

INSPECTION REPORT

TEWKESBURY SCHOOL

Ashchurch Road, Tewkesbury

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 115756

Headteacher: Mr A Önaç

Reporting inspector: Ian Stuart
19298

Dates of inspection: 30 September – 3 October 2002

Inspection number: 249831

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C Horswell
Date of previous inspection:	16 – 20 September 1996

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13481	Doug Binfield	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development; How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
22691	Ray Woodhouse	Team inspector	Physics	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
23528	Andrew Bird	Team inspector	Mathematics	
23393	Brian Dower		English	
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18261	Anthony Hill	Team inspector	Art	
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27666	John Dockrell	Team inspector	French	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Tewkesbury School is a comprehensive school for boys and girls with just over 1700 pupils, including 330 in the sixth form. It is much larger than most schools. It is situated on the edge of the historic and rapidly expanding town of Tewkesbury, close to the M5 motorway, and serves the town and surrounding area. It is the only secondary school in the town, though a decreasing number of children go to grammar schools in Gloucester and Cheltenham. The pupils come from a range of backgrounds and circumstances, which, overall, are similar to the national picture; a significant minority has disadvantaged circumstances, even though the proportion claiming free school meals is below average. The attainments of pupils on entry have improved a little in recent years so that they are now around the national average. The proportion of pupils with special needs is broadly average, though the proportion with a Statement of Special Educational Need is below average. Few pupils come from ethnic minorities and virtually no pupils speak English as an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school with some outstanding features. It provides a very effective education for nearly all its pupils whatever their abilities and circumstances. From overall standards which are average on entry, pupils achieve very well; present standards are now well above average by the end of Year 11, as were GCSE results in 2001. It is a civilised and very well-ordered place; pupils' personal development and relationships between themselves and with their teachers are excellent, characterised by friendliness and respect. The tone of the school creates an atmosphere that encourages high achievement and hard work; this environment produces mature young people who are well prepared to take their place as worthy citizens of the 21st century. The large sixth form considerably enriches the life of the school. Teaching is very good overall. The school provides very good value for the money, and has the potential to develop still further, particularly as it builds on rising standards in Years 7 to 9.

What the school does well

- Excellent relationships in a very caring and supportive environment encourage pupils to work very hard to achieve their best.
- Very good teaching and learning in a large number of lessons enable pupils to reach high standards.
- Very good leadership and management at all levels enable the school to continue to make progress with clearly identified priorities for development.
- Pupils' personal development is excellent, with excellent provision for extra-curricular activities, including the arts, sport and other areas.
- The very high quality of resources in information and communication technology (ICT) and their use in the subject and across the curriculum is enhancing pupils' achievements in many areas.
- Teachers are highly enthusiastic and committed to all aspects of each pupil's education.

What could be improved

- There are no areas where significant improvement is needed.

As there are no areas of weakness significant enough to be raised here, there is no requirement for specific issues to be covered in a governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected six years ago in September 1996 when it received a very positive report. Since that time there have been very major changes in education generally and at the school. The substantial evidence of very successful developments in recent years includes the school's designation and recent re-designation as a Beacon School, its Technology College status, Gold Sportsmark and Artsmark awards, its steadily improving GCSE results and, more recently, marked improvements in its national test results at the end of Year 9, and very significant improvements in buildings and resources for learning. The quality of care and support for pupils continues to be very high despite much growth in the size of the school. The quality of teaching is now being monitored much more rigorously, and, because teaching is of a more consistently high quality now, this is having a positive impact on the quality of learning and standards. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

STANDARDS

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

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

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

Over the last four years, the results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have been around the national average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science; in 2000, they were above average; standards in mathematics and science have generally been higher than English. However, the 2002 results are much higher, around the likely 'well above average' benchmark. Until 2001, results have been following the national trend. Standards of work seen during the inspection by the end of Year 9 are above average, reflecting recent improvements. Pupils are now achieving very well; they are developing their knowledge and understanding, as well as making good progress in improving their literacy, numeracy and computing skills. In most subject areas, the use of computers and new technology is enhancing the quality of learning very significantly.

GCSE results over the last four years have improved broadly in line with the national trend, and were well above average in 2001 following a notable rise. The results in 2002 are only slightly lower than 2001. A significant feature of GCSE results in recent years has been the very substantial improvement between the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11; in 2001, the school was in the top five per cent of schools nationally for improvement at this stage. Work seen during the inspection by the end of Year 11 shows well above average standards and very good achievement. Achievement is similar amongst all groups of pupils right through from Year 7 to Year 11. Whilst girls, overall, are achieving somewhat better than boys, boys and girls work well together; the gap between girls' and boys' attainments has been much less than the national difference in all but one recent years. In both Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 to 11, the school is in line to meet its suitably demanding targets.

AS and A-level results were above average in 2001 as they have been in most recent years. The 2002 results show a substantial rise. Most students attained grades in line with or better than would be expected from standards on entry. Work seen during the inspection is above average overall, showing good achievement from most students.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Most pupils enjoy school; they want to do their best and take advantage of what it offers them.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Nearly all pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. Some pupils can be challenging but occasional poor behaviour is very well managed and only rarely disrupts other pupils' learning.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Pupils are very friendly, open, respectful and co-operative. These qualities are very well promoted by teachers who are deeply committed to their pupils and provide excellent role models.
Attendance	Good and above the national average. Unauthorised absence is very low. Despite the large site, lateness to lessons is not a significant problem.

The very positive attitudes and behaviour are great strengths 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	Very good	Very good	Very good

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

Teaching is very good overall in the main school and in the sixth form. Although some teaching is not as good as most of it, there are no significant differences between the quality of teaching in different years in the school. Indeed the increasing emphasis the school is putting on the monitoring of teaching and the sharing of good practice ensures that high quality teaching is occurring consistently across the school and within subjects. Teachers have embraced new initiatives, such as the Key Stage 3 Strategy, and the use of well-designed and appropriate teaching methods is having a very positive impact on pupils' learning and their achievements.

In most cases, teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of their subject ensures that they are able to convey their enthusiasm to pupils who respond well to stimulating teaching. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills are major strengths in the school. The teaching of information and communication technology (ICT) is first-rate. In other subject areas in some lessons, the high skill levels of teachers mean that pupils are able to make very good use of modern technology to raise their standards considerably. In most cases, the teaching meets the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs. The teaching methods used by most teachers enable boys and girls to learn equally well and work well together, resulting in a narrower gap in achievement between boys and girls than is found in most schools.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. All statutory requirements are met, and the curriculum is broad and balanced. However, there are a number of classes in some subjects which have two different teachers, the options pattern can restrict some pupils' choices, and not all teachers make full use of all of each 65 minute lesson.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Specialist teaching, support in classes, curriculum arrangements, and the management of special needs are all very good. As a result, pupils with special needs make very good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Many subjects make notable contributions in fostering these areas 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	Very good. The school provides a very caring environment in which all pupils are valued. The quality of pastoral care is high, and there are very good procedures for child protection and welfare.

Pupils benefit from excellent provision of extra-curricular activities; the outstanding links with primary schools and transfer arrangements help to ensure that pupils get the best possible start in the school.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The new headteacher has inherited a strong team of senior managers who, between them, have an impressive range of expertise. The construction and implementation of development plans are very well managed.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. Governors have a clear grasp of the school's strengths and priorities, and bring a wide range of expertise and experience to the school's strategic planning.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school has very good systems for collecting data and analysing its performance. Teachers have comprehensive information to monitor pupils' progress and to use with pupils to set targets, based on pupils' prior attainments.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. There has been very skilful use of funds available to the school in recent years, including specific funding and special grants. As a result, the quality of most of the school environment and overall levels of resources have been transformed.

Very good financial management ensures that the principles of best value are very well applied.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The school's high expectations of the work pupils will do.• The school's approachability when problems arise.• The good progress pupils make.• The good range of activities outside lessons.• The leadership and management of the school.• The way the school helps pupils become mature and responsible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The way the school works with parents.• The amount of homework set.• The quality of information provided by the school about how individuals are getting on.

Most parents are very supportive of the school, though, understandably, some parents of the new Year 7 pupils felt they were not yet in a position to comment on some matters; others did not comment on leadership and management because of the recent change of headteacher. Inspectors agree with the parents' assessments of the school's strengths, and believe the partnership with parents is very good. Procedures for working with parents are comprehensive and copies of most reports seen by inspectors are good. Generally, homework appears to be set appropriately to pupils and there is a published homework timetable. The inspectors suggest that these areas, where a relatively small minority of parents have expressed concerns, are areas for review by the school in consultation with parents.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form has 330 students and is growing in size. This is nearly twice the national average for sixth forms. A number of students enter the sixth form from other schools, as well as about 80 per cent of the previous Year 11 in the school. Most students take courses leading to AS and A2 examinations in a wide range of subjects; a smaller number take one or two year courses leading to vocational qualifications. There are no specific entry qualifications for the sixth form. Only a few fail to complete their course, and the majority continues into higher education, with proportionately more than average going to local institutions of higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very effective. Its presence enhances the life of the school generally and nearly all sixth formers are very appreciative of the benefits it brings to them and their development. Although there are variations in the amount of progress students make, overall they achieve well in relation to their starting points in the sixth form. Standards are above average. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The very good leadership and management backs up the teaching by taking the overall development and support of each student as the central principle. Excellent use is made of resources available to the sixth form, including ICT, and the sixth form is very cost effective. There is an increasing range of vocational courses that are helping to match the curriculum to the needs of the students.

Strengths

- Students' attitudes and relationships with teachers are excellent; students show a commitment to each other and to younger pupils.
- The personal development of students is excellent, enhanced further in many cases by extra-curricular opportunities, particularly in the expressive arts.
- The overall quality of teaching is very good; teachers' knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, their subjects promote very good learning.
- Leadership and management are very good, especially the monitoring and support of individual students; the guidance given to students for progression from the sixth form is excellent.
- Learning resources available in the sixth form are at a high level, including very good ICT facilities to support learning.

What could be improved

- As in the main school, there are no areas where significant improvement is needed.

A number of minor matters are identified in the full report. Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Standards are now well above average. Teaching is very good, with excellent subject knowledge of teachers; students are achieving very well.
Physics	Good. Standards are above average and students are achieving well.

	With the recent increase in the number of specialist teachers, there is potential for further improvement.
Biology	Very good. Results have been consistently well above average in recent years with students achieving very well. Biology is a popular subject with very good teaching and careful monitoring.
Design and technology	Good. Standards are broadly average, with some present work above average, with higher attainers achieving well. Staffing is now more stable which should lead to further improvement.
Business studies	Very good. This is a popular subject where students achieve very well. Standards are well above average. Teaching is very good, and excellent support is given to students.
Information and communication technology	Very good. Students are achieving very well in the range of courses. Particular strengths include the use of assessment to support learning and very good teaching.
Physical education	Good. There is a wide range of academic, vocational and community leadership qualifications. Very good relationships and good teaching enable most students to achieve well.
Art	Very good. Standards are improving and present work is now well above average. Students have excellent attitudes; teaching is very good with a very strong team of confident teachers.
Media studies	Very good. Standards are above average from the large numbers of students taking the subject. With very good support, most achieve well, and participate very well in activities.
History	Good. After a difficult period, there has been good improvement recently. Standards are now above average, with students' very positive attitudes promoting good achievement.
Sociology	Good. Teaching and learning are good with well planned lessons. Students are achieving well, especially when undertaking first-hand research; standards are above average.
English literature	Very good. The quality of work in Year 13 is very high; overall standards are above average with good achievement. Most teaching is very good with considerable subject expertise.
French	Good. Good teaching and learning are leading to rising standards which are now above average. Achievement is good with students developing their speaking and listening skills.

