tasks often include the use of ICT. When completed, pupils can e-mail their work to the teacher. There is satisfactory use of ICT in geography where it is part of the planned work; pupils use of the internet for research, scanners and word processing to present their coursework. Effective use of ICT supports the work of pupils within the special educational needs department and in personal, social and health education (PSHE). Pupils in design & technology use the digital camera, scanners, specialist software for designing and testing electronic circuits as well as computer aided design. However, they do not gain sufficient experience of computer aided manufacturing as because of limited resources.
145. Leadership and management of ICT are good. This is evident in the major investment and improvement in the school's ICT resources and network system. Standards of teaching and learning in ICT lessons have improved significantly. The ratio of pupils per computer is now better than the national average as a result of the considerable work done in the school to upgrade existing computers to run the standard software. The increased resources and access to computers now contribute significantly to learning. Improvement since the last inspection has been good as a result of the improved standards, increased quality and range of resources, the introduction of an ICT lesson for all pupils in Years 7 to 9 and the continued development of ICT in the majority of subjects across the curriculum. Furthermore, the technician contributes very effectively to smooth running of the school's ICT resources. However, there is a need to continue the development of ICT in subjects across the curriculum in order to assure sufficient use in all subjects to meet requirements, especially meeting statutory requirements in Years 10 and 11 for those pupils not taking an examination course in ICT. The co-ordination of teaching, planning, monitoring and assessment of pupils' work on a day-to-day basis are not yet effective to have a significant impact in raising standards further.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Provision for modern foreign languages is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good; a notable strength is the way that good teaching motivates lower attaining pupils to achieve well.
- The languages department is active in successfully adopting strategies to raise the attainment of boys.
- The use of ICT is well developed to add variety to teaching and increase pupils' motivation.

Areas for development

- National Curriculum assessments and levels are not used regularly enough to inform pupils of their attainments, nor to enable teachers to set subject-specific targets as a way of challenging pupils to raise their levels of attainment.
- There is insufficient monitoring of teaching to identify good practice and ensure consistency of standards.

146. In the 2002 GCSE examination in French, the proportion of pupils with grades A*-C was broadly in line with national averages for the second consecutive year. Boys' results showed an improvement resulting from the change of course and the experiment with a boys-only group. Girls' results show a marked decline where one group had been taught by two inexperienced teachers over the last two years. Pupils' results in French were similar to those they obtained in their other subjects. In GCSE German, results at grades A*-C were just above the national average but were much lower than those in 2001. Boys were clearly above and girls broadly in line with national averages. These are pupils who were identified in Year 8 as more able linguists. About half the group showed under-achievement and these students' performance in German was generally below that in their other subjects. These students had a change of teacher in the final year leading to the examination.
147. Standards seen during the inspection are at national average levels by the end of Year 9 and again by the end of Year 11. By the end of Year 9, standards match the teachers' own assessments of pupils' attainments. Pupils who begin German in Year 8 are accelerating to the standards of first language learners and overall achievement is good. By the end of Year 11, pupils in German have good listening skills, good recall of vocabulary and are managing some complex grammar. As a result they are on target for higher grades. In French there is good learning by pupils of all attainment levels in Years 7 to 9. Lower attaining pupils' achievements are particularly high because teachers adapt their methods to support pupils' learning and give them experience of success. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is only satisfactory because some higher and average attaining pupils still only focus on their tasks in lessons when directed by their teacher.
148. Overall teaching is good; it is good and sometimes very good in Years 7 to 9 and overall satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is not as strong in Years 10 and 11 because new teachers are adjusting to the requirements of teaching to examination level. The availability of native speakers is a bonus for both teachers and pupils because they bring authentic and current insights into the language and the culture. All teachers are very competent linguists. As a result they can conduct their lessons in the foreign language to challenge and develop the pupils' listening skills. Learning is helped by well-planned lessons, and good cross-curricular links make some of the work more relevant. A particular strength is the teaching of lower attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9. A parallel success is seen with a boys only group in Year 11. In these groups, teaching methods have been carefully chosen to meet the learning needs of the pupils. In these and other groups, teaching uses a good variety of approaches including the regular use of games and activities to sustain interest and involve pupils actively in learning. The use of computers is well established as a regular feature of teaching. Good relationships with pupils support learning. Books are regularly marked and there is a programme of assessments. However, assessments are not used regularly enough with pupils to inform them of their levels or to set targets for improvement; as a result, some of the benefits of assessment in helping pupils to achieve at higher levels are lost.
149. The leadership and management of the languages department are good. The head of languages shows a clear understanding of the issues to be addressed to raise standards further. There is an

excellent analysis of examination results which clearly identifies the reasons for any mismatch of results and predictions. As a result, there has been positive action to provide a more suitable examination course for some pupils, to trial a boys-only class and to allocate the more experienced teachers to groups that are seen to underachieve. In 2002, this led to an improvement in boys' results. There have been many staff changes over the last two years and this has adversely affected results. The department is now well staffed and the head of languages has created a good team by involving them in the development of schemes of work and the updating of the handbook. The team shows commitment to their subject and they have the capacity to sustain and raise pupils' attainment further. Currently only the newly qualified teachers are monitored on a regular basis. Now that the staffing has stabilised, the department would benefit from more regular monitoring of all aspects of teaching to identify and share good practice and ensure conformity of standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been good with increasing entries at GCSE, increased time for the second language and the production of a more detailed departmental handbook to help teachers in their work.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- There is a consistently good teaching.
- Attainment in years 10 and 11 and the results at GCSE are well above average.
- The attitudes and behaviour of pupils in the subject are very good.
- There is very effective use of ICT.
- The leadership and management in the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are insufficiently developed.
- Insufficient use is made of homework to help pupils' learning in Years 7 to 9.
- Inadequate sound insulation of the accommodation limits teaching and learning opportunities when the hall is used for examinations.

150. Eighty five percent of pupils entered for GCSE music in 2002 gained grades A*-C. Although numbers were too small for valid statistical comparisons to be made with national figures, these standards are high and the pupils generally performed better in music than in their other subjects. The 2002 results maintain the standard of recent years. Present standards of work in Year 9 are above average and the pupils achieve well in relation to their starting points. By Year 11, pupils are continuing to achieve well and are reaching standards that are well above average. These standards are achieved because teaching and learning are consistently good and the pupils have very good attitudes to the subject.
151. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are able to identify notes on the keyboard and keep well in time with a good sense of rhythm. Sometimes their keyboard fingering lacks fluency, with many still dependent on letter names, but they have a good understanding of chord structure and have grasped the concept of major and minor tonality. When composing, the higher-attaining pupils produce interesting arrangements with independent parts and percussion. Average and lower-attaining pupils concentrate on melody but all show a good understanding of structure and question and answer techniques. There are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls. Pupils with special needs, and pupils for whom English is an additional language, also achieve well and are helped by the teachers' very practical approach to the subject.
152. The music examination group in Year 11 is small so national comparisons are not particularly helpful. However work seen during the inspection indicates that the well above average level of results achieved in recent years will be maintained. Performance standards are high. The pupils perform well on keyboards in addition to individual instrumental and vocal skills. Compositions show a high level of inventiveness with some outstanding work from higher-attaining pupils. For example one pupil is writing an extended work for solo instrument and orchestra. Pupils with

special needs and pupils for whom English is an additional language also achieve well. ICT standards are high with pupils using sophisticated software to sequence and present their compositions.

153. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11. All lessons seen were good or better and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. The teachers, including the visiting instrumental staff, are very good musicians and use their skills effectively in demonstrating and supporting the pupils' learning. Expectations are high and lessons well-planned overall, although sometimes there is insufficient variety in the activities. The management of pupils is good, creating a good working atmosphere resulting in productive working. The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils are very good and this means that they can profit from the opportunities offered for independent and group learning. The use of ICT is very good and enables pupils to compose with greater fluency and to present their work effectively. For example a group in Year 8 experimented with various drum patterns on the computer sequencer and were able to refine their composition. Pupils with special needs, and pupils for whom English is an additional language, learn well because of the high level of individual attention. This is a strength of the teaching in general. However learning could be more consolidated by the use of homework to support the class teaching. The marking of work in Years 7 to 9 is not sufficiently systematic nor linked to National Curriculum assessment levels; this means that pupils are insufficiently informed as to how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
154. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is clear educational direction and the flourishing extra-curricular activities and high take-up for instrumental lessons reflect this. There has been good improvement since the last inspection; standards have been raised and the quality of teaching and learning has improved. Significant progress has been made in the use of ICT. Although the accommodation for the department is good in terms of space and facilities, it suffers from inadequate sound insulation, which means that, in the course of the year, a significant number of lessons have to take place outside the music suite because of examinations in the adjacent hall. This has a negative effect on learning and affects standards in practical work.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- GCSE examination results are above average; pupils learn well in lessons in Years 10 and 11.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject.
- The subject has good systems for assessing pupils' work.
- Good relationships and pupils' positive attitudes contribute to a purposeful learning atmosphere.

Areas for improvement

- Standards have been adversely affected by inconsistencies in the quality of teaching brought about by long-term staff absence and the necessity to use a series of temporary teachers.
- There is insufficient time in the course taken by all pupils in Years 10 and 11 to cover all aspects of the course in sufficient depth.
- Monitoring of teaching and sharing good practice are insufficiently used as ways of improving the overall quality of teaching.

155. In the 2002 GCSE examination results, standards were above average. However, standards were well above average for those pupils following the full course and below average for those on the short course. Overall, these results were a significant improvement on the 2001 results, especially for boys whose results were then well below average. Over the last three years fewer girls than boys have studied physical education at GCSE. Pupils do as well in physical education as they do in their other subjects. Present standards of pupils in lessons and extra-curricular sports are average in Years 7 to 9 and above average in Years 10 and 11 in the GCSE course. School teams and individuals are successfully competing at school, district and county levels. No significant differences were observed between the performance of boys and girls.

156. Pupils enter Year 7 with physical skills which are broadly average for their age. By the end of Year 9, standards remain average, representing satisfactory achievement in Years 7 to 9. By the end of Year 9 many pupils take responsibility for their own warm up and some know the purpose of warm up. Many pupils are starting to use the correct physiological words associated with warm up. Year 9 pupils studying a health related fitness course know the differences between aerobic and anaerobic activity; they effectively take pulse rates in order to measure and record recovery rates. Pupils also get time to reflect upon how they feel after activity. Pupils' gymnastic skills are less well developed. In games, they show a basic understanding of the rules applying them fairly and accepting decisions without dissent. This was well shown in both Year 7 and 8 football lessons.
157. Standards by the end of Year 11 are above average; all pupils achieve well in relation to their work in Year 9. Work seen shows standards are improving. By the end of Year 11, pupils continue to have responsibility for their own warm up. However, they are now better aware than they were in Year 9 of some of the physiological changes that occur in the body that help performance. Teachers build upon the foundations laid in Years 7 to 9. Pupils following the GCSE course show a very good understanding of factors contributing to fitness. They successfully measure heart rates in order to measure fitness and recovery rates; many draw graphs to show this graphically. High attaining pupils show a secure knowledge of the workings of the hip and shoulder joints. Many know the major bones and muscle groups and how they work when the body exercises. Higher attaining pupils very successfully link theory and practice, which was well demonstrated in a Year 10 lesson on healthy eating related to different sports.
158. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory; teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Some of the shortcomings in teaching have come about through inconsistencies in the quality of teaching; long-term absence and the necessity to use a series of temporary teachers have adversely affected standards. However, teachers demonstrate very good knowledge of physical education. For example, the application of this knowledge was very well used to promote the pupils' learning during a Year 10 lesson on the importance of diet in sport activities. Good learning is encouraged by teachers' high expectations of both pupils' work and behaviour. For example, in a Year 9 health related fitness lesson, high expectations of good behaviour at the very start of the lesson enabled all pupils to learn very well. Overall, lesson planning is good ensuring continuity and progression. Good probing questions to stimulate all pupils' thinking is a strong feature of most lessons. For instance, in a Year 11 lesson on the cardio vascular system, good questioning enabled both consolidation and development of ideas. Pupils respond well to such questioning and give good quality oral responses. Good teaching methods, especially in the GCSE course, encourage pupils to consolidate their work and to take responsibility for their own learning. There is only limited support for pupils with special educational needs but, where learning support assistants are present, their presence is helpful. However, teachers are sufficiently flexible in their teaching to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs when there is no extra support. Good relationships and pupils' positive attitudes also contribute to the purposeful learning atmosphere found in most lessons.
159. The day-to-day management of the subject is satisfactory. At present, two relatively inexperienced teachers have the responsibility for leading boys' and girls' physical education. In the long-term absence of the head of subject, the need for several different temporary teachers has adversely affected standards and consistency of teaching. A weakness is the insufficient amount of monitoring of teaching that takes place; similarly, the best practice in the subject is not sufficiently shared. Overall, the curriculum is satisfactory, although its depth and breadth are significantly limited in Years 10 and 11, though there are some gaps in the schemes of work, including references to literacy, numeracy, citizenship and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of the subject. This means that these areas are not covered consistently, though, generally, both literacy and numeracy successfully support the subject. Assessment systems across Years 7 to 11 are now good and use National Curriculum levels in most aspects of the subject. The subject offers a seasonal range of extra curricular activities, which supports and extends the curriculum; about one fifth of the pupils take part. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory with staffing difficulties holding up development. However, the present team of teachers shows a good commitment to improving standards.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Results in the GCSE short course have been well above average.
- Pupils' positive attitudes to the subject contribute to their good achievement.

Areas for development

- Recent staffing difficulties have had an adverse impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Pupils are not given enough guidance on how to improve their work in Years 7 to 9.

