

INSPECTION REPORT

WHEATLEY PARK SCHOOL

Holton

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123243

Headteacher: Mr N Young

Reporting inspector: Mrs J Murray
1606

Dates of inspection: 13 – 16 January 2003

Inspection number: 249836

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community (Arts College)
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed

School address:	Holton Oxford
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Postcode:	OX33 1QH
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Telephone number:	01865 872441
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
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Name of chair of governors:	Mr C Tippet
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Date of previous inspection:	28 April 1997
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INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
1606	Mrs J Murray	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? The school's results and achievements. How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
19727	Mr E Langford	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?
19866	Mr P Austin	Team inspector	Art Art and design	
7926	Mr J Bowden	Team inspector	Sociology Physical Education	
30433	Mr C Corp	Team inspector	Chemistry	
23393	Mr B Dower	Team inspector	English literature	
27666	Mr J Dockrell	Team inspector	French	
1604	Mrs J Head	Team inspector	Mathematics	
13122	Ms S Matthews	Team inspector	History	
1223	Mr A Piggott	Team inspector		How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students.
22491	Mrs L Small	Team inspector	Design and technology	
30128	Ms S Stanley	Team inspector	Religious studies	
4486	Mr M Weller	Team inspector	Drama Media Studies	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Wheatley Park School is a specialist Arts College for boys and girls aged 11 to 18. With 1390 students on roll, it is bigger than other secondary schools nationally. Students are from homes that represent a breadth of socio-economic backgrounds. About seven per cent of students are entitled to free school meals which is below the national average. The school serves a wide area and students come to the school from Buckinghamshire as well as from the city of Oxford and surrounding villages. The school also shares its site with a school for pupils who have learning difficulties; these pupils are integrated into many lessons and other activities. Pupils of all attainment levels enter the school in Year 7. However, more pupils have attained at Level 4 and above in the end of Year 6 national tests than are usually found on entry to secondary schools, which makes attainment on entry above average. Around 18 per cent of students have special educational needs; this is broadly in line with the national average. Just over one per cent are supported by a Statement of Special Educational Need; this is below the national average. Needs include emotional and behavioural, moderate learning and specific learning difficulties. Less than one per cent of students speak English as an additional language, which is low. About two thirds of students move into further education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Wheatley Park School is an effective school as it offers a very wide range of educational opportunities to promote students' development. Standards are above average and students achieve as might be expected given their attainment when they enter in Year 7. Teaching is satisfactory overall with a significant proportion that is good or better. Students in higher attaining sets are particularly well challenged and attain up to 12 GCSE A* to C grades; this is a much larger number than is usual. The sixth form is flourishing and prepares students very well to continue their education; four students this year have firm offers at Cambridge or Oxford universities. The leadership and management of the school are good with a strength in the way extra funds are gained to support the school's distinctive values and development. Good management and skilful deployment of staff helped to overcome the staffing difficulties of the preceding year. Resources are carefully targeted to benefit students and thus the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- The quality of educational provision is greatly enhanced by the school's ability to secure significant additional resources through national and local initiatives.
- An exceptionally wide range of activities provided beyond the school day gives excellent opportunities for students to develop intellectually and personally.
- Extensive links with industrial and local community groups broaden the curriculum and are of enormous benefit to students in their learning.
- The sixth form and its students have a very positive and beneficial influence in the school.

What could be improved

- Although many students make good progress and attain high standards, achievement could be even better by giving greater attention to improving the consistency of teaching across the school.
- Assessment information is not used as effectively as it could be to analyse and improve performance at either whole school or department level.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in May 1997 and since that time it has made good progress overall. It has made very good progress in extending opportunities for students to take part in a wide range of activities and visits. The school became a specialist Arts College in 2000; this has brought notable benefits to the range of experiences offered to students. Links with the community and partner institutions have also developed considerably. Extra-curricular sport has been revived and school teams have gained success in competition. The school has addressed all key issues identified in the last inspection report well and is continuing to work to bring about further improvement. For example, the school is still seeking ways to motivate boys and improve their attainment; it recognizes that the ratio of computers to students is still below that nationally but National Curriculum requirements for information and communication technology are now met. Guidelines have raised awareness for students' spiritual and cultural development and students' moral and social development is very good. Progress in improving the quality of teaching has been satisfactory. Although the proportion of lessons that are very good or excellent has increased, overall, the proportion of satisfactory or better teaching is similar to that found in the last inspection. This is in part due to staffing difficulties in previous years and to a lack of systematic monitoring to share good teaching practice. Senior managers and the governing body have excellent working relationships and have proved that they have the capacity to continue leading the school in its developments.

STANDARDS

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

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

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

**National comparison data for AS/A-level results in 2002 are not yet available. Similar schools are those who have the same proportion of students entitled to free school meals.*

Overall, standards are above average in the main school. In 2002, the end of Year 9 national tests show that standards in mathematics are well above average when compared to both national and similar schools; they are also above those of English and science. Standards in science are above average whereas those for English are broadly average compared to national results but are below those of similar schools; in 2001 they were well above similar school results. There are no significant differences in the standards of boys and girls. The trend of improvement over the past four years for English, mathematics and science has been broadly similar to the national trend. Compared to their attainment on entry in Year 7, students' achievement is satisfactory.