Nearly all other sixth form courses were sampled. Standards are similar to subjects inspected in depth, with most above or well above average. Teaching and learning are good or very good, and excellent lessons were seen in music and theatre arts.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. Very thorough monitoring procedures, with full involvement of tutors, ensure that students are well supported. There is rapid intervention when necessary, and the excellent relationships greatly enhance the level of care and support. Support for students with special educational needs is particularly good.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. There is very active leadership and management of the sixth form, ensuring that it has clear educational direction and a sense of purpose. Sixth formers themselves have opportunities to be actively involved through an effective and well run Sixth Form Council. There is a commitment to equal opportunities through the open access policy.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approachability and helpfulness of their teachers. • The very good teaching they receive. • The high quality of support and guidance they receive. • The excellent and improving facilities available to them, including the library, modern technology and extra-curricular opportunities. • The opportunities they have to take responsibility, including community service and charity work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A few students believe that they have insufficient information about their progress in some subjects.

Nearly all sixth formers are very positive about the sixth form and their experiences. The inspectors are very heartened by their attitudes, and endorse their views of the sixth form's strengths.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Excellent relationships in a very caring and supportive environment encourage pupils to work very hard to achieve their best

1. The very strong and positive relationships between pupils and between teachers and pupils are a very strong feature of the school. It is a very large place and it would be easy for pupils to think that they were unimportant as individuals. That is not the case, and, with a few exceptions, pupils do feel valued and, in turn, respond by playing a full part in the life of the school and by working hard to achieve their best. Overwhelmingly, parents and pupils believe that the school has high expectations of hard work and good behaviour, and the inspection team agrees.
2. The first class relationships are founded on mutual trust and respect. This is the case in nearly all lessons, around the school, and in the high quality of pastoral care. A well-structured pastoral system is very effective in providing a secure framework in which pupils are able to flourish. The care and development of pupils is very well recorded and monitored, and so the care of pupils is not only fostered by sympathetic teachers who know their pupils well, but by systems that can quickly identify actual and potential problems. Teachers take their pastoral responsibilities seriously. Courtesy and care are evident in all areas of the school's work. Pupils report that instances of bullying are rare, but, when incidents do occur, they are dealt with quickly and sensitively. Certainly, one incident observed during the inspection week was handled very well.
3. The high expectations that teachers have of pupils are reflected in the close contact that there is between subject teachers, tutors and key pastoral staff. This results in a full picture of each pupil's strengths and weaknesses being available, and the very thorough records are regularly updated. Teachers successfully use the available information to set challenging but realistic targets, and are also able to identify underachievement and take appropriate action. The very good use of information is very apparent in the school's policies for encouraging pupils with special educational needs to achieve their best. Pupils who benefit from withdrawal in the Learning Support Centre make very good progress against their literacy targets. Those who are supported in the classroom generally make at least as good progress as others, and, because teachers make very good use of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), pupils with them make very good progress against their IEP targets.

Very good teaching and learning in a large number of lessons enable pupils to reach high standards

4. When pupils enter the school, overall standards are around or a little below average. By the end of Year 11, they were well above average in 2001 and have been approaching that level in other recent years, including 2002. There are variations between subjects but, generally, the standards being reached show very good achievement, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Standards seen during the inspection are similar to those in recent public examinations, and, notably, with the exception of one year, the gap between the standards reached by boys compared with girls is narrower than the gap found nationally. A major factor contributing to the high standards is the high quality of much of the teaching and learning.
5. Teaching was judged good at the time of the previous inspection, and, although it had many strengths, the key issue from the previous inspection was to improve the quality of teaching still further, particularly by sharing good practice, extending the range of teaching and learning styles, and by placing greater weight on developing pupils' capacity to think independently. Evidence from this inspection indicates that the overall quality of teaching has improved and that there is greater consistency in its quality now. There is, for example, little difference between teaching in different year groups, whereas teaching previously was found to be stronger in the sixth form. Apart from a few exceptions when teaching and learning in lower attaining sets were weaker, there is also little difference between the quality of teaching in different groups of pupils. In Years 7 to 11, in over half the lessons seen, teaching was judged to be very good and occasionally excellent. In only six of

the 56 lessons seen in Years 7 to 11 was teaching judged less than good; in two out of these six, it was judged unsatisfactory. This picture from direct observation, plus much evidence of the quality of teaching gained from detailed scrutiny of pupils' books, provide convincing evidence to judge teaching to be very good overall in Years 7 to 11, as it is also in the sixth form. There is, as might be expected, a very close link between the quality of teaching and that of learning. Very occasionally learning was adversely affected because of the unsatisfactory behaviour by a small minority of pupils.

6. An example from a Year 8 mixed ability geography lesson on river basins illustrates aspects of the best teaching seen in the school. The lesson was characterised by excellent organisation, attention to every kind of detail, high expectations, acute awareness of the needs of individual pupils, and varied teaching methods. As a result, the pace of the lesson was rapid, pupils knew exactly what was expected of them and they became totally absorbed in the lesson. Their learning was excellent and this was extended still further by a challenging homework, the requirements of which were made crystal clear. The excellent introduction, using an overhead transparency, set the scene in the local area, increasing pupils' spatial awareness. There were opportunities for paired work, discussion and the reinforcement of specialist geographical vocabulary. Responses were first rate, and tasks were adapted for pupils with special needs and for the higher attainers. A major emphasis on spelling and extended writing helped develop pupils' literacy skills; their numeracy skills were being used in drawing graphs and their fieldwork project required the use of ICT skills.
7. Other characteristics of much of the teaching are teachers' expert subject knowledge and technical skills that allow pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding as well as their intellectual and creative capacity. For example, in a Year 9 music lesson, the teacher's high level of subject knowledge and technical expertise of the computer software, plus the very high quality of the computers, keyboards and software, provided the basis for extremely high levels of musical and creative work shown by virtually all pupils. Pupils created additional lines of music, each on a different track, on to the bass chords of Pachelbel's Canon which the teacher had entered on to the computers. Pupils had been very well prepared for their own work in the first part of the lesson, and the degree of concentration and interest was very high. The teacher circulated to help and to challenge in speedy and sensitive ways; additional help from the technician was very valuable. In the last five minutes of the lesson, pairs of pupils played their contributions and orchestrations. Their progress was exceptional, brought about by excellent teaching, preparation and competence by the teacher, which motivated pupils to achieve very high standards.
8. Whilst these are examples of the best teaching, many similar features are found in the majority of lessons. Teachers' confident knowledge allows pertinent questions to be asked to extend understanding, and, in nearly all lessons, good management of pupils creates a purposeful working atmosphere that enables good use to be made of time; consequently, productive learning takes place. Realistic target setting is now common practice, and both higher and lower attainers are becoming able to evaluate their work and progress and, therefore, take more responsibility for their own learning. Teachers, too, are evaluating their own practices through what is now a rigorous programme of lesson observation by senior teachers and other teachers; subject areas are sharing good practice and are reflecting on their work through a strong understanding of how pupils learn. As a result, consistency in good methodology can often be seen within subjects, and teachers have embraced the best features of the Key Stage 3 literacy and numeracy strategies. Although there is still some way to go before the best practices are used by all teachers all the time, there are considerable strengths in the teaching and there is potential to improve still further for the benefit of pupils' learning and progress.

Very good leadership and management at all levels enable the school to continue to make progress with clearly identified priorities for development

9. Six years ago, the previous inspection report noted that the clarity of the school's aims and its educational direction was remarkable, and that 'senior staff and governors, especially the headteacher, give excellent leadership and an outstanding sense of purpose'. There is no evidence of complacency since then and, indeed, further improvements have steadily occurred, including, for

example, examination results, major building and site developments, the designation of the school as both a Technology College and a Beacon School, and the Gold Artsmark and Sportsmark awards. All of these and more, indicate continuing high levels of leadership and management. However, the very recent retirement, after 17 years, of the previous headteacher, is clearly a very significant event. It is too early to comment in detail on the impact of the new headteacher, who had been in post for three weeks at the time of the inspection, but the change of headteacher brings into sharp focus the depth and quality of leadership and management of senior and middle managers, and of the governors. It is the opinion of the inspection team that overall leadership and management in the school are very good, and that, in two important areas of re-defining a 'mission statement' for the school and of beginning the process of constructing a new development plan, the new headteacher is already making a positive impact. The inspection team is pleased to note that, as part of the planning process, the school is soon to conduct a full curriculum review. Although there are no significant weaknesses in the present curriculum, there is some evidence that there is a degree of inflexibility in the present 25 period timetable cycle and that work related curriculum links are less well developed than overall links with the local community.

10. The unusually large senior leadership team is collectively very strong with a wide range of complementary skills and experience. The team is cohesive and has a firm grasp on priorities and development areas. In addition, the business manager brings much experience and expertise from the financial sector to the school and is giving a very robust and secure basis to the school's finances, including the application of principles of best value. The roles of the deputy headteachers make particularly good use of their strengths. One, for example, is able to draw on his immense knowledge of people and the local area to successfully head the school's pastoral structures; another brings her experience from elsewhere to give a clear, sharp and decisive thrust to the school's systems to monitor the quality of teaching and to implement its performance management policy. The third has considerable strengths in the analysis of data and also manages the Technology College aspects of the school's work. Three senior heads of department and the head of sixth form complete the senior team, and they are able to bring their intellect and close contact with other teachers to the senior team, and play an important part in the link management arrangements which are a key element in the school's management structures.
11. The previous School Development Plan was commendably brief and very clear; it focused very appropriately on the core purpose of the school – teaching and learning, and on resources to implement its aims. An evaluation of the plan identifying outcomes and future action has informed the determination of priorities for the new Development Plan. The senior leadership team is showing good leadership by giving clear direction and a framework for middle managers as they draw up their development plans for 2002-3. The present development planning processes are rigorous, and there are now commendable strategies to improve further the quality of teaching. Whilst there is evidence of steps to monitor teaching following the previous inspection, variations in the quality of teaching are indicated by varying standards reached by pupils in different subjects over the years. However, there are now much more structured and sharper policies which, collectively, are having a positive impact. These include: an analytical approach to lesson observation with an emphasis on pupils' learning; the creation of time for subject and faculty heads to undertake lesson observation; professional development for teachers in teaching methodology rooted in a sound theoretical background; encouragement for subject areas to hold sessions for sharing good practice; and the implementation of initiatives such as the Key Stage 3 strategy and strategies for stretching more able pupils. These current management policies are now helping significantly to embed good teaching practice into the school's culture, and, whilst not yet as advanced as might be hoped, inspection evidence points to more consistency in higher quality teaching compared with the previous inspection.
12. Middle managers are responding well to the challenges facing them, and some subject areas that have been weaker in the past are benefiting from new or recent appointments at head of subject level. Indeed, at least six heads of subject have been appointed within the last 18 months.

Pupils' personal development is excellent, with excellent provision for extra-curricular activities, including the arts, sport and other areas

13. The excellent relationships and the caring and supportive environment that have been referred to are important elements in promoting pupils' personal development, but other factors are also important. One of these is the programme for personal, social and health education. Unusually this is not a formal timetabled programme as it is in many schools; instead, provision is made in subjects across the curriculum to cover different aspects of pupils' personal development, including a commitment to promote racial equality. It is successful because the school produces mature young people who are well prepared to take their place in society. The spiritual, moral and cultural sides of pupils' personal development are very good; many subjects make very good contributions to these areas, and the programme of weekly assemblies is also designed to promote these aspects of personal development. Pupils spend a good deal of relatively unstructured time with their tutors; whilst this is valuable for their social development, whether it is the best use of all the time is not clear.
14. Almost without exception, pupils and parents applaud the provision for extra-curricular activities. The value of these is very significant and they play a vitally important part in the personal development of the majority of pupils. The range and scope are very extensive, and no attempt is made to list them here. Some are subject-based, offering extension or recreational opportunities in the subject; some provide facilities for homework or the use of specialist facilities. The range of musical, dramatic, artistic and sporting activities and visits is very great. Schemes such as the Duke of Edinburgh Award provide opportunities to give service and build character. There are many residential visits, both field trips and those of a more social kind. Charity work and community service are fundamentally important to the school, and the international dimension is also important through exchanges and visits, including a notable link with South Africa. Overall, this dimension of the school's life is impressive and most valuable for pupils' personal development.