160. Standards of work of Year 9 pupils are above the level expected by the Agreed Syllabus. Pupils have a good knowledge of the world's major religious traditions. In work on Islam, for example, Year 8 pupils showed a good understanding of the role of the mosque and of the importance of Hajj to Muslims. Pupils discuss religious and moral issues thoughtfully, giving well-argued reasons for their views. They use religious language correctly. The written work of higher attaining pupils is fluent and persuasive; this was seen in some Year 9 work on Buddhist beliefs about life after death. Overall, pupils achieve well, including those with special educational needs. However, pupils in some classes have not made as much progress as they might have done because of inconsistency in the quality of teaching.
161. In Years 10 and 11, all students follow the GCSE short course. Results have improved over the last three years to standards that were well above the national average in 2002. Present standards of work of Year 11 students are above the national average. At the moment they are not as high as last year, partly because staffing difficulties have disrupted pupils' learning in some classes. Pupils have a generally good understanding of a range of religious and moral questions, such as war and peace, medical ethics and issues of equality. Pupils also develop a good appreciation of Christian perspectives on these issues. Higher attaining pupils produce relevant and persuasive arguments to support a point of view, both orally and in writing, which was seen in some Year 11 work on racism. Overall, pupils achieve well. Their understanding of issues becomes clearer and their written work improves.
162. The overall quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. It is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. A period of long-term sickness and the departure of an unsuccessful teacher have led to some inconsistency in the quality of teaching and learning. Whilst lesson planning is thorough and detailed, work prepared for temporary teachers is not always implemented appropriately so that learning is not fully effective. Teachers usually manage pupils well so that they get the most out of lessons. However, in classes where there has been discontinuity in the teaching arrangements, small groups of pupils present challenging behaviour which is not always successfully handled. Teachers' understanding of the subject is generally good and their clear appreciation of GCSE examination requirements means that pupils are well prepared in Years 10 and 11. Teachers use a good range of methods so that pupils become fully involved in their work. In a lesson on Christian attitudes to euthanasia in Year 10, for example, skilful questioning, well-judged use of video and carefully organised work in groups made for particularly effective learning. The quality of teachers' marking is inconsistent. Some marking, especially in Year 10 and 11, is detailed and helpful, and supports pupils' learning well. Other marking is incomplete and inadequate which means that pupils are make less progress because they are not given enough encouragement to do their best, or sufficient help on how to improve. However, overall, pupils' attitudes are positive. They are usually interested in the topics they are studying and enjoy being challenged to think about issues of meaning and value. This helps to explain their generally good achievement in the subject.
163. Leadership and management of the subject are good. This has ensured good improvement since the previous inspection when provision was unsatisfactory. However, the recent staffing difficulties have weakened overall provision for the subject, but appointments have now been made which will

enable good provision to be restored. There is a strong commitment to high standards and further improvement. Good resources and classroom displays help to make for effective learning in religious education. Pupils' work is regularly assessed in Years 7 to 9 but pupils are not given enough guidance on ways to improve.

DRAMA

As drama is not a National Curriculum subject, there is no requirement to report on drama beyond commenting on its overall contribution to the curriculum and to pupils' experiences in the school. However, because drama, as a separate subject, has been introduced into the school's curriculum relatively recently in September 2001, the inspection team is pleased to report more fully than usual on drama to assess how successfully it has been introduced to the school.

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

Strengths

- Standards of attainment in Years 10 and 11 are above average with pupils achieving well.
- Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is very good, with very good programmes of study.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes to the subject.
- Leadership and management are very good, with good assessment arrangements in Years 10 and 11.

Areas for development

- Achievement over time in Years 7, 8 and 9 is held back by pupils' having only one lesson a fortnight, and because teaching by some non-specialists is less confident.

164. Until this year, no pupils have taken drama at GCSE. The current Year 11 pupils will be the first to do so. The subject is becoming very popular at this level, with two option groups choosing to take the subject in the current Year 10. Standards seen during the inspection are average by the end of Year 9 and above average by the end of Year 11. Under the very good leadership and teaching of the subject co-ordinator, both Years 10 and 11 are now making rapid progress and are likely to attain at least above average standards.

165. Pupils' drama coursework folders are thorough and well organised. Their written work reflects the good level of pupils' responses and development. It is clear that they have learnt to evaluate their own and others' work and to analyse intellectually as well as work creatively. Their performance skills are informed and well practiced, and they show an impressive grasp of improvisation work. Work seen in a Year 11 lesson based on one of their set texts, Arthur Miller's 'The Crucible', showed good knowledge of the play, much understanding of the moral dilemmas posed by the play and an ability to empathise with and portray characters with a high level of response. Work seen in Year 10 on a piece of practical coursework, as part of pupils' examination assessment, demonstrated a good degree of self-discipline in rehearsing and preparing for production. Their enthusiasm and enjoyment were infectious and their capacity for hard work and co-operative effort apparent as they continually came up with good new ideas to improve and refine their presentations.

166. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is very good with some excellent features. The drama teacher plans very carefully to ensure that pupils acquire all the necessary skills of stagecraft, improvisation, direction and evaluation. As a result, pupils are absorbed in their work and learn well. The teacher shows great expertise in the subject and communicates it well to the pupils. Pupils find her ideas and energy inspirational and she provides a very good role model for them. Her management of large mixed gender classes is very good and all pupils are encouraged to stretch themselves to reach their full potential. The pace of work is good, so that work is always productive and progressive. Methods are varied and tasks very focused, ensuring that pupils are constantly learning. Homework is set regularly and marked constructively and discussed with each pupil.

167. The programmes of study follow those set for the GCSE examination, but the teacher has adapted them with relevance and sensitivity to the needs of her pupils, who are largely inexperienced in drama when they begin the course. The subject is accessible to pupils of all abilities and many find that they are able to achieve well in the practical areas of the course, raising their self-esteem and their understanding of the way they present themselves. There are excellent relationships between pupils and the teacher.
168. The subject is very well led. The head of subject has devised all the very good schemes of work, drawn up strong and realisable development plans and brought a high degree of professional expertise and charismatic teaching to the subject. Assessment procedures are very good, both by the teacher and by the pupils themselves, under her direction. The results of assessment are used to great advantage to set targets for future achievement.
169. In Years 7, 8 and 9, standards are close to those of national expectations, but no higher. Pupils' achievement in these years is held back and is unsatisfactory over time because of the provision and timetabling in the school. In these years, pupils have a drama lesson once every two weeks and tend to forget what they have learnt in the intervening period. Since drama was only introduced eighteen months ago, few of them have much experience of stage techniques or dramatic genres. As there is only one drama specialist in the school, some classes at this age group are taught by non-specialists, some of whom are unsure of how to ensure the self-discipline needed by pupils in creative lessons. Progress is therefore hampered, despite the good schemes of work provided by the head of drama. These schemes of work promote good examples of areas of citizenship, such as that seen on the theme of 'Power', as well as an awareness of social and cultural influences, as observed in a Year 8 lesson based on Kafka's 'Metamorphosis', in which pupils were made aware of the style of modern theatre, as well as experimenting with body awareness and vocal techniques. However, the majority of pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to improve their oral and presentational skills in the way which more frequent drama lessons would offer them.

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

In the inspection, nine 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, the latest year for which complete national comparisons are available. However, comments are made in the text about results in 2002 in comparison with the school's 2001 results.

GCE A level and AVCE courses

| Subject | Number entered | % gaining grades A-E | | % gaining grades A-B | | Average point score | |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
| | | School | England | School | England | School | England |
| Art and design | 2 | 100 | 96 | 100 | 46 | 9.0 | 6.6 |
| Biology | 4 | 100 | 88 | 25 | 34 | 5.0 | 5.3 |
| Business studies | 11 | 100 | 92 | 27 | 32 | 5.5 | 5.5 |
| Chemistry | 5 | 100 | 90 | 40 | 43 | 5.2 | 5.9 |
| Computing | 3 | 67 | 86 | 0 | 23 | 3.3 | 4.6 |
| Design and technology | 4 | 100 | 91 | 50 | 30 | 6.0 | 5.4 |
| Economics | 5 | 100 | 89 | 60 | 36 | 7.2 | 5.5 |
| English literature | 10 | 90 | 95 | 20 | 37 | 5.4 | 5.9 |
| French | 3 | 100 | 89 | 33 | 38 | 4.0 | 5.6 |
| Geography | 11 | 91 | 92 | 27 | 38 | 4.2 | 5.7 |
| German | 4 | 75 | 91 | 0 | 40 | 2.5 | 5.8 |
| History | 9 | 100 | 88 | 33 | 35 | 6.9 | 5.5 |
| Mathematics | 13 | 92 | 87 | 46 | 43 | 6.8 | 5.8 |
| Music | 2 | 100 | 93 | 50 | 35 | 8.0 | 5.7 |
| Physics | 8 | 88 | 88 | 38 | 40 | 5.0 | 5.7 |
| Physical education | 11 | 100 | 92 | 0 | 25 | 4.4 | 5.1 |
| Religious studies | 3 | 33 | 92 | 0 | 38 | 0.7 | 5.8 |
| Sociology | 1 | 100 | 86 | 0 | 35 | 4.0 | 5.3 |

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics and chemistry, but one Year 12 lesson in each of biology and physics was also sampled. Both are popular subjects with encouragingly large numbers of students taking the courses. In both lessons, teaching and learning were good, with students achieving well and reaching above average standards. Learning is helped by teachers' good subject knowledge and high expectations of students; as a result, the quality of questioning is high and lessons proceed at a good pace.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Results at A-level are normally well above the national average, with a high proportion of A and B grades.
- Students do much better than expected compared with their GCSE grades
- There is a good balance of male and female students.
- Teaching is good overall, with a good proportion of very good teaching; lessons are well structured.
- Relationships between students and teachers are good.

Areas for improvement

- The number of A-level students has declined compared with numbers in 1998.
- Teaching strategies do not always cater fully for the wide range of attainment in A-level classes.
- Insufficient use is made of value added data to analyse the subject's performance.

170. Standards in the A-level examinations in 2001 were well above the national average, with half the students entered gaining either grade A or B. There was no significant difference in the results obtained by male and female students. Overall results were well above expectations based on students' performance at GCSE level, indicating very good achievement by students. In 2002, results showed a slight improvement in the proportion of students gaining grades in both the range A-B and A-E.
171. The standards of work of current students are above average, and their achievement is good overall. There is a wide range of attainment in most A-level classes, but with a high proportion of students aiming for higher grade passes. In a Year 13 lesson on the binomial series, the teacher did not manage to involve all students in discussion about the work, with the lower attaining students being generally more passive, and, consequently, achieving less well. Insufficient questions were directed at these students in order to ensure they understood the work. The standard of students' coursework assignments is also variable, but above average overall; they take pride in the presentation of their work.
172. Teaching is good overall, ranging from satisfactory to very good. The more lively and confident teaching is provided by the more experienced teachers. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subject; combined with the good relationships they have with students, this leads to a positive working atmosphere in most classes. Planning is good, with high expectations of students being on-task. However, there is not always sufficient breadth in the tasks provided in order to challenge both higher and lower attaining students. In a Year 12 lesson about speed and acceleration, good consolidation of the process of integration took place, and of the solving of quadratic equations. However, there were no additional and more difficult questions provided, and therefore there was insufficient challenge for the higher attaining students who found these processes straightforward. Better differentiation of tasks occurred in a Year 12 lesson about the transformation of algebraic functions where both teacher and students used graphic calculators effectively, and students were able to progress at their own pace. Here, the wide range of attainment was well catered for.
173. The subject also offers the opportunity for students to take the further mathematics examination, if there are sufficient students interested to form a viable group. Results at this level are also normally above average. The key skills course on application of number was no longer operating at the time of the inspection, having terminated rather early in the term whilst awaiting students' test results. The take-up for mathematics A-level courses has declined since the last inspection when take-up rates were described as very high. However, there is a very good balance of male and female students, and a high proportion of students taking the subject complete the two-year course.

174. Leadership and management of the sixth form courses in mathematics are satisfactory. The work is well organised, with the A-level teaching shared by four teachers; in most lessons there is a clear sense of enjoyment of the intellectual challenge of the subject. The formal assessment of students' standards is satisfactory, but there are insufficient references to A-level standards when marking work. Moreover, when analysing examination performance, the subject does not make sufficient use of the value added data available in the school to identify strengths and weaknesses in provision, and there is insufficient monitoring of teaching to support this process.
175. At the time of the last inspection, standards were described as well above average, with a very high take-up rate. The take-up rate has declined, but this is a national trend, and the subject has maintained its high standards. Overall, satisfactory improvement has been made.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average and students have very positive attitudes to their work.
- Teaching is good and there is a stimulating pace to learning in lessons.
- Students have a good introduction to the course.
- Regular homework is set, and good marking ensures the rigorous monitoring of students' progress.

Weaknesses

- Students are not involved sufficiently in assessing and identifying clear targets for learning, nor are they guided on how these should be reached
- Learning objectives are not emphasised clearly enough by teachers.