The very high quality of resources in information and communication technology (ICT) and their use in the subject and across the curriculum is enhancing pupils' achievements in many areas

15. As might be expected in a Technology College, the school has enthusiastically embraced modern technology in its strategies to raise achievement. There are a number of strands that contribute to the successful use of ICT. Firstly, the quality and quantity of hardware and software are high; this enables pupils to have reasonably easy access to first-rate resources regularly and when needed, both in lessons and in the own time. For example, there is state-of-the-art equipment for all pupils to use in music, a central ICT facility in technology that can be accessed by pupils from different classes as the need to use computers arises, and the library is well equipped with computers. There are also other modern suites of computers around the school. Secondly, there has been a comprehensive training programme for teachers which means that most of them are competent and confident in using the available facilities, understand the potential of the facilities to support pupils' learning, and can offer effective support to pupils when they are using the facilities. Thirdly, the quality of teaching of ICT skills is very good; this ensures that pupils' competences in using ICT are high, and understanding how their learning can be enhanced by using appropriate technology. Fourthly, the management of ICT resources is very good; there is clear direction for the development of ICT across the school, and careful analysis is undertaken before financial expenditure is committed to ensure that it will improve learning.
16. Whilst the overall position is very good, there is still some way to go before all areas of the school are able to benefit from the use of modern technology. However, there are detailed plans to extend the use to areas where at present facilities are limited. The new humanities block has just received its facilities, but other areas such as English and modern foreign languages are still waiting for access to ICT in lessons. Similarly, despite major improvements to the accommodation and site through new or refurbished buildings and site improvement projects, there are still areas where improvements are needed. However, the school is planning very well its building and refurbishment programme. Once the present building programme is completed, the very necessary refurbishment of former classrooms to provide modern technology facilities will enhance provision in this area.

Teachers are highly enthusiastic and committed to all aspects of each pupil's education

17. Implicitly and explicitly, one theme running through all sections of this report is the high calibre of the school's teachers. The school is well served by its teachers who give generously of their time to support all pupils and for extra-curricular activities. Their enthusiasm and commitment are valued by nearly all pupils and parents.
18. The teachers, collectively, are a good blend of age, experience and expertise. Morale is high, and the cohesiveness of the teaching staff has been maintained despite its very large size and considerable changes in recent years. Of a teaching staff of over 100, well over 50 have been appointed in the last two years. Many are newly or recently qualified, but they contribute to the dynamism and energy that is apparent in the school.
19. The teaching staff are also very well supported by other staff. All of them, including learning support assistants, technical, administrative, maintenance and other staff providing important services, also contribute fully to the well-being of the school. The school community is strong; virtually everyone, from the longest serving teacher to pupils new to the school, clearly identifies with the school and its values.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

There are no areas where significant improvement is needed.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

Main school

As stated earlier, there are no significant areas where improvement is needed. A few matters have been discussed with the school's headteacher, senior managers and governors. The inspection team believes that a review of these areas would be useful as part of the school's determination to raise its standards still further.

Sixth form

As with the main school, there are no significant areas where improvement is needed. The school may wish, however, to review the following areas in its plans to raise standards further: the sixth form curriculum, with particular reference to the range of vocational courses, and the timetable structure, including the allocation of time for subjects in Years 12 and 13 (28, 33, 57, 78, 91); strategies to raise attainment at the highest levels (28, 60, 62, 87, 89, 103, 108); ensuring that the use of assessment for target setting is consistent between subjects (44, 104, 119).

(The numbers in brackets refer to relevant paragraphs in the report)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	56
	Sixth form	68
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		124

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	3	27	20	4	2	0	0
Percentage	5.4	48.2	35.6	7.1	3.6	0	0

Sixth form

Number	8	26	26	8	0	0	0
Percentage	11.8	38.2	38.2	11.8	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching.

Information about the school's pupils (January 2001 census date for all schools)

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1312 (now 1375)	293 (now 330)
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	100 (includes 6 th form)	

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	22	5
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	119	5

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	41
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	33

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.9
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	134	131	265

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	71	81	90
	Girls	99	101	96
	Total	170	182	186
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	64 (73)	69 (70)	70 (72)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (29)	44 (43)	32 (30)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	63	86	93
	Girls	95	104	99
	Total	158	190	192
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	61 (75)	72 (74)	72 (74)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	26 (31)	46 (48)	35 (32)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	116	88	204

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	75	112	113
	Girls	61	83	84
	Total	136	195	197
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	67 (55)	96 (96)	97 (97)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	45.9 (43.6)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0
	National	n/a

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	55	54	109
	Average point score per candidate	16.5 (15,2)	18.4 (17.0)	17.4 (16.3)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.1)	18.0 (18.0)	17,5 (17.6)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	51	53	104	14	6	20
	Average point score per candidate	16.1	17.2	16.7	6.1	13.0	8.2
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9,8	11.4	10.6

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

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

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	1545	49	2
White – Irish			
White – any other White background	17		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean			
Mixed – White and Black African			
Mixed – White and Asian			
Mixed – any other mixed background			
Asian or Asian British – Indian	6	1	
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	2	1	
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background			
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2		
Black or Black British – African	1		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1		
Chinese	3		
Any other ethnic group	18	1	
No ethnic group recorded	10		

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)	91.87
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.5

Financial year	2001/2
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Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	494

	£
Total income	4,143,351
Total expenditure	4,130,330
Expenditure per pupil	2,573

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.3
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.2
Key Stage 4	22.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Balance brought forward from previous year	147,460
Balance carried forward to next year	160,481

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	36.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	51.8

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	5
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1705

Number of questionnaires returned

454

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	29	60	7	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	41	48	2	0	8
Behaviour in the school is good.	21	60	9	2	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	55	14	2	10
The teaching is good.	30	60	4	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	45	15	2	9
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	44	4	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	33	2	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	21	54	17	2	7
The school is well led and managed.	37	52	2	0	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	35	52	4	1	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	43	46	2	1	7

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Most comments made by parents were very supportive of the school, with some elaborating on their responses on the questionnaire. The small number of criticisms related mainly to some communications between teachers and parents, particularly about pupils' work and progress, and to the amount of homework set, evenly divided between those who thought there was too much and those who thought there was too little.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

20. The open access policy to the sixth form means that students have a wide range of attainments when they start their sixth form courses. However, because overall standards are high at the end of Year 11, students' overall level of attainment on entry to the sixth form is above average. These levels are maintained and overall results in advanced level examinations have been above the national average over a period of time, and the 2002 results show further improvement from 2001. Results in other courses in the sixth form reflect the differing starting points of students and the differing standards expected from students undertaking these courses. In both advanced level and other courses, students are achieving well in relation to their starting points with some exceptional performances.
21. When standards over a number of years are considered, there are no subject areas where there is cause for any significant concern, although there are variations between different subjects and between different years in the same subject. There are no significant differences between standards reached by boys and girls. Biology and business studies have been consistently strong performers, but in both 2001 and 2002, a significant number of subjects had 100 per cent pass rates. It is notable that half the students taking the two subjects with the highest number of entries in 2002 obtained the highest grades of A or B in each subject; these subjects are business studies and media studies with 36 and 35 entries respectively. In a number of other subjects in 2002, at least half the students obtained grades A or B, but, as detailed in individual subject reports, one of the challenges facing some subjects is raising levels of achievement at the highest levels. In a few subjects, the numbers taking the subject remain quite low, though there are encouraging signs that numbers are rising in areas such as modern foreign languages. Also encouraging are the high retention rates in most subjects. Few students fail to complete courses once they are fully committed to them, and, because of this, most achieve well.
22. Standards seen in the subjects inspected in depth at this inspection are well above the national average in mathematics, biology, business studies, ICT, art, and English literature. Standards are above average in physics, design & technology, media studies, history, sociology and French; they are average in advanced level courses in physical education. The standards being reached reflect many factors, including prior levels of attainment of students taking particular subjects. The quality of teaching is another factor. In mathematics, for example, students are acquiring new knowledge and understanding through teaching, much of it excellent, which demands much of them. The high quality of planning, for example in biology lessons, means that students learn well because the variety of styles and tasks interest and stimulate them. In business studies, the combination of challenge for the highest attainers and support for those encountering difficulties ensures that all students achieve equally well. In physical education, standards in practical aspects of the subject are above average, but inconsistencies in written work and some inconsistencies in what is expected of students result in satisfactory rather than good achievement. In art, the depth and extent of students' research work, and the range of their experiences, contribute to their very good achievement. The intellectual challenge to which students are put is another key factor affecting their achievements and the standards they reach; in subjects such as English literature this is apparent, with, for example in one lesson, a mature understanding of Blake's use of symbolism; in French, the teachers' sustained use of the French language challenges students' intellect as well as contributing to their rapid progress in listening to and speaking the language.
23. The good and often very good achievement of students also applies to sixth formers with special educational needs. These students are well known to their teachers and their needs are effectively met through resources in the subject areas and by the flexible teaching methods adopted. Any barriers to learning are overcome through the commitment of teachers and students, with the support, as required, of the Learning Support Centre. The success of pupils with special needs in

public examinations is a testament to the quality of the overall provision made for them by the school.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

24. The attitudes of students in the sixth form are excellent. Students adopt a conscientious and hardworking approach to learning during lessons, private study and in the work undertaken at home. Attendance levels are good and students make very good use of time during the school day. They develop a confident and determined approach to independent learning and research. These positive characteristics are shown across all subjects and courses and this is making an outstanding contribution to the levels of achievement.
25. Students transferring from Year 11 and those joining from other secondary schools soon adapt to the sixth form's high expectations. All students contribute to the busy and purposeful atmosphere that prevails. The relationships between staff and students are exemplary. Students are friendly and helpful to one another. This is characterised by politeness, respect for the views of others and ready co-operation when working on joint ventures.
26. Excellent arrangements are made for students' personal development. This helps to provide a firm foundation for their adult lives. Students have a strong commitment to play a full part in the school's success. They are encouraged to take on responsibilities such as helping with the Year 7 residential visit to the Forest of Dean. There is a very effective sixth form council. Students from both sexes and from widely different personal backgrounds enjoy working together and often form cohesive groups to implement special projects. These include many activities such as educational visits at home and overseas, organising the charity fortnight, helping with community projects and providing extensive assistance to younger pupils.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

27. The overall quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good. This is a major contributory factor to the very good learning that occurs in most lessons and the good progress that most students make. Some excellent lessons were seen, and teaching in nearly 90 per cent of lessons as judged good or better. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen in the sixth form. Of the subjects inspected in depth, teaching is judged very good in mathematics, biology, business studies, ICT, art, media studies and English literature; it is judged good in physics, design & technology, physical education, history, sociology and French. The high levels of technical competence and the very good use of computers by most students are indications of the success of the teaching of this key skill in the school.
28. One of the great strengths of most of the teaching is the depth of teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject; their enthusiasm is often infectious and these qualities of teaching are major factors in developing students' intellectual curiosity, creativity and depth of understanding. These qualities are seen in most subjects but were particularly apparent in some lessons seen in mathematics, biology, art, English literature, and in the one music lesson that was sampled. Occasionally where the depth of intellectual challenge was less apparent, or where the relative inexperience of the teacher in questioning and in discussion was noticeable, students' learning was less rapid. Planning is another strength of most teachers; because there are usually a range of varied activities and a good blend of direct teacher input, collaborative work involving students and teachers, and independent study by students, the pace of lessons is brisk and this leads to interest and concentration being maintained. As a result, there are good gains in knowledge and understanding and good use is made of time. Occasionally, the pace of learning does drop towards the ends of lessons so that full use of the 65 minute period is not made, but, in most cases, teachers manage students and their use of time very well. A detailed section on assessment is found later in this report, but the high quality of day-to-day assessment and feedback in lessons through marking and discussions with students is an important aspect that helps their progress in most lessons. Teachers successfully encourage students to improve through their guidance and support for individuals, and are often able to set work to be done outside lessons that is appropriately matched to students' needs.

29. The very good use of computers has already been mentioned. Students are encouraged by many of their teachers to use computers as research tools and for presentational purposes. There are a few areas where this is, as yet, less well developed, though subjects such as history are poised for further developments as new facilities come into use. Overall, teachers make good use of resources in their teaching, including effectively using the help and expertise of support staff; for example, in art, the technician's skills considerably strengthen the expertise in that subject area. Learning support teachers and assistants give well-informed and well-targeted support to students with special needs, and specialist teachers have well-planned strategies to teach these students. As a result, some students have been able to take advanced level courses successfully; for example, two students who have recently left the school and had Statements of Special Educational Need are now taking art courses in higher education.

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

30. The curriculum provided for students in the sixth form is good, with a number of very good features. There is open access for students from Year 11, and the staying-on rate is high at around 80 per cent. A small number of students join the sixth form from other schools.
31. The school provides a wide range of AS and A-level courses, and an increasing range of vocational courses, aimed at meeting the needs of the student intake with its wide range of prior attainment, talent, and aptitude. The impact of Technology College status has enabled the school to improve overall provision in most subjects, but particularly in the range of courses and qualifications in ICT. There is also the opportunity for students to take part in a number of 'enhancement' subjects. These include provision for students to improve their standards in mathematics and English, either through lessons in key skills, or by repeating their GCSE course. The music technology course, taught outside normal curriculum time, enhances the provision for both musically and technically minded students and leads to an AS qualification, and, for a few students from this year, an A2 qualification. There is a well-planned general studies course leading to an AS qualification in Year 13 for most students; lessons are also available in citizenship and games. There is also a wide range of extracurricular clubs and activities. The curriculum therefore provides for a broad educational experience.
32. The sixth form is popular. Before they enter the sixth form, all students are provided with very good individual advice about the appropriate courses for them to take based upon their qualifications from their Year 11 courses, and their career aspirations. The school is very responsive to the needs of individual students. Consideration is given each year to increasing the range of advanced level and vocational courses available, but expansion is limited by the need to ensure that courses are cost effective. Students appreciate the regular advice made available to them about their work as they progress through the sixth form. This includes help with the organisation of work, and how to make effective use of the time available for private study. The result of this careful selection of courses, and the sensitive and on-going support, is that only a small proportion of students leave school before completing their courses.
33. The increasing number of vocational courses provides opportunities for students with a wide range of attainment. These courses range from advanced to foundation level, and include a number of courses in ICT, as well as leisure and tourism, sport and recreation, and early years care and education. There is good progression from Year 11 for the courses in ICT. Many of the vocational courses, in particular, include learning through group activities, and provide very good training in meeting deadlines and time management. Provision in vocational courses is less well developed in the area of business education. There are, however, good links with local employers for the provision of work placements for students. With students taking an increasing number of AS levels, and some selecting a mix of AS and A2 levels and vocational options, it is difficult within the limitations of a 25-period week for the school timetable to meet the needs of all students. This is particularly the case with enhancement classes, for instance in citizenship and physical education. A number of students therefore have timetable clashes which it has not been possible to resolve, which mean they are unable to benefit from some of the courses on offer, and which they would otherwise enjoy attending. The organisation of the timetable also results in subjects

only having four lessons a week in Year 12 and five in Year 13, whereas five hours per week is a typical allocation; whilst there is no firm evidence to indicate that the lower than usual amount of time is having an adverse effect on standards, it does limit some opportunities to study some topics in as much depth as would be desirable, for example in mathematics. However, students with special needs have the same access to courses as other students, with withdrawal support, if necessary, for study skills or other specific area of weakness; subject and support staff work hard to ensure that particular needs are catered for.

34. The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is very good. A number of subjects make a very positive contribution in this area, including English and biology. In both Years 12 and 13, all students take part in a good general studies course; this includes discussion about religious, ethical and moral issues, based around the Gloucestershire Agreed Syllabus. A number of speakers visit the school to talk about, and debate, topics of national and international importance. These include foxhunting, the Israel/Palestine conflict, the provision for people with disabilities, and other health issues. The school ensures that students are exposed to the views of both sides, so that student debate about such issues is well informed.
35. There are a large number of other school activities from which students gain experience of the local community, the way it provides for the needs of its members, and the complexities of adult life. These further enhance the breadth of educational experience during their time in the sixth form. As well as work placements, students in the sixth form take part in concerts, and they are very involved in the arrangements for Charity Fortnight. Charities to benefit include a township school in South Africa, as well as local charities. Visits that further enhance students' cultural experiences also occur, such as exchange visits for foreign languages, and a sporting trip to South Africa. They are also offered the opportunity to take part in community service, and to provide support for the education of younger pupils both in school and in local primary schools, such as the organisation of sports competitions. Further experience of society is gained through membership of the Sixth Form Council, which is led and organised by students themselves.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

36. The procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are very good. A substantial amount of data on students' attainment is collected by the head of sixth form and recorded when they enter the sixth form. This information is then made available to heads of subject and to sixth form tutors. As students progress through Years 12 and 13, information is gathered on their attainment and stored centrally, updated regularly and available to all teaching staff. Subject records on students' personal progress complement the system. A comprehensive range of regular monitoring procedures involving tutors, teachers, students and parents occurs throughout the two-year courses. The school's assessment, recording and reporting policy enables teachers to be well informed, and to track students' progress towards agreed predictions based on accurate data. 'Causes for concern' and 'causes for praise' meetings contribute to a formal programme of interviews leading to very good diagnosis of and provision for individual learning needs.
37. The use made of assessment in planning the curriculum is very good. There is a wealth of assessment data available to subjects, although the variation and inconsistency of some subjects' response is a cause of concern and is being addressed through 'link' meetings and whole school initiatives. Where excellent practice is firmly established as in the case of English, mathematics and business studies, students' progress is monitored closely through a variety of assessments linked to the published courses. For example, students are aware of their average points score and maintain an up-to-date record of assessment and diagnostic annotations inside their files, alongside the scheme of work. This enables teachers to match work closely to the needs of all students and results in students achieving well. Overall, the school is committed to the principle of 'assessment for learning' and assessment information is having a positive impact on work being done in the classroom and contributes significantly to raising achievement.

38. The quality of reports for parents and for students is very good. They provide a detailed picture of the students' learning and of targets for further progress.

Advice, support and guidance

39. Very good procedures are in place for ensuring students' welfare and well-being. The frequent contact between tutors and other teachers enables the care of students to be carefully monitored. Students are able to discuss any personal problem or concern through the helpful and understanding pastoral arrangements. Good systems are in place for monitoring attendance and punctuality. The school operates effective health and safety procedures.
40. The quality of advice and support given to students is very good. Tutors closely monitor academic progress and maintain a diligent recording system. This provides the basis for the high standard written reports that are issued regularly. A particularly strong feature is that any emerging problems are quickly identified so that remedial measures can be taken to help the student overcome any difficulties. Support for pupils with special educational needs is particularly good.
41. Excellent arrangements are in place for careers education and for guidance about higher and further education opportunities. The school produces a very helpful Sixth Form Prospectus. During Year 11, pupils receive detailed advice about the courses on offer in the sixth form and at colleges nearby. The school gives a high priority to this process in order that the particular needs of each student are addressed. There are very good arrangements for the induction of students at the start of Year 12.
42. Students receive comprehensive information from the head of careers and from specialist visiting speakers, including advice about apprenticeships and other employment opportunities. Students wishing to consider continuing their education at colleges or universities receive extensive support from the school's senior staff. This service gives special attention to each student's aspirations and abilities. A notable feature is the helpful guidance given on completing application forms and the ready facility for these to be submitted through the school's computer based system. Teachers are readily available when the advanced level examination results are published in August so that students can be advised about any implications that may affect their provisional plans.

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

43. Parents have a high regard for the quality of learning and the wide range of activities that are available to sixth form students. Communications and relationships with parents are very good. The co-operative approach enables parents to make a helpful contribution to students' key decisions such as subject and course options for the sixth form. At a later stage they are consulted about further or higher education choices and career opportunities.
44. Discussions with students during the inspection indicate that they are very pleased with the sixth form. The overriding view is that teaching is very good. The approachability and helpfulness of teachers is praised. A few students are concerned about information on progress in some subjects, but inspection evidence suggests such issues are usually dealt with appropriately. The high quality of support and guidance provided is appreciated. Students commend the school's excellent facilities such as the library, modern technology and extra curricular opportunities. They enjoy opportunities to take on responsibilities such as community service and charity work. Students' high level of satisfaction with the sixth form helps promote an enthusiastic approach to their studies and other activities.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

45. The sixth form is very well led and managed. It is vibrant, active and busy; the very positive way it is led and managed contributes significantly to its success. There is a clear sense of purpose and direction that is explicit in public documents about the sixth form, in internal organisation, and in the atmosphere that prevails in the sixth form area and around the school. Indeed, the sixth form is

not élitist; it is an integral part of the school, and, just as sixth formers benefit from the opportunities of being members of the whole school community, so the rest of the school benefits from the presence of sixth formers who are encouraged to take seriously their contributions to the school and the wider community.

46. The tone of the sixth form is clearly set in the lively sixth form prospectus, and the organisational arrangements for the sixth form are first-class. The tutor handbook sets out the tutors' roles and responsibilities very clearly, and very successfully establish an ethos where the overall development and support of each student is the central principle. Well-established procedures, carefully and properly monitored, put this principle into practice. The procedures include consultation with sixth formers themselves, with the head of sixth form regularly meeting members of the sixth form council. There is every encouragement in the leadership and organisation of the sixth form of students' personal development, including an emphasis on community service. Students have easy access to the head and deputy head of sixth form both by the physical presence of their offices in the sixth form area and by the relaxed atmosphere; they and the tutors lead by example, enabling students to feel supported but to have high expectations of hard work and endeavour.
47. As part of their overall very good contribution to the school's strategic planning, governors take a keen interest in the sixth form and ensure that it is adequately resourced. The sixth form is very cost effective. The cost of running and resourcing the sixth form is somewhat less than the income its students generate; however, this is not detrimental to the sixth form because the school makes excellent strategic use of its resources through the careful establishment of priorities and planning for future developments. Therefore, the whole school, including the sixth form, benefits from this clear strategic planning and resources can be targeted at identified needs at particular times.
48. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum at sixth form level is very good. Teachers who take sixth form classes are very well qualified to teach at this level and in most subjects have good experience of teaching post-16 courses. However, due to the large number of new appointments during the last three years, including many newly qualified teachers, some inexperienced staff inevitably teach sixth form classes. Very good provision is made for the professional development of staff, which helps to ensure that sixth form teaching is fully effective. This commitment to the people who work at the school is seen in its Investors in People status, which it has had since 1993. Staff development and training are very well linked to department and school development plans as well as to individual teacher's appraisal targets. This continuing emphasis on the school's human resources benefits the students in the sixth form as well as other pupils.
49. The school provides good accommodation for its sixth form students. They use the same specialist accommodation as the main school, and once the current building programme is complete the school's overall accommodation will be very good. Sixth form students have the use of a spacious common room in the sixth form centre, which also contains offices for sixth form staff and a careers library.

Resources

50. The provision of high quality resources in many areas of the sixth form makes a very positive contribution to students' learning. Since the acquisition of Technology College status, the extension of sophisticated computer networks throughout the school gives students greatly increased access to ICT in many lessons and in their own time. However, although computers are readily available and used in many lessons, this is not yet possible in a few subjects such as physical education. But, by using modern technology, students are now able to pursue additional subjects such as music technology and to develop very good habits of independent research and learning, for example in vocational subjects. The school is keen to share these benefits across all areas of the curriculum through its ambitious, on-going building and refurbishment programme. The new buildings now in use provide exceptionally good resource bases and learning environments, for example in humanities.

51. The school library is particularly well used by sixth form students. A wide range of books and research material is available, together with access to ICT and areas for private study. The school retains its desire to build a separate sixth form library in future, in order to provide a designated resource area for its increasingly large number of students.

52. The quality and quantity of resources available in subjects to support students' learning is very good overall. All subjects receive generous, flexible budgets for purchasing new resources and most have a good supply of essential textbooks in good condition. Some subjects such as travel and tourism and media studies produce their own very high quality resources, adapted to the precise needs of their courses. Practical subjects are well equipped, for example in art where there are ample 3D and excellent printmaking resources, providing very good learning opportunities.