176. Chemistry is a popular and successful subject in the sixth form. Increasing and good numbers take the subject but uptake does not yet fully reflect the very strong performance of the subject at GCSE. This is because the subject has not been marketed as well as it might have been. Standards at A-level in 2001 were average with the proportion of students reaching the higher grades being above average. Standards in 2002 were higher and reflected the well above average standards seen in previous years. Standards reached by those students taking the one year AS examinations were above average in 2001 and were similar in 2002. Students did well at the end of both years compared with their GCSE performance. Present students in both years are attaining above average standards because of the good teaching, good curriculum and their very good attitudes to work.
177. Year 12 students are achieving well and have adapted well to the demands of their new course. During the first term, they developed a better understanding of some the fundamental aspects of the subject, such as how elements are arranged in the periodic table, atomic structure and methods of chemical analysis. In lessons seen, students learnt how changes in temperature or pressure resulted in chemical reactions responding to counteract the change. In practical exercises, most students could confidently use this idea (Le Chatelier's principle) to predict what would happen in a variety of other chemical reactions. Their reasons were well justified.
178. Year 13 students are also achieving well, with the female reaching higher standards than the male students. In one lesson, they understood very difficult ideas about how some reactions occur through exchanging electrons in an "electrolytic cell". Once they had gained confidence in the rules and conventions involved, most could use their new understanding to predict what would happen in a variety of other combinations of chemicals. Written work is generally well-organised and focuses on a problem solving approach, but there is scope to increase the amount of a more open-ended writing and note taking. Students have some opportunities to use ICT for gathering experimental data and in word processing their work, but this aspect of work is generally under-represented.

179. Teaching is consistently good and a key reason why students do well. Teaching is shared and effectively co-ordinated between two teachers in each year. This arrangement works well. The shared expertise strengthens learning and helps students to gain a wider perspective of the subject. Students experience a good range of learning approaches. For example, a newly developing school web site is being used to help students revise and widen their appreciation of the subject. Both teachers have very good subject knowledge and help students learn well by explaining difficult ideas clearly. Lessons are effectively planned with the demands of the examination syllabus in mind. The one weakness in teaching is that the learning goals of each lesson are not always sufficiently emphasised at the start of the lesson, nor revisited at the end of the lesson to establish how much has actually been learnt and where misunderstandings still prevail.
180. Students speak positively of the course and of their teachers. They appreciate the personal attention, support and guidance they are given and the care teachers give to make their learning challenging and interesting. They have very good attitudes to work, are attentive, concentrate hard and are keen to give of their best. Time is used to the full in lessons. They are equipped with the latest chemistry textbooks and make good reference to these in their work. Students rise to the challenges and deadlines which are set and have a mature attitude to their work.
181. The subject is well led and managed. Good feedback on tasks set, regular topic tests, assessed practical work, reports and predicted grades help to give students a fairly clear idea on how well they are doing. Rigorous monitoring of students' progress helps to ensure that they receive timely help and support at all times. There is an emerging system of topic assessment, but this lacks an element of self assessment from the students; incisive comments from teachers and agreement of what individual students need to do to address areas of weakness would make assessment an more effective tool to further improve standards. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology is taught. One Year 13 lesson was sampled. Standards are average with satisfactory achievement, though, in the sampled lesson, teaching and learning were good. The majority of students are working independently and are very knowledgeable about what they are doing. There is a good range of products being made in a variety of materials, and students are competent both in their designs and their constructions.

BUSINESS

The school offers an intermediate level GNVQ business course, an advanced vocational course in business, A-level business studies and economics. The focus was on economics, but two business lessons were sampled. In a GNVQ lesson on students' work experience assignment, teaching and learning were good because of planning that was clearly structured and because of good use of assessment. Standards are broadly at pass level, though, last year, four out of seven students achieved merits. A GNVQ business studies lesson was taken by two visitors from a major international company. They made a very good presentation and made a very worthwhile contribution to the course which put much emphasis on real links with industry.

Economics

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is very good and leads to students achieving very well and reaching above average standards.
- The assessment of work informs students well about the progress they are making on the AS- and A-level courses.
- The curriculum is very good and is enhanced by good links with the business community.
- ICT is well used to extend students' learning.

Areas for improvement

- Students are not trained sufficiently in assessing their own performance.

182. Results in the GCE A-level examination in 2001 were very high, albeit from a small entry of students. Female students achieved higher than males did but both were well above their respective national averages. Results in 2002 were slightly lower but still well above the 2001 national average. Analysis of data shows that students, overall, did better than expected from their GCSE scores and achieved better than they did in the other subjects that they studied.
183. In work seen during the inspection, students' attainment is above average. This represents very good achievement given the standards on entry to the AS level course. Students have very good knowledge of a wide range of economic terms. In a Year 12 lesson for example, students discussed ideas about the factors influencing consumption, used correct terms and understood how changes in interest rates affects the cost of borrowing and investment planning. They make very good use of the Internet to research information in global and local contexts. Note taking is clear and well ordered but, in extended writing, students do not analyse work enough nor use examples to support theoretical studies.
184. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of topics are excellent and combined with the clarity of explanation, lead to students making very good progress. Teachers know students' learning needs very well. The work is regularly assessed; students are well informed about their strengths and weaknesses and how they can raise standards further. As a result, they improve the structure of written work and increasingly give more detail in answers. In a Year 12 lesson for example, students improved their writing skills about government influence to promote healthy living because the teacher discussed issues and supported learning with a model answer. Teachers expect much of students and consistently set challenges for them. In turn students respond very well by independently researching tasks, collaborating with others to give group presentations. The emphasis placed on economic literacy is strong. In Year 13 for example, students know key terms such as 'single currency' and 'exchange rates' in assessing the benefits of the UK joining the single currency. They write well-structured notes and use data in writing evaluation of the merits of joining. A strong feature of students' learning is the pace of progress made in lessons. This is because teachers set time controls for completion of tasks, monitor progress closely combined with students' positive response to the challenges presented. Occasionally, learning could be even better because too much comes from the teacher and not enough is expected of students in discussion.
185. The quality of leadership and management are very good. The ways that teachers assess students' progress, and the support that is provided, help them to make very good progress on the AS- and A-level courses. However, because students do not engage in formal, on-going assessment of their own performance, a valuable opportunity for critical self-analysis is missed. The match of teachers to courses is excellent and leads to students attaining high standards. The curriculum is broad and enhanced by a wide range of links with the business community, such as HSBC who work with the sixth form students manage the school bank. There are first class relationships between teachers and students and these promote self-confidence and the will to succeed; students' morale is consequently very high. The resources for learning are very good and students make regular use of information and communication technology to support learning.

186. The economics course has replaced the joint business and economics that was reported at the last inspection and there is no direct comparison between the courses. The high standards reported previously, however, have continued.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The focus was on advanced-level courses in ICT, but a notable innovation this year for students taking AS level in Year 12 has been their taking an industrial standard network systems course as well; standards are above average in test scores in this course. In addition, a key skills level 3 course teaches ICT skills to other students to complement their other work. In the one lesson that was sampled, teaching and learning were good, with several students very skilled in the use of spreadsheets.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- Achievement of students is now good and improving as a result of the very good teaching they are now receiving.
- Very good relationships between staff and students lead to very positive attitudes and a very good learning environment.
- The work is very well structured and meets the needs and aspirations of the students.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not yet have sufficient opportunities to become actively involved in their learning.