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

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

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

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	12	100	96	33	46	6.2	6.6
Biology	10	100	88	40	34	6.8	5.3
Business studies	35	100	88	51	32	7.0	5.5
Chemistry	7	100	90	43	43	5.7	5.9
Media studies	50	96	93	38	31	6.2	5.5
Information & communication technology	1	100	86	-	23	4.0	4.6
English literature	19	100	95	26	37	5.7	5.9
Design & technology	15	100	91	20	30	5.7	5.3
General studies	26	92	85	46	30	5.9	4.9
Geography	8	100	92	25	38	5.0	5.7
German	4	75	91	25	40	5.0	5.8
History	9	100	88	44	35	6.7	5.4
Mathematics	17	88	87	35	43	5.2	5.8
Music	2	100	93	50	35	7.0	5.7
Physics	8	100	88	63	40	7.0	5.7
Religious studies	10	100	92	30	38	6.0	5.8
Sociology	7	100	86	29	35	6.0	5.3
Spanish	2	50	89	-	39	2.0	5.7
Physical education	18	94	92	6	25	3.8	5.1

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, biology and physics, but chemistry was also sampled. In chemistry, examination results in 2001 were broadly in line with the national average, with students performing generally in line with expectations based on their GCSE results. In both the lessons observed, the teaching was very good, and students were challenged to think deeply about the subject. They became very involved in the work, readily made useful contributions to discussions, and learned very well. Standards in lessons that were observed were above average, and, overall, the quality of provision is very good with some excellent features.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Excellent leadership and management are leading to significantly rising standards.
- Excellent assessment and monitoring students' progress means that students are aware of their targets and what they need to do to achieve their targets.
- Teaching and learning are very good, with exemplary lesson planning so that students can build on their skills, knowledge and understanding through many varied activities.
- New technology is very well used both a teaching aid and to support students' investigations.

Areas for improvement

- The lower than usual amount of time for teaching restricts the depth in which some topics can be covered.
- There is potential to increase the proportion of students achieving the higher grades at examination.

53. The 2001 GCE A-level examination results, though still below the national average, were a significant improvement compared to previous years with the highest ever proportion of A and B grades. In relation to their GCSE results many students performed well. This summer, the 2002 GCE A-level examination results showed a further significant improvement with all students entered achieving grades A to E. The proportion of students' achieving A and B grades is similar to the previous year. Female students continue to perform better than male students in achieving the higher grades. The 2001 GCE AS-level examination results showed a significant proportion of students achieving A and B grades, above the national average. In 2001, a significant proportion of students re-entered for the GCSE mathematics examination at intermediate level in both June and November achieved the highest grade, a marked improvement on their previous performance.

54. The standards of work of current students are well above average with some outstanding work. Students' files are very well organised containing work of the highest standard with course objectives and up-to-date assessment data included. In Year 13, both male and female students are achieving equally well in relation to their GCE A-level predicted grades. In the lessons seen, students acquire new knowledge and understanding as a result of excellent teaching, which demands much of them. The lesson structure and application of computer software clearly focused their learning. The students recall knowledge well and are able to apply it confidently both in class and through their written work. In one lesson, for example, they drew on their knowledge of exponential functions and finding the derivative from first principles to identify the exponential number e . Students in Year 12 are only a short way into their courses, but are achieving as expected, successfully moving on from their GCSE work into new areas. In one lesson, using graphic calculators, the students were hesitant at the start but their confidence improved markedly as the lesson progressed, developing their analytical and intellectual skills. The introduction of the negative coefficient served to extend the gifted and talented of the group.

55. Teaching is very good overall and is sometimes excellent; as a result, students learn very well. The principal features are clear objectives, excellent planning, high expectations, brisk pace and a

range of methods and teaching styles that are consistent across the subject. Teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge in their exposition and explanation engaging all the students in dialogue. Excellent use is made of new technology on a regular basis. The teachers are enthusiastic about the subject, which is infectious. The tasks set for students are challenging but achievable and provide opportunities for them to work independently and collectively, to confirm their understanding and formulate new ideas. Homework is marked up to date coupled with diagnostic annotation, which aids learning. Differentiated homework in the early part of courses could better reflect the range of ability that exists in some classes. Extra curricular activities contribute to learning and opportunities for students' personal development are excellent.

56. The high quality of teaching means that students learn very well. They are attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles that they experience in class. Students rise to the academic challenges presented and persevere when difficulties occur. Relationships between the students themselves and with their teachers are excellent. Students support and help one another effectively; they talk, discuss and listen to each other maturely as part of their learning.
57. Leadership and management of the subject are excellent. Effective action has been taken to raise standards. The very good teaching and learning result from work in the subject being both innovative and very well led and managed. Excellent assessment procedures are well established. Accurate and critical analysis of improving examination performance has resulted in realistic and achievable targets for continuing improvement. The regular monitoring of students' progress towards their predicted grades is a model of good practice. Student numbers have increased significantly, enabling additional courses that meet the needs of all students to be introduced. The subject makes effective provision for students to develop key skills. There is a shared commitment to build on what has already been achieved; teachers share good practice and develop their professional skills in excellent ways. However, because teaching time for the subject is significantly less than is provided in the majority of schools, some topics are not covered in as much depth as would otherwise be possible.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Results at A-level in 2001 were well above average.
- Teaching is good; as a result, students achieve well.
- There are very good relationships between teachers and students.
- There are regular assessments of students' learning; homework is marked regularly and students' targets are well established.
- The course is well planned, and there is good leadership of the subject.
- There is increasing use of computers to enhance learning opportunities.

Areas for improvement

- The number of students taking the subject is relatively low.
- There is insufficient challenge at times for the higher attaining students.
- There is insufficient monitoring of students' folders and the presentation of their work.
- The sharing of good practice and the use of innovative teaching methods at sixth form level needs to be extended.

58. The A-level results in 2001 were well above the national average. Over half the students obtained A or B grades, and all gained at least a pass grade. This was the result of good achievement by the students during the course. Prior to 2001, and in 2002, results in general were in line with national averages, and also in line with what would be expected from students' starting points on the course. There are no consistent differences in the achievements of male and female students.

59. The standards of current students are above average in Year 12, but they are average in Year 13. They are mostly producing a standard of work, and also gaining test results, in line with their targets based on earlier performance in the GCSE examinations. For a minority of students in each year group, their progress in physics is restricted because of their lack of confidence with mathematics. In a Year 12 lesson, for instance, this resulted in the need for additional help with simple trigonometry. In another Year 12 lesson, however, students showed more confidence when setting up circuits to show how electrical resistance varies with temperature. By Year 13, students can recall the properties of simple harmonic motion, and they discuss confidently the extent of their errors when measuring Young's Modulus for a piece of copper wire.
60. Teaching is good overall; there is a close link between the quality of teaching and learning. The planning of the course and of individual lessons is thorough, with clear objectives. Teachers show a very good understanding of their subject, and possess specialist knowledge of particular modules. The use of computers is increasing, with clear references in the scheme of work, but some opportunities are missed to add interest to lessons through the use of appropriate software. The pace of lessons is not always sufficiently stimulating for the higher-attaining students, and lesson summaries are variable in their effectiveness in consolidating learning. The management of students is good, with high expectations that all should be involved; they are encouraged to ask questions. The assessments of students' learning are regular, and teachers make frequent reference to the standard of work produced by individual students compared with their target grade. There is sound advice about how to improve. The quality of work in folders is not regularly monitored; its presentation is therefore variable.
61. Students have a mature approach to their work, and their learning is good as a result, and has the potential to be very good. In the lessons seen, they clearly enjoyed the practical investigations. Relationships with their teachers are very good. They have a desire to succeed, and respond particularly well when required to use their initiative. They enjoy the challenges posed by difficult work. They make good use of the time available; concentration was particularly good in the lesson on electrical resistance.
62. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The newly appointed head of subject is quietly establishing himself, and identifying the strengths and weaknesses of provision in order to determine priorities for action. There is a commitment to improving standards. The monitoring of teaching is well established within the science faculty, though insufficient attention is paid to the sharing of good practice and the use of innovative teaching methods at sixth form level. There has been an increase this year in the number of physics specialists in the faculty, so that there is good capacity for improving provision, and for increasing the relatively small number of students taking the subject at present.

Biology

The overall quality of provision in biology is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards at GCE Advanced Level were well above average in 2001, with a good proportion achieving higher grades.
- Teaching is very good. Teachers have good knowledge of biology and plan lessons with a range of stimulating activities that build students' knowledge and understanding so that they learn well.
- Teachers use questioning and short tasks very effectively to develop students' thinking and to assess their understanding and their progress is regularly reviewed.
- Marking is good and provides students with effective feedback and a clear indication of the standard of their work.
- The subject is very well led and curriculum plans are good. Teaching and standards are monitored to guide developments in the subject.

Areas for development

- Students are not given sufficient guidance through learning goals linked to their target grades to sharply focus their independent study outside lessons.

63. Biology is a popular course at the school and retention rates amongst those taking up the course from Year 12 are good. In 2001, standards at A-level were well above the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades of A and B was well above the national average and all students achieved pass grades. The 2001 results were typical of previous years. The school achieved 100 per cent pass rates over the previous 4 years with consistently good proportions of higher grades. The 2002 results continue this pattern of 100 per cent pass rates, although there was a dip in the proportion achieving higher grades as some more able students underachieved. Only one student failed to complete the course in 2002. There is no pattern of difference in achievement between males and females in recent years.
64. Inspection findings show that similar standards are being maintained in work that was seen. Students are achieving well in both Years 12 and 13, with Year 13 students likely to achieve their challenging target grades next year. Their achievements are good, and often very good, in both their knowledge and understanding of key facts and principles and in their coursework. There are several reasons for this good achievement. Firstly, teachers are well qualified and their very good knowledge guides the way in which they develop key principles and links between related topics. For example, Year 13 students have a good grasp of the principles of ecology, having studied sequences of different plant communities developing in a given habitat over time on a recent field trip. The underlying principles were developed well in follow up lessons where the teacher used examples with discussion involving all students to establish the variables to consider in measuring species diversity in a habitat. Consequently all students can calculate an index of diversity and reason how human and other influences can alter the composition, richness and diversity of communities.
65. Overall, teaching is very good. Lessons are planned carefully and with a variety of styles and tasks that stimulate students' interest and engagement so that they learn well. The department has focussed recent training on ensuring students are learning for themselves through their active participation in lessons and the beneficial impact of this training is evident. Marking is good. Students value the detailed written and verbal commentary on their work and are given a clear indication of the standards achieved. Good learning also results from the rigorous use by teachers of technical terms, encouraging students to assimilate and apply new vocabulary regularly and correctly. For example, Year 12 students distinguish between types of protein and use scientific terms such as 'polypeptide' and 'conjugated' precisely as their teacher discussed the features of a range of protein molecules with them. As a result, all students can classify proteins and most identify unnamed examples correctly from their key features at this early stage in their Year 12 studies.
66. One of the reasons why the subject consistently achieves full pass rates is that students are closely monitored and assessed both in lessons and over time. For example, in a very good Year 13 lesson about genetics, the teachers used open and challenging questions and short tasks very effectively to probe and develop all students' prior knowledge of the genetics of sex determination and the probabilities of inherited characteristics. All students were closely assessed and the teacher skilfully discussed their responses and mistakes so that they were able to correct their own errors. All students developed their understanding of the probabilities of sex determined inherited characteristics such as colour blindness and were well placed to build on their learning. This balance of teaching with probing assessment ensures no student is left behind or floundering. High quality learning is also encouraged by students' being set a mix of tasks and research outside lessons, requiring them to use a range of books and ICT sources in their independent studies. This practice should be extended to become a systematic part of their programme of work so that all students know what learning goals are required of their independent study to achieve their challenging target grades.
67. The subject is very well led by the head of biology who has a clear vision for development in the subject based on her rigorous monitoring. All students are regularly assessed and their progress reviewed in relation to challenging targets based on their prior achievements. Teaching is monitored and the outcomes used to guide training and support. Curriculum plans that have been

recently revised are good and linked well to department resources and there is very good teamwork and mutual support amongst the staff that is helping to raise standards.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

In this curriculum area, courses in design and technology were inspected in depth.