187. The A-level course is new to the school and there are no previous results. Standards in the subject are broadly average in both Year 12 and Year 13, with potential for standards to rise further. Several students currently doing the AS and A-level courses have not taken ICT at GCSE level prior to starting the courses in the 6th form. This means that teachers have to cover the basics as well as the more advanced level skills. As a result, the course has been challenging for both the students and teachers. All have responded very well, and students are achieving well.

188. Students are familiar with a wide range of software and are able to show application of this in a variety of challenging tasks. Coursework for both AS- and A-level courses is now well planned and structured to meet the coursework criteria. Students have developed a good knowledge and use of databases. The application of this forms part of their examination coursework tasks. The selection of software used by the school this year is more flexible and appropriate for the demands of the coursework. This is an improvement on the software used by the students in the previous year when they were disadvantaged by the limitations of the software they used.

189. The quality of teaching and learning is now very good. Last year, the AS-level results were below expectations, but the factors that caused the problem have now been successfully tackled. There has been much additional work to students' coursework with some students retaking the examination with improved results. The school has appointed an additional teacher who joined the school at the beginning of this school year. He is an experienced examiner for the A-level course. Students are benefiting well from this expertise, and this is reflected in the very good teaching now being seen. The changes that have taken place are now contributing to the improved standards of work seen in lessons which is matched more closely than it used to be to the requirements of the examination. Lessons seen during the inspection were well planned and teachers were well organised. They have very good knowledge of the subject. As a result, students benefit from the very structured and specific guidance and support which is well matched to the needs of individuals. Teachers set clear objectives in lessons to guide students with their work. In lessons, teachers cover the knowledge to good depth and explain the information well. However, students are sometimes less active in their own learning in lessons because of listening to the teacher without having sufficient opportunities to be challenged and to participate. Students are given good individual support. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson where the teacher discussed specific points

for development with each student, helping students to consolidate their own plans for their coursework.

190. Students complete a network management certificate in Year 12. This is an accreditation recognised by industry. This gives them the opportunity to gain further practical application and knowledge of computer network systems. An example of this was seen in a Year 12 lesson; in the lesson, students were setting up a network of their own design in the sixth form ICT lab. The majority of students develop good skills in numeracy to cover work on spreadsheets and gain sufficient understanding of the concepts both as part of the network certificate course and the A-level coursework components. Their literacy skills are good and students complete work to an appropriate level as required for the examination. They benefit from the high quality of teachers' guidance to increase the quality and presentation of their final coursework. Teachers establish very good relationships with the students, which create a very good learning ethos in which there is mutual respect.
191. Leadership and management of the subject are very good, with a clear view of students' needs and the type of relevant courses and teaching that they need. Much of the difficulties with the initial introduction of the AS and A-level courses have now been successfully addressed. The A-level course is now well established and has become very popular amongst students. The network systems course is also developing well. Teachers work well together as a team and very good relationships create very good conditions for learning. Standards are improving since the start of the course two years ago. There is good monitoring of the work of students as well as improvements in teaching and learning.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education is the only course taught in this curriculum area.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good; teachers have very good knowledge and very high expectations of students.
- Achievement is good because students are well taught, and they work well in groups and independently.
- Very good relationships and students' excellent attitudes also contribute to a very purposeful learning atmosphere.

Areas for improvement

- Although teaching is good, more observation of particularly good practice and extension of expertise through professional training, would improve the overall quality of teaching further.
- Weaknesses in the organisation and presentation of students' files are holding back their progress over time.
- There are insufficient timetabled opportunities for physical recreation for all sixth formers.

192. Over the last four years, between six and ten students have taken A-level, and it is rare for a student not to complete the course. However, since 1999 results have declined. In 2001 A-level results were below average; results in 2002 were similar with no students gaining A or B grades, with students tending not to do as well as they do in their other subjects.
193. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are currently above average and rising rapidly. Students are now achieving well. Year 12 students can successfully analyse the performances of their peers, though they often look for complex things rather than the basics. Year 13 sports psychology lesson students show a very good understanding of the reasons for success and failure in a sporting activity, with high attaining students analysing these situations very well and coming up

with possible solutions. They show a good awareness of commercialisation in sport exploring both the positive and negative aspects. In a physiology lesson on the sliding filament theory, many Year 13 students showed a secure understanding of the processes, which involved successfully relating theory to practice.

194. The quality of both teaching and learning in physical education are good. The majority of lessons seen were classroom based; due to the nature of the examination syllabus, there is limited physical participation. Good teaching is characterised by very good subject knowledge. This was evident in the good explanations they give to their students, for example, in the development of factors affecting sports performance, and how the theory and practice match one another. Teachers are very confident and enthusiastic about their subject and want their students to be successful. Teachers also have high expectations of students. As a result of this good teaching, students make rapid gains in their knowledge and understanding, particularly as teaching methods also give students much responsibility for their own learning. For instance, students make good class presentations using ICT and many are able to confidently sum up a debate as was seen in a Year 13 lesson on global sport. Good literacy and numeracy skills also successfully support students learning. Students are given good opportunities to work individually or in small groups. For example, in a Year 13 lesson where students were analyzing skills in their chosen sport, they engaged in open debate with each other and consequently improved the depth of their learning. A feature of the majority of lessons is the pace and demands made by teachers and, as a consequence, students take part with great zest and enthusiasm, resulting in good achievement. Students' attitudes towards physical education are very good; these also contribute to their good learning. They develop a very good and confident working relationship with their teachers and as a result good learning takes place.
195. The leadership and management of physical education in the sixth form are good. Although the leadership and management are shared between two teachers, the team teaching the A-level modules work well together. However, more opportunities to observe other teachers in their work, and further opportunities to extend their own expertise, would give some teachers experience of a more extensive range of teaching styles. Monitoring of students' work takes place regularly; however, progress is hindered by the work in files not being well presented or organised in a way to make for easy recall of learning. At present, there are insufficient timetabled opportunities for physical recreation courses for all sixth formers.
196. Although, up to now, examination standards have not improved since the previous inspection, other good improvements have been made. Notably, assessment systems have improved and teaching methods have expanded to involve students more fully in their own learning. Indeed, all teaching is now at least good and, at times, it is excellent.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No courses are taught in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design, music and media studies are taught. Media studies has just started this academic year and, at present, is only taught in Year 12. The focus was on art and design, but one media studies lesson and one music lesson were sampled. Teaching and learning were good in the media studies lesson analysing an advertisement for a major retailer. Standards are above average with very positive relationships encouraging high levels of participation. Very good teaching and learning are leading to well above average standards in music. A high-powered lesson analyzing a prelude and fugue by Shostakovich moved at a fast pace with the relaxed tutorial style approach creating an atmosphere in which the students had confidence to draw on their previous knowledge to discuss and work things out with the teacher; there were real gains in knowledge and understanding.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- High quality teaching has a significant impact on raising standards.
- Very good leadership and management provide a clear educational direction.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work.

Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient opportunities for students to use ICT creatively.
- Inadequate storage provision puts students' work at risk of being damaged.

197. The subject offers courses in AS art and design and AS and A-level fine art. Very small numbers of A-level entries in recent years means that no valid comparisons with national standards can be made. However, the AS results for 2002 were promising; ten students were entered and the majority achieved very well in relation to their GCSE results. Retention rates are good, with all but one of these students continuing into the A-level course and working at above average standards. The number of pupils in the current Year 11 who have applied for the AS course next year shows a very significant increase on previous years.
198. Present standards in both Years 12 and 13 are above average in relation to AS and A-level expectations. Students' achievement in relation to their GCSE results is very good. Students in Year 13 have made particularly good progress. This is due to the identification by the new head of subject of shortcomings in their earlier work and the subsequent implementation of a programme of study which ensures that all students are thoroughly prepared for the demands of A-level study. Students in Year 12 make rapid progress in the way they learn to deal with these demands and to think and work independently. They quickly develop the confidence to work in new media such as oil paint, and are able to produce accomplished and ambitious large scale paintings. One outstanding example of the progress made is the large portrait by one higher attaining Year 12 student which hangs near the school office. This was produced as the result of extensive personal research and experimentation. The way in which the student was able to explain her intentions and the growth in her own learning showed impressive maturity of thought, ideas and self-confidence. Students use ICT to produce well written critical studies but their achievement in the creative uses of computers is unsatisfactory because they do not have sufficient opportunities to use them in this way.
199. Teaching is of high quality. Overall it is very good with some excellent features. The teacher has expert understanding of examination course requirements and plans work to ensure that both these and the needs of individual students are fully met. Students are challenged to think for themselves whilst, at the same time, they are provided with the teaching necessary to enable them to pursue their own individual approaches. Students are very well supported when they encounter difficulties. This was evident in a Year 12 lesson, where the teacher provided appropriate help to a student with English as an additional language who was having difficulty with her written art historical work. Students respond very positively to the teaching and to the support they receive. Although some arrive late for the lessons on days when they are not required to attend registration, overall their attitudes to work are very good. Students appreciate the help they are given by the teacher and they recognise the progress they have made as a result of the teacher's efforts. They welcome the opportunities they are provided with for their personal development. A Year 12 student, for example, spoke enthusiastically about the work she does to assist the teacher in a Year 7 art class. A good proportion of students apply for higher education and the teacher provides helpful advice with the preparation of portfolios for interviews.
200. Leadership and management are very good. On taking up post, the head of subject quickly established what needed to be done and she provides a clear educational direction. Assessment procedures are good and students benefit from regular, constructive feedback about their work. A classroom has been equipped as a sixth form studio in which students have individual work areas. This makes a significant contribution to standards and students' attitudes because they are able to work without distraction and can leave work out safely and return to it in their private study time. However, storage facilities for students' examination coursework and for resources are inadequate

for the needs of students and for teaching; there is a risk of students' work being damaged. The subject has only one computer which means that there are insufficient opportunities for students to learn about the applications of ICT in the art and design industries. Although this remains an unsatisfactory feature of the subject's provision, overall improvement since the last inspection has been good.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on history, but geography and religious studies are also taught; one lesson from each subject was sampled. In the geography lesson, students were working on sand dune ecosystems as part of their preparation for a field course. Teaching and learning were very good with above average standards. The combination of well motivated students, very good teacher knowledge, and a very well structured and progressive lesson led to a stimulating learning experience with much gain in understanding. In the religious studies lesson, teaching and learning were good with most students working at above average standards. Students are clearly enjoying the course and have very good attitudes to the work. The well managed discussion helped students to understand the importance of sustaining a line of argument and of justifying a point of view.

History

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

Strengths

- The most recent results in A-level history were well above the 2001 national average, with most students showing very good achievement in relation to their previous attainment.
- Students produce well-balanced arguments with a very good command of analytical skills.
- Teaching is very good: it is well planned and reflects the strength of subject knowledge and a very good understanding of the way students learn.

Areas for improvement

- Students' skills in using detailed historical evidence to support their arguments are not quite as well developed as other aspects of their work.

201. Present standards are well above average. Students' performances in the A-level examination in 2001 were average for the proportion achieving A and B grades and above average for the proportion achieving a pass grade. These results represent very good achievement in relation to students' standards on entry to the course. In 2002 examination results were well above the national average for 2001 in terms of A and B grades, with a particularly high number of students gaining A grades. All students obtained a pass. Again, these results represent very good achievement in relation to standards on entry to the course. Inspection evidence confirms that standards in Year 13 are well above average and achievement is very good. Standards are well above what might be expected in the Year 12 AS-level course with students progressing smoothly from GCSE.

202. Students analyse historical sources critically and evaluate a wide range of historical evidence to produce well-balanced and convincing arguments. This was evident, for example, in a Year 13 lesson where students debated whether Lenin was responsible for the development of Stalinism. Students are able to articulate their own views with growing confidence, showing a very high command of the higher-order skills of analysis and synthesis. Students' written work is carefully organised and structured to support valid conclusions based on evidence. Sometimes, however, students need reminding to provide sufficiently detailed evidence to support their arguments. Teachers have very effective strategies to ensure that students develop good notes and study skills. As a result, their files are well organised with information presented in a variety of ways to ensure efficient retrieval.

203. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Occasionally the teaching is excellent. There are many significant strengths in the teaching that have a positive impact on both students' attitudes

and the quality of their learning. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed to raising standards in the subject and increasing its popularity as an option choice. A large number of pupils in the current Year 11 have chosen history as a Year 12 option. Although two out of the three sixth form teachers are new to A-level teaching, all have high levels of subject knowledge and prepare students effectively for the demands of the higher-order skills in the subject. Students feel that they benefit from being taught by three well-qualified teachers who have a complementary range of strengths. Teachers choose well-structured learning tasks that enable students to make clear progress in their quality of thinking and writing. Students are articulate, purposeful and confident. They realise that they are being taught well and respond accordingly. The relationships between teachers and students are very positive and students show very good levels of enthusiasm for their history lessons. Evaluation of their work is speedy and thorough: during the week of the inspection, for example, one student was on the second version of an essay which her teacher willingly agreed to remark.

204. The very good achievement and teaching can be attributed to the fact that the subject is very well managed by an experienced head of subject and a committed team of teachers. The subject leader has a clear view of the priorities for the subject and is committed to the maintenance and further improvement of the high standards established in recent years.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was English literature and French, but one Year 12 lesson in German was sampled. It was a very good lesson. There was a strong focus on grammar; relationships with the small group were very good and created positive attitudes. As a result all the students participated actively in the lesson; they have successfully bridged the gap from GCSE and are developing well as independent learners. Standards are above average.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Standards in English are above average and students achieve well because students have good attitudes towards their work and share very good relationships with their teachers.
- Teaching is good. Lessons are stimulating and help students to gain good understanding of their set texts
- Students' work is very well monitored and assessed.
- The leadership of the subject is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Students are not sufficiently encouraged to think and research independently.