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

Strengths

- Good teaching is leading to good learning.
- Good management of students and very positive relationships help raise levels of achievement
- Progress made by able students is particularly good.
- Students' learning is enhanced by the good use of computing facilities.

Areas for improvement

- Students have not always been fully aware of the type of work involved in the design and technology courses.
- Teachers sometimes spend too long talking to students at the expense of other activities.
- Refurbishment and updating of some accommodation are necessary to bring all learning opportunities up to the standard of the best.

68. A-level results over the last three years have been above the national average although results were near average in 2001. All students taking the examination and completing the coursework gained results in the A to E range. AS-level results were also above average in 2001 with some A grades. In 2002, results were above average and gained a significant number of A grades.
69. Students entering the sixth-form design course have had a variety of previous technology experiences. Consequently they sometimes need to develop new skills and learn new techniques when starting on their A-level course. However, the majority of students produce work that is near or above average when completing the course work. Sketching skills are well developed and some students produce coursework that gains the highest grades. ICT is well used in many cases to improve presentation. The most able students are given every opportunity to succeed, and overall standards in work seen are judged to be above average.
70. Teaching in lessons seen was sound or good. Overall, when the contribution of teaching to the full range of students' work is also considered, teaching is good. The teachers have sufficient knowledge and understanding to plan effective lessons based on the interest of the students in food technology, textiles and resistant materials. However, in a few lessons teachers spend too long talking to the students. An additional alternative learning activity would give greater variety and ensure that concentration and progress are maintained. The students are challenged to produce high standards of coursework when designing or making. The teachers make effective use of a wide range of equipment available in the subject. The quality of learning closely follows the quality of teaching and is therefore good overall. The students acquire knowledge of the design process by following carefully prepared information sheets, using the Internet and developing their own research techniques with guidance from the teachers. In A-level food technology, experiments are conducted to successfully illustrate the properties of various foods.
71. Most students choose design and technology because they are interested in the subject or need a higher qualification for university entrance. Attitudes are therefore good. Students develop their learning skills and work well together. These are important factors contributing to their good achievements. Furthermore, students are offered a good range of design courses, which take into account their previous attainment in design and technology. These make it possible to specialise in resistant materials, textiles, food or systems for one or two years. Further steps are planned to ensure that all students understand the requirements of a course before they commit themselves to one or two years study; this has not always happened in the past. However, an open door policy allows students to have access to the technology rooms whenever possible to progress with

their independent work; their progress is further helped by the willingness of teachers to give advice on an individual basis during lunch break and after school.

72. The good assessment procedures also help raise levels of attainment and students' achievements. The subject follows school policy when marking students' work. Assessment grades are recorded using ICT and analysed to guide future planning. Students are made well aware of their progress in time for action to be taken if necessary. Attendance records are also maintained so that possible problems are avoided. Teachers know the students well and are able to give appropriate guidance on an individual basis. Predictions are made so that teachers and students can plan their future work.
73. A new head of faculty has clear aims for the development of technology, with an emphasis on setting high standards. Together with his deputy, policies and schemes of work have been devised so that they will maximise the opportunities for all students. Regular meetings are held and good relationships between teachers and with the students are given a high priority; as a result, levels of motivation and of morale are high. The overall management of the faculty is good and delegation ensures that each subject area has control of its responsibilities. All teachers are appraised and given opportunity for professional development to extend their expertise further.
74. Accommodation is good and additional accommodation is planned nearby. However, some refurbishment is needed in most of the rooms to bring the whole department up to the standard of the technology foyer and computer room. Refurbishment is an important part of ensuring that the subject has the same apparent status as other subjects. Staff changes have led to difficulties in teaching some sixth form classes during the last two years; however, the situation is now more stable. Expertise is available for teaching resistant materials, textiles and food technology to advanced level. Learning resources are very good and are well used, though an increase in the number of sewing machines would be advantageous for textiles. A wide variety of equipment is available including computer controlled machines and equipment for the production of electronic circuits. The subject makes good use of 'Pro-desktop' and other software, and the central computer room is used very effectively by all teachers in the department. Recent developments mean that the subject now has the potential to move forward rapidly in its aim of raising standards further.

BUSINESS

Advanced level courses in business studies are taught in this area of the curriculum.

Business studies

The overall provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards are well above average.
- Increasing numbers of students are choosing business studies; they appreciate the high quality of provision.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teaching is very good.
- Management of the department is very good.
- The way in which assessment information is used is an example of the excellent care and support provided for students.
- Good quality resources are available for students.

Areas for improvement

- The lack of computers in some classrooms limits learning opportunities.
- More links with local business would provide a valuable extension to the experiences of students.
- No vocationally orientated courses are taught in this curriculum area in Years 12 and 13.

75. Standards are well above average. In 2001 students achieved higher results than those seen nationally and this quality of performance was repeated in 2002. The trend has been for improvement year by year, and the present Years 12 and 13 have many higher attaining students and standards are clearly well above the national average.
76. Achievement is very good in relation to results in previous tests or examinations. Attitudes to the subject are very good in Years 12 and 13 although a few of students in Year 12 are not always completing set work. Boys and girls succeed equally well, although there are more far more boys in most classes. The subject clearly challenges the highest attaining students but also supports those who encounter problems with some aspects of learning.
77. Students are achieving well because of the high quality of teaching and of their own responses. Teaching is very good and this leads to very good learning. Teachers are very skilled at questioning to assess understanding and to encourage students to think for themselves. For example, students in Year 12 show a clear understanding of the value of break-even analysis and then in Year 13 they can use this to study more complex investment appraisal. Learning in the accounting and finance part of the course is very effective because of the pace and challenge which encourages students to apply their numeracy skills. The majority of students work well on tasks set in class and they show a good general knowledge of business theory. In Year 12 they can work on cases studies related to the car industry to gain an understanding of product lifecycles, with higher attaining students talking confidently about marketing strategies. In Year 13 students are able to apply this knowledge to a more theoretical approach. Average and higher-attaining students show a clear grasp of the marketing issues facing a key player in the confectionery and soft drinks industry. The highest-attaining students could expertly analyse marketing strategy using Ansoff's Matrix because their teacher had resourced and prepared the lesson very well. The majority of students in Year 13 clearly have the detailed knowledge and the higher levels of understanding to succeed at the higher levels.
78. Students are skilled in using computers as part of their learning, particularly in using web sites. However, although they are expected to make presentations, they are not able to use PowerPoint or other computer-based soft ware in class. They use very high quality resources produced by the department and they can become involved in Young Enterprise and work experience. The school has links with local industry but students feel that they would benefit from a greater variety and more frequent visits.
79. Assessment is rigorous and the information is managed very well. Its use ensures that students are clear about their strengths and about how they can improve. The subject is managed very well. Newly qualified teachers are supported very well and the new courses have been effectively introduced. Planning is good and documentation is comprehensive and readily accessible. There are no vocational courses at present but the department would like to re-introduce them to provide progression from GNVQ Foundation courses. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. This is a subject that provides an excellent quality of care for its students who clearly value highly the level of support they receive.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

A range of advanced and vocational courses is taught. The main focus was on advanced courses, but other courses were sampled and are reported on within the main report.

Information and communication technology

Overall, provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Examination results are well above average with very good achievement by students.
- Very effective and good teaching methods lead to very good learning.
- The leadership of ICT is excellent.
- Assessment information is very well used, enabling students to have very good knowledge of their own learning.
- Students' attitudes are very good and they have a high opinion of their courses and the teaching they receive.

Areas for improvement

- There are no significant areas for improvement.

80. Students taking the 12 unit AVCE course in 2002 gained well above average grades overall, compared with 2001 national results. A third of all students on advanced courses gained grades A or B. This represents very good achievement and exceeds the previously predicted results for most students. Although students taking the three or six unit awards gained lower grades than those taking the twelve unit candidates, their achievement was also very good. Similarly, students taking the one year GNVQ intermediate examination achieved very well.
81. Observation of students' work during lessons and at other times shows that standards are above average overall. On entry to the sixth form students generally feel confident of their abilities in ICT; the well structured courses ensure that progress is rapid so that the great majority of students achieve very well. Coursework indicates that the highest grades are possible for students willing to work hard. Most students continue to work at home and often e-mail their work to school or vice versa. The impact of these efforts is to raise standards because of the very good learning that is taking place.
82. Teaching is very good and is sometimes excellent. Teachers have very good knowledge in their area of expertise and are well able to plan appropriate lessons. A particular feature of the planning is that the lessons have a clear objective and are structured with a beginning, middle and end. Many of the tasks present a clear challenge so the students are motivated and at times inspired. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and encourage a working atmosphere. Learning closely follows teaching and is therefore also very good. The students learn by having a clear understanding of what is required. This is provided by clear explanations, sometimes using the overhead screen demonstration facilities and sometimes using explanatory booklets. The teachers use classroom demonstration facilities so that each student can observe techniques on their own screen; this greatly helps the learning process. Learning is also very effectively promoted by the very good pace of lessons which ensures high levels of productivity. Students are expected to produce coursework on a regular basis and are taught to structure their workload. The higher-attaining students are encouraged to develop their work to gain the highest possible grades. Students are made well aware of the advantages and potential problems of using the Internet. All these features of the teaching mean that students make very good progress in acquiring knowledge and understanding as well as developing their intellectual skills.
83. Students' achievements are also enhanced by their very good attitudes to their ICT courses and to their teachers. They are made fully aware of their progress and know that they can gain very good grades if they keep up with the work. Teachers and students show mutual respect. Attendance is good because they know that each lesson is important for the development of the topics and therefore for their understanding.
84. The ICT department provides several courses appropriate to the needs of the post-16 students. These are the GNVQ intermediate, AVCE in ICT and AS level computing. The courses attract large numbers of students and the drop-out rate is very low. The students say that the courses meet their aspirations very well, and they are able to use ICT rooms at most times of the day. An Internet cafe has been set up for student use; this also encourages their interest and independence in their learning.

85. Sixth form work and progress are carefully monitored. Students are made well aware of their predicted grade in time for action to be taken if necessary. Assessment information is used as a guide to the effectiveness of the teaching methods. The needs of individual students are known to the teachers and appropriate feedback is given. Considerable guidance is provided at any time. Teachers are available for individual consultations after school if necessary.
86. The leadership of the department is excellent and shows a clear direction for the development of ICT across the school and in the timetabled sixth form classes. Charts in each room show clearly when each unit will be taught and for how long. Teaching is monitored and developed by the head of subject. Careful analysis is undertaken before any financial expenditure to ensure that it will improve learning, but new technology is introduced when the benefits are assured. All members of the subject contribute to the development of the teaching material. The qualifications and experience of teachers to teach ICT in the sixth form are very good. There has been considerable improvement in overall resources during the last few years. Accommodation and resources for ICT teaching are now good and will soon be very good, especially as students also have access to computers in their common room and in the library.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was on physical education, but leisure and tourism was also sampled. The one leisure and tourism lesson that was observed was the newly introduced intermediate GNVQ course for about 12 students, including two with special educational needs. The teaching was very good; as well as the teacher's very good knowledge and understanding, planning was of a high quality with very good awareness of needs of individual students. As a result, learning was very good with students' work already showing great strides in their motivation and achievements; the students are enjoying the course and particularly welcome the mature atmosphere in the classroom.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Teaching and the marking of the students' work are good.
- There is a wide range of courses for academic, vocational and community leadership qualifications.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards on AS and A-level courses are not as high as most other subjects in the school.
- There are some inconsistencies in teachers' expectations throughout all aspects of examination work.
- Arrangements for general physical education mean that not all students can attend at the same time.

87. Standards in the practical aspects of the subject are above average; standards in written and theoretical work tend to be below average. In 2001, A-level results were below the national average, broadly reflecting the students' overall prior attainment on entry to the sixth form; results in 2002 are an improvement, but still below the 2001 national average. No students reached the highest level, the best achievement being one B grade, gained in both years by a boy. This is disappointing because, consistently, students achieve well above average standards at the end of Year 11 in GCSE examinations in the subject. For several years, results in A-level physical education have tended to be below those which students gain in the other subjects that they take. In the most recent examinations, girls in the school outperformed boys. Retention rates from Year 12 to 13 are impressive, with most students carrying on to Year 13. Results for the one-year NVQ sport and recreation course were average in 2001, with similar results in 2002. Approximately 25 students gain the Community Sports Leaders award each year. Standards in competitive sport are

good at district level. A few individuals play for the county. One boy represents England in badminton.

88. In work seen during the inspection, standards are average overall and most students achieve satisfactorily. Achievement is better in the non-advanced level courses; many students find the theory work in the advanced level courses difficult compared with the more practically orientated GCSE course in Years 10 and 11. Standards in the practical aspects of the subject are above average. In a Year 12 general lesson, girls had a very good understanding of dance choreography; students performed well in the fitness suite. A NVQ student was very knowledgeable and articulate in role play related to sports recreation. Standards on advanced level courses are average overall. In coursework, homework and test answers, the highest attainers display above average levels of knowledge and understanding by the end of Year 13. However, across the ability range, the standard of written work is inconsistent both within and between the different units of the course. In a Year 13 practical lesson, the students' observation and analysis skills were modest because of limitations in their technical knowledge and inadequate recall of previous work. Students are confident when answering direct questions about their views on the examination course. However, there is some reluctance to contribute orally in theory lessons. While most coursework files include satisfactory examples of word-processing, no one used computers in the lessons observed.
89. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good; it is very good in general and vocational lessons, where lively rapport between teachers and students encourages independent learning. Teaching strengths include: very good grasp of course requirements; effective planning; detailed marking and assessment procedures; efficient use of very good facilities. Less effective aspects include: insufficient pace and variety throughout the 65 minute period; inconsistencies in departmental expectations of students' contributions to their learning. In AS and A-level lessons, feedback at the start of all lessons provides students with useful information on how to improve their homework or test answers. The impact of teaching on learning was very good in a brisk Year 12 lesson; probing questions and appropriate links to various practical examples engaged the class, helping them to build successfully on previous work. In Year 13, the impact of good curriculum planning was constrained because boys relied too much on the teacher's prompts when analysing performance in cricket. Whilst progress in theory work is satisfactory overall, the teacher's use of time, resources and questioning was not effective as it might have been in promoting the students' understanding of deviance in sport.
90. Leadership and management are good, with the potential to be very good. The young head of department has been in post since September 2002, following internal promotion. Already, she has a clear vision of priorities for the subject. Some promising procedures are in place to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning, thus targeting standards in examinations. The strong, cohesive department works hard to provide students with an appropriate range of courses appropriate to their interests at this stage of their development. However, whole-school timetabling arrangements mean that not all students are able to come together for general physical education lessons.
91. Since the last inspection, improvement has been good. High standards in practical aspects, including team fixtures, have been maintained. The curriculum is underpinned by a reflective rationale. Assessment procedures are methodical. Links with the community are developing well. However, examination results are below average. Expectations of what students should achieve throughout all aspects of examination work is not as consistent as it might be across the subject. Opportunities for all students to extend their interest in sport and dance during lesson times are less extensive than is often found in similar schools.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

In this curriculum area, NVQ courses in early years care and education are taught. One lesson was sampled with a small group of seven Year 12 girls working for the level 2 qualification. Standards are in line with the course's expectations and both teaching and learning are good. With the teacher providing

good guidance, helpful discussion and appropriate individual help, students are making good progress and are interested in what they are doing.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and media studies, but theatre studies and music were sampled. Music technology is also taught outside the normal timetable as an AS level course to students from Years 12 and 13, with two students now progressing to the A2 qualification. About a dozen highly motivated students are undertaking this course; their interests cover a wide range from practicing musicians to those with a strong technical background. Facilities for the course are now very good, and, in the session observed, all were working very well, being absorbed in their tasks. The course makes a most valuable contribution to the overall sixth form curriculum. Teaching and learning were excellent in the music lesson that was observed. Standards are already well above average with original and creative work of a high order. The very thorough preparation of musical extracts and resources, the high intellectual content which constantly challenged the students, and the excellent use by the teacher of the students' own contributions to take the thinking forward led to rapid progress and understanding. The lunch time concert in Tewkesbury Abbey given by sixth form students as part of the performance component of their course was memorable and uplifting.

The excellent theatre studies lesson was part of the very good provision for drama in the sixth form which enables many students to have careers in the theatre in acting, management or on the technical side. Accommodation, resources and staffing are excellent. With wide variations in the starting points for students in the group, a key quality of the teaching was the first rate evaluation of the students' critiques of 'Billy Liar' which gave clear pointers on how to improve their work.

Art

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is very good, and sometimes excellent.
- Leadership and management of the subject are very good, with a clear vision for future developments.
- The students have excellent attitudes to their studies.

Areas for improvement

- More use of visiting artists in residence would broaden students' experiences further.
- The use of computers for digital imaging is under-developed.

92. Students taking advanced level examinations gain overall grades in line with national averages. One third of the students gained the higher grades of A or B in the A-level examinations in 2001; provisional results for 2002 indicate an improvement, although numbers entering remain small. With three of the four subject teachers only in their second year of teaching, and with the quality of teaching observed being very good and often excellent, there are good reasons to feel confident that the present high standards of teaching will yield improving results over time. The current building extension work will significantly improve the quality and amount of available space, which gives further grounds for optimism about future trends.

93. In work seen during the inspection students are achieving very well and making very good progress. The quality of work in sketchbooks and portfolios is consistently well above average and, in some cases, the standard of their individual studies is very high. The depth and extent of their research into the work of well-known artists are strengths that are developed through the teachers' excellent knowledge and understanding of their subject. All students pursue their studies along very individual lines and shows resourcefulness in developing their ideas. The small numbers using the computer are confident in using the very good software, but there is scope for further developments in the use of new technology in promoting students' intellectual and creative skills. One student was observed layering her drawing onto a Magritte image, before cutting,

manipulating colour and form and building a very interesting digital image that showed her very good understanding of surrealism. The students have an excellent experience of life drawing and all show well-developed observational drawing skills. In one excellent lesson observed, the students were exploring the work of diverse artists such as Bosch, O'Keefe, Rainer and Giger, each one able to explain the work they were doing and showing a very good knowledge and understanding of the focal artist. Students with special educational needs are successful in gaining good grades in advanced level examinations.

94. Students have a positive attitude towards their work and are very committed to gaining good grades that will secure them a place at university or art college. Many Year 13 students have set their sights on particular courses in particular institutions and are committed to working towards a placement there. They use a lot of their free time to continue with their work.
95. The quality of teaching is never less than very good and is often excellent; overall, it is judged very good, and this is a major factor in the very good learning that is taking place, and, hence, the rising standards. All teachers have an excellent command of their subject and enjoy the challenge of teaching it at this level. They use their own skills to demonstrate and guide the techniques used by students. They have high expectations and challenge students to constantly raise standards. Relationships are mature, reflective and supportive, enabling students to work as independent learners in a largely tutorial setting as they grow through Years 12 and 13. The teaching team is strengthened by the support of a technician who is a print maker in his own right. He not only brings his skills to the department, but has also made some high quality resources for student use.
96. The head of subject sets very high standards and is clear in her vision for the future development of the subject when it expands into the excellent accommodation being built for it. She leads a very strong team of young teachers who are confident, enthusiastic and committed to working together to raise standards. The curriculum is very broad, within the constraints of examination guidelines. It is weighted towards fine art and two-dimensional work, especially painting and drawing and printmaking; as such it prepares students well for further study and vocational coursework. Students are successfully encouraged to visit art galleries to support their studies and benefit from an occasional workshop led by visiting artists, though this is an area for further development to broaden students' experiences. The excellent displays of students' work around the school enhance the presentation of the school to parents and the public. It is clear that standards overall have risen significantly since the previous inspection, and this trend is continuing with exciting prospects for the future.

Media studies

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

Strengths

- Overall standards are above average and achievement is very good for the large numbers of students taking the subject.
- Students show good knowledge and understanding of film language.
- Student participate very well in class discussions, responding to the very good teaching.
- There is very good guidance and support for individual students.

Areas for improvement

- Some tasks in some lessons are not always the most appropriate for the work being covered.
- Enrichment activities are relatively underdeveloped.

97. Advanced level results are above average. In 2001 and 2002 AS attainment was above average with over two-thirds of students being awarded either grade A or B. In 2002, almost half the 35 students who took the new A2 examination obtained the top two grades, with five gaining grade A. Nearly all students achieved very well in relation to their starting points after GCSE.

98. In work seen during the inspection, standards are also above average. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of the way that film conveys meaning and are able to provide convincing explanations for the choice of lighting, camera work and other film codes. The students' print production work for their coursework shows high-level skills in the manipulation of digital images to create advertising campaigns. However, their evaluation of production work is insufficiently critical with no use made of audience feedback to assess whether the adverts achieve their intended aims. For their independent study, students' analysis of narrative, representations and marketing is very strong, but in researching their chosen subject, there is an over-dependence on Internet web sites at the expense of academic literature.
99. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Sources are well chosen and effectively deployed to illustrate the teaching themes. For example, in one lesson the teacher selected a range of film still from different Westerns spanning several decades from which the students could identify common codes and conventions as well as changes in representation. In another lesson, short DVD sequences from the film 'The Sixth Sense' enabled the class to analyse the way lighting and camera work are used to create suspense. The lessons are characterised by active group work in which students share ideas in discussing textual extracts; their active involvement promotes very good learning. However, some of the tasks are not always designed to ensure that the students focus on the appropriate aspects of the texts being studied. In analysing magazine covers, one class was not guided towards such key features as the use of language or typography. In the best lessons, however, students are able to make perceptive observations concerning textual content, and teachers try to ensure that there is whole class participation. There is scope for more enrichment of media studies through extra-curricular activities such as visits or guest speakers. However, on an individual basis, students receive very good support and guidance both inside and outside the classroom.
100. The very good leadership and management of the subject are underpinned by strong teamwork and efficient use of resources. In addition, there is good departmental planning which focuses on raising standards of attainment. The classrooms are well equipped with DVD and large TV monitors, and there are striking displays of students' work and media images. Although there is no audio-visual equipment for video or radio production work, there are satisfactory print production facilities for the print based practical module in the AS course.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on history and sociology, but geography and religious studies were sampled. In the Year 13 geography lesson that was observed, teaching was good. Very good planning and organisation enabled students to make good progress in their independent learning. Their standards are in line with national standards and they are achieving well; however, access to more up-to-date information would improve the validity of their findings. One very good advanced level religious studies lesson in Year 13 was sampled. Very good relationships and opportunities for thoughtful reflection resulted in very good learning. Standards are above average and students are achieving very well.

History

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving and are now above the national average.
- Students' very positive attitudes promote good achievement.
- Effective leadership and management have contributed to good improvement in the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Data from assessment is not yet used enough to set learning targets for individual students.
- Teachers' use of questioning sometimes misses opportunities to extend students' historical understanding and thinking.