205. The A-level English literature results in 2002 were well above the 2001 national average, with over half of the entry gaining A grades. Several students attained good grades in the advanced extension paper. This was an improvement on the previous year, when results were above the national average, but there were fewer of the higher grades. Overall, students taking English attain some of the best results in the sixth form. Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE grades and there is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls.

206. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. By the end of Year 13, most students can speak about their texts in a mature and adult manner and with clear expression of their ideas. They do not always offer contributions readily during lessons, but are, nevertheless, absorbed and interested in their work. Their reading of texts from all periods is thoughtful and this can be seen clearly in the quality of coursework they produce. They approach difficult texts, such as Chaucer's 'The Merchants' Tale', with enthusiasm and a readiness to overcome the difficulties presented by the language. Their written work tends to be more forthcoming than their oral contributions, showing a wide range of

vocabulary and critical terms and a high degree of understanding. As a result, their level of achievement is good, often very good, as students work with increasing familiarity with texts and show strong personal response to them.

207. The attitudes of students are good. They listen well to their teachers, respect their knowledge and opinions and are well motivated to achieve. In lessons, they treat the opinions of others with thought and respect. Students' levels of concentration and perseverance are good. Many clearly spend much time and expend much energy in producing work of the highest standard of which they are capable and all take pride in their work. Their written work is, carefully drafted and redrafted and full of good, relevant quotation and reference.
208. Teaching is good overall. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are able to inspire students with their enthusiasm for literature. This was clearly to be seen in a lesson on Brian Friel's play, 'Translations', in which the teacher's depth of understanding of a complex text made it both accessible and absorbing to the students. Their enthusiasm and understanding were testament to the success of the teaching and learning which had taken place. They teach the basic skills of critical appreciation and literary techniques well. Lessons are effectively planned to match the current objectives and teachers have good expectations of what students can achieve. Lessons are managed through friendly relations and mutual respect. Time is always used efficiently to good purpose, as in a lesson in which students were examining 'Othello', looking at the part played by Iago and the techniques of persuasion used by him. Students worked hard to draw up a list of his techniques, while the teacher intervened with sensitivity, to clarify language and imagery. Teachers' day-to-day assessment of students' work is good and homework is used to good effect, ensuring that students make progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding.
209. Lessons are well planned so that teachers ensure that their students understand the moral, social and cultural context of the times of the texts they study and compare them with the values of today. In a Year 12 lesson on 'Hamlet', the teacher was careful to explain the significance of spiritual ideas and the symbolism of religious belief in Shakespeare's time as students studied the first scene, when the Ghost first appears.
210. The quality of assessment of students' work is very good. Regular oral and written assessment is carried out and fed back to students, who are also encouraged to evaluate their own achievement. Information gained from assessment is subsequently used to help teachers to reinforce areas of weakness and to provide targets for each student. Students are sometimes too content to rely on their teachers for ideas and understanding of their work. They lack a high degree of independence and do not always carry out sufficient personal research to reinforce the work done in lessons. Although they demonstrate a good level of personal response to literature, they would benefit from greater expression of their own opinions, both orally and in their written work.
211. The subject is very well managed and led. The head of subject ensures that teachers work well as a knowledgeable, close team. His leadership is of a style which ensures that teachers are always prepared to help motivated students and to offer good advice and encouragement.

French

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and challenging with sustained use of French.
- Students are mature and have positive attitudes to the subject; this helps their own learning.
- Students are encouraged to be independent learners through the regular use of the Internet to research information on the topics of the course.

Areas for development

- Some students' learning is reduced by weaknesses in structured programmes and weaknesses in guidance for increasing their vocabulary and improving their pronunciation
- Because some students undertake little private study beyond the topics studied for the examination, their language skills and knowledge of the culture are not as good as they could be.

212. Numbers taking A-level have been too low in recent years to make valid national comparisons. However, in 2001 and 2002, all students gained grades at least as good as would be expected from their GCSE results. Results at the A-level in 2002 were much higher than 2001 with three students gaining an A grade and one student a B grade.

213. The overall standards of work seen of current students are above average. In Year 13, because there are only two students of broadly similar attainment, they lack the benefit of the variety of exchanges, opinions and questioning that is found in larger groups. Their achievement from GCSE and the AS-level is satisfactory. They have good attitudes and communicate both orally and in written work. However their written work continues to show weaknesses in aspects of basic grammar and vocabulary. In Year 12, there is a larger group covering a full range of attainments. There are good relationships within the group and with their teachers. This creates a non-threatening atmosphere where all students are confident to attempt answers and where they benefit from paired work requiring them to argue from different standpoints. These students have adjusted well to the requirement to be independent learners and show good achievement from their GCSE grades. In oral presentations, each had prepared a separate talk on some aspect of employment. As homework they are all required to use the Internet to research information on topics; they do this successfully, extending their knowledge and understanding as a result. The written work of the high attaining students is already at the level of higher grades; good language constructions are used, and these students display a good vocabulary and a high level of accuracy. Other students in the group have a more limited vocabulary. This is because they do not systematically record and revise new words and phrases. As a result, they are more hesitant in speaking and more limited in their written work. In both speaking and listening the students benefit from teaching which is almost exclusively in French. Because of this, their speaking and listening skills are good.

214. Teaching is good. Teachers plan well with authentic and up-to-date materials to introduce new topics. Learning benefits from the teaching being shared between teachers, with each bringing different strengths and emphases. All teachers challenge the students through the sustained use of French. This challenge is even greater where a native speaker makes no concessions of pace in speaking. As a result students have developed the skill of listening for broad understanding. However, teachers do not regularly challenge poor pronunciation nor teach pronunciation formally; as a result, what students mean when speaking is not always clear. All teachers set tasks in class paired work, written homework and internet research that require the students to participate actively as individuals. Independent learning is an established feature of the students' work, helping their progress. An extension of this by encouraging students to use the Internet and other media for private study would reinforce their language skills and increase their broader knowledge of the culture. Relationships with the students are good. Teachers know the students well and match their expectations accordingly. Written work is regularly marked using the examination board's pattern. Students would have a clearer understanding of their attainment if there were more formal assessments with references to grades and the examination board's criteria. Students would also benefit if the good marking of written work was extended to identify subject-specific targets to improve attainment levels.

215. Management and leadership of the subject in the sixth form are good. By sharing the teaching in the sixth form, teachers develop professionally from the stimulus of teaching at this level. At the same time, students benefit from the variety and different strengths that each teacher brings. The schemes of work are clear and support teachers' preparation. The department's expectations of the use of ICT is evident and builds on the good practice developed in the main school. The proper priority of inducting new teachers into the main school has limited monitoring of teaching in the sixth form. Formal and mutual monitoring would enable teachers to share in the good practice that is already taking place.