101. Students' performance in A-level examinations has shown a rising trend in recent years. Results were in line with national averages in 1999 and 2000, but were well above in 2001. Students' performance in history was not significantly different from that in their other subjects. Results in the new AS-level examination in 2001 were at the national level for grades A and B but above for grades A to E. In 2002 candidates at A2 and AS levels met or exceeded their predicted grades. This represents good achievement on the part of the students.
102. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are above average and students' achievement since the start of Year 12 is good. They have a firm grasp of the topics they are studying and can analyse relevant issues and questions successfully, as seen in two lessons on the terms and implementation of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act. The written work of most students is clear, effective and well argued, although a few have difficulty in bringing sufficient depth and analysis to their work. Year 12 students have made a good start to the course and standards of work seen are above average. In their work on the USA in the 1920s, students are using sources effectively to support different interpretations of social and economic trends. Their achievement, thus far, is good.
103. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good, and often very good. Teachers plan work very thoroughly, so that students are always clear about the purpose and direction of a lesson. Teachers use a good mix of methods, which enables students to become fully involved in the work. In a Year 13 lesson on the Poor Law Amendment Act, work in pairs and small groups was particularly successful in helping students extend their understanding of contemporary reactions to the legislation. Resources are carefully prepared and well used, as seen in two Year 12 lessons when packs of picture sources on the USA in the 1920s were used very skilfully to help students explore and debate aspects of the period. In the best lessons questioning by the teacher is well used to clarify and extend students' understanding. However, where questioning is less effective opportunities are missed to highlight themes and ideas, and promote historical enquiry and debate. Marking is usually very good, which helps students improve their work. The attitude of students is very positive. They work well on their own and are confident in discussion and debate. They enjoy history and are keen to succeed, which helps to explain their good achievement in the subject.
104. The leadership and management of sixth form history are good. After a period of considerable staff changes a team of well-qualified teachers with a shared commitment to improvement is now responsible for the subject, although some are still inexperienced at taking history at sixth form level. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Students' oral work has improved and the quality of teaching has become more consistent. Good progress has been made in developing assessment practice. However, data from assessment is not yet used enough to set learning targets for individual students. Appropriate use is made of ICT for teaching and learning, and once the facilities in the new humanities block become available, further development will be possible. History is an improving subject at sixth form level. The number of students choosing the subject is increasing and the subject is well placed to improve still further.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- Teaching and learning are good with well planned lessons.
- The subject expertise of the teachers is a particular strength.
- Students are making good progress with their essay writing skills.
- Leadership and management of the subject are good.

Areas for improvement

- Sometimes higher attainers are not challenged sufficiently, with scope for more debate of issues in class and more independent reading by students
- An extension of extra-curricular opportunities would enrich existing provision.

105. Standards in A-level sociology have been above average for the past three years with 100 per cent of students attaining a pass grade each year. In all but one of recent years, the proportion gaining either grades A or B has been above the national average. The AS level results in 2002 show further improvement from 2001, with over half the students being awarded grades A or B, and one student achieving a top ten place for all sociology entries in the country for the examination board used by the school. Overall students are achieving well in relation to their starting points on the courses.
106. Standards in work seen during the inspection are also above average. Students' essay work is well structured and demonstrates a very good grasp of key sociological theories and concepts. The standard of essays, though, is sometimes undermined by a lack of detailed evidence so that issues are not evaluated in enough depth. Students' work shows good skills in undertaking first-hand research to investigate sociological topics. For example, students undertook a comparative content analysis of television news programmes to assess whether there was any bias in news reporting between the channels.
107. The teaching is good overall and is based on strong subject expertise. Lessons are well planned and students are provided with a wide range of up-to-date resources. There is a strong emphasis on developing students' knowledge and understanding of key concepts, for example, through students being required to continually update a glossary of terms in their files. The students are given very good guidance in constructing essays. This includes drawing up plans with students in class and following up with model answers, and in some cases, exam board mark schemes. Lessons contain a range of different activities. For example, in a lesson on the labelling theory, students participated in a role-playing exercise which demonstrated the extent to which certain kinds of social identity provoke stereotyped responses. As a result of this good teaching, students' learning is good and they are achieving well. However, although students are willing to respond in class and show their knowledge and understanding, there is scope for more active debate of issues. In a class on gender, the students were asked to identify differences between masculinity and femininity but were not encouraged to question how far these differences were natural or social.
108. The teaching enables all students to clearly understand the main points and make reasonable progress. However, the pace of some lessons is sometimes rather slow and the higher-attaining students are insufficiently challenged. Students are provided with a comprehensive list of relevant Internet websites of which some students make effective use, but there is generally little independent reading undertaken beyond that set in class. Relationships between staff and students are very good. Teachers provide strong individual support and guidance, and negotiate strategies with students for improving their average grade. Beyond the classroom there are no extra-curricular activities which might enrich the students' experiences.
109. The sociology department is well managed. The teachers work closely as a team, and there is good departmental planning which focuses on how to raise standards of attainment. Being housed in the newly opened humanities block, the department enjoys a very high standard of accommodation. The classrooms are well equipped and decorated, providing a strong sense of subject identity.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English literature and French, but German was also sampled. Spanish is also taught, but was not sampled on this inspection. In German only 4 students were entered for GCE A-level in 2001. In 2002 there were only 3 candidates for AS Level and none for A-level. Teaching in the one lesson observed with the new AS group was satisfactory. The lesson was

logically organised and there was sustained use of German; the material used was demanding and there were high expectations in the homework set. Students' attitudes to the subject are good; they responded well in oral activities but, because they were not challenged frequently enough, the more passive students participated very little in the lesson.

English literature

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

Strengths

- The quality of work presently undertaken by Year 13 is of a very high standard.
- The standard of teaching and learning is very good overall.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of students attaining at the highest grades at A-level has been below the national average, with few students pursuing their English studies to degree level.
- There is scope for wider background reading to broaden students' perspectives.

110. The overall attainment of students in the 2001 A-level English literature examinations was close to the national average; male students' overall performance was above average performance of the male students, whilst that of the female students was below average. Prior to 2001, few male students studied the subject and female students were attaining the higher grades. That has changed, however, with their examination standards declining in recent years. There has been a spread of attainment on entry to the course but a significant number of students had GCSE grades which were below the expected levels for advanced level study. Overall, male students have achieved better than female students in relation to their levels of prior attainment but the female students' levels of achievement have declined. Advanced level results in 2002 were similar to those of 2001 with half the male students attaining at grades A and B. All students who were entered for the subject gained a pass grade. The 2001 AS results were well above average with nearly all students obtaining grades in the A to C range and over half attaining grades A or B. The initial 2002 AS results were lower but anomalies in the examination grading have resulted in extensive remarking, the results of which are awaited. Apart from the differences in performance of male and female students at A-level, different groups of students achieve equally well. Students joining the sixth form from other schools, for example, do just as well as those who have come through this school.
111. The quality of A-level work seen in Year 13 is well above average, reflecting the standards the students attained in their AS examinations. In one of the lessons seen, students showed a mature understanding of William Blake's use of symbolism in his writings on innocence and experience, and they were fluent and succinct in evaluating the poems. The challenge in the work was to understand how the structure and language of the poetry informed meaning, and the students were motivated by the intellectual demands made of them. Their levels of achievement were high as a result. Students in Year 12 have just embarked on the AS course and the standard of their work is as expected for the start of an academic year. Good work was seen in the Year 12 introductory research module and students successfully gathered and presented information as background material for the set texts. The result was a greater understanding of the literary heritage and the cultural context in which the writers of the set texts worked.
112. Sixth form students are confident and articulate and have a wide general vocabulary and understanding of specialist terms. Written work is usually thorough, carefully researched and expressed, but there are a few students who continue to need help in structuring an argument logically and presenting supporting evidence. Files are well presented and students successfully use computers as an aid in presenting their work and as a research tool. As they progress through the sixth form, students take increasing responsibility for their own learning and are developing as independent critical thinkers. Many broaden their reading beyond the set texts because of the

guidance and encouragement they receive from their teachers but the practice is not yet widespread. The understanding and use of background reading is an area for development.

113. The quality of the work seen in the sixth form results from very good teaching overall, and from the students' positive attitudes to their work. Teachers' subject knowledge and lesson planning are of a high order and lessons challenge and enthuse the students. Relationships are very good and the climate for learning is excellent. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson where, because of the good working relationships created by the teacher, students were able to present their research findings to their peers confidently and fluently. On the occasion when teaching was satisfactory, subject knowledge and planning were strengths but there was not the rigour and challenge in the delivery of the subject which was seen in so many other English lessons. The subject has strategies in place to address this issue and to ensure the professional development of colleagues new to sixth form teaching.
114. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of subject has a thorough knowledge of the new AS and A2 requirements and provides clear educational direction to the work of her team. Teachers are deployed effectively and she gives priority to their professional development. The monitoring of sixth form teaching is well established and teaching approaches are modified and developed. She is well supported in her work by an enthusiastic and hard working team whose members display an enthusiasm for the subject and are eager to evaluate and improve their own practice. Curriculum provision at sixth form level is very good and there is a developing extra-curricular programme of activities with recent conferences on Shakespeare and the World War One poets. One issue facing the subject is the recruitment of males on to the sixth form literature course. Female students predominate in Years 12 and 13 and although the male students contribute fully in lessons and make very good progress, the balance of the groups is distorted. The result is that there is not that range of perspective needed to give vitality to discussion work. It is also a concern that students are not choosing to study the subject at degree level. Teachers are well aware of these issues and are actively seeking ways to address them.
115. The subject is well placed to secure further improvements in provision because of the open, critical but mutually supportive way in which the team works.

French

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

Strengths

- Good teaching and learning are leading to rising standards which, from being below average, are now above average.
- More students are now taking the subject in the sixth form.
- Students are showing very positive attitudes to the subject.

Areas for development

- More formal use of assessment and specific targets will help to raise standards further.
- Students' learning will be enhanced by more structured direction to improving their work after it has been marked.

116. In 2001, there were no candidates at AS or A-level. To some extent, this is some reflects the lack of continuity in staffing whilst this age group was passing through the school. In 2002, all seven candidates entered at A-level achieved a pass grade, although the distribution of grades and the average points score were below the national averages of recent years.
117. The standards of work seen of current students are above average. In Year 13 students show good achievement from their prior attainments. They benefit from the small size of the group in the development of both their listening and speaking skills. In listening the teachers' sustained use of French accustoms them to the pace and intonation of the language. As a result, they only require English to be used to explain difficulties or some aspects of the grammar. Oral standards are high

because there are lessons where students work one-to-one with the teacher or French assistant. Both are good models for the students to follow. There is frequent use of paired work which also helps with learning and speaking the language. Students speak French with confidence and communicate their message even where there are faults in the language. They are able to express opinions on health topics such as smoking, alcohol and the use of animals in research. Their writing shows the key vocabulary to present an argument on topics such as democracy. There are examples of lengthier writing and an awareness that good style requires variety of form and vocabulary. In some of the writing sound ideas are spoilt by errors of basic grammar.

118. At the time of the inspection, students on the AS Level course were just at the end of their first month. Their achievements are good. They are adjusting more quickly than is normal to the expectations at this level. In tasks they had prepared at home in preparation for the current topic of families and relationships, they showed the ability to research for information to help translate both into and out of French. When reading their answers they spoke with a good accent but could not always adapt their skills to new words. A few students lack confidence in speaking. At this stage there is little creative written work.
119. Teaching is good, and this leads to good learning. A strength of all the teaching is the high level of challenge and expectation. The teachers' use of French presents a constant challenge, especially at this stage to students in Year 12. In writing teachers encourage students to bring more variety to their vocabulary and the sentence patterns they use. In both years the shared teaching of groups offers students variety in teaching styles which is helpful in the learning process. In Year 12 the teaching focuses on strategies to encourage independent learning and this is already having an impact on students' confidence. Teachers direct students to reference resources other than the teacher and are campaigning strongly for students to buy quality dictionaries for their personal use. As a result, the gap between teacher-centred learning for GCSE and the independent learning required for advanced level work is being bridged. Students admit to finding the work difficult but enjoy working things out for themselves, even if some in Year 12 do not yet have the confidence to risk making mistakes. Good relationships and positive attitudes also support learning by creating a positive atmosphere. For some their motivation is heightened by their participation in the forthcoming exchange visit to Poitiers. Marking is very thorough with helpful comments and corrections. However there is only limited evidence that students are directed to tasks to help them remedy the most important weaknesses. Students' work is regularly assessed, but they would benefit from the rigour of more formal assessment related to examination grade levels. Development in these areas would complement the high expectations which is a feature of the teaching.
120. New leadership in the modern foreign languages has already had a positive impact in this area of the curriculum; the growing confidence amongst the teachers and improving results at GCSE have encouraged more students to take the subject. The head of French appreciates the support given for developments in the subject. The leadership and management of French are good. The subject is well administered and the shared teaching is well co-ordinated for continuity. The French assistant is well used to optimise the opportunities for oral work. Although the monitoring of teaching and students' work is established in the modern languages, priority has properly been given to supporting developments in the main school. With the growth in numbers in all three languages in the sixth form, monitoring and mutual observation would provide the opportunity to identify and share good practice to further raise standards at this level. The subject has the commitment and capacity to build on the improving standards seen in this inspection.