The proportion of students attaining 5+ A* to C GCSE grades in 2002 is above that nationally and in line with similar schools as is the average points score. Students make the expected progress from the end of Year 9 and their achievement is broadly satisfactory. However, whilst the proportions of students who attain 5+ A* to G grades and 1+ A* to G grades are in line with those nationally, they are below those of similar schools. Girls' results are better than those of boys especially for the higher GCSE grades; this reflects students' prior attainment. The trend of improvement over the past four years has been below that nationally; this was caused by a dip in results in 2001. The school's GCSE targets for 2002 were not met but the school is working to meet those for 2003. National statistical data, used to determine relative overall success within GCSE subjects, shows that in 2002 students did better in German, history and geography than in their other subjects; they did less well in design and technology, drama, physical education and Spanish.

Standards in the sixth form are broadly average. In 2001, the latest year for which national comparison data is available, achievement was broadly satisfactory. Results were well above average for A-level art and design and above average for AVCE art and design, and A-level geography and history. In 2002, results show improvement with considerable gains in average points score in most subjects. The proportion of students attaining the highest grades of A and B also increased substantially across subjects.

Standards of work seen in the main school show satisfactory achievement and largely reflect test and examination results in both Years 9 and 11 in English, mathematics and science. Standards of literacy and numeracy are above average. In the sixth form, standards were confirmed as well above average in art and design and history; they were seen to be above average in mathematics, physical education, drama and theatre studies and media studies, and average in other subjects. Students are achieving well compared to their attainment on entry to courses.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Most students enjoy coming to school and are prepared to work hard. They eagerly participate in extra-curricular provision.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The majority of students behave in a sensible manner in lessons and around the school. A small minority of students behave less well and cause disruption in a few lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Relationships are good and students co-operate well with each other and teachers. They readily accept responsibility.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Authorised absence is similar to that nationally. The rate of unauthorised absence is higher than usually found; systems to monitor unauthorised absence are not secure.

Students move about the extensive site in an orderly and sensible manner. Most students are punctual to lessons and settle quickly to learning. Participation rates in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities provided are very good. Students like their school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

Overall, teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 with a significant proportion that is good. There has been an increase in the proportion of very good and excellent teaching since the last inspection. Teaching is good in mathematics and satisfactory in English and science. Students' learning is also satisfactory, leading to progress and achievement being broadly what might be expected given attainment on entry to the school. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is satisfactory across the curriculum. Students with special educational needs are taught well, particularly when taught in small groups or when supported in lessons. Where teaching is good or better, teachers capture and hold the interest of all students and ensure that students know what they are learning and why. Teachers challenge higher attaining and gifted and talented students very well. Teaching is good in the sixth form; frequently it is very good. This is because teachers' very good subject knowledge is used effectively to promote independent learning. However, the approach to teaching is not consistent across the school and not all lessons engage students from beginning to end; some teachers do not manage the behaviour of less motivated students well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The breadth and range of courses meets students' needs and aspirations well. An excellent range of activities, visits and external speakers contribute to students' development very well.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Students benefit from carefully planned provision that enables them to make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	All students who have English as an additional language speak fluent English and do not need extra support. Appropriate arrangements are made to provide support as students enter the school.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Provision for moral and social development is very good; many opportunities are provided for students. Provision for spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. Pastoral care is very good. Procedures to monitor and support academic progress are satisfactory and are being developed.

The curriculum has many strengths. In the main school, the academic curriculum meets all statutory requirements and offers breadth through a very good range of courses. In the sixth form, students choose from a comprehensive range of AS, A-level and AVCE courses; these are further enhanced by a well-planned enrichment programme that includes the teaching of key skills to all students. However, religious education is not taught in sufficient depth to fully meet requirements at sixth form level.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good overall. Strong and effective leadership has developed the school as a specialist Arts College. Values and aims are shared. Middle managers provide good management overall.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. The governing body has an effective structure to support the school in its work. However, it has not ensured that statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship and the teaching of religious education in the sixth form are met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Satisfactory. Monitoring procedures are satisfactory although the school evaluates some aspects of its work well.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school uses its resources well. It is almost fully staffed with specialist teachers; shortages of text books and a lower number of computers per student than is usual affects learning in some subjects.

The school is managed well to provide a breadth of educational opportunities and experiences for its students. The headteacher and senior staff work well together. Priorities are established and communicated through the school development plan but these could be given greater clarity so that monitoring and taking action, particularly of the quality of teaching and achievement, are more rigorous. The principles of best value are understood well and applied appropriately.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• That an interesting range of activities is provided outside lessons.• Their children make good progress.• Their children are expected to work hard and achieve their best.• Their children like school.• They feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Information about how well their children are doing.• The closeness with which the school works with them.• Behaviour.• The amount of homework that is set.

Parents are pleased with the school and how it helps their children to succeed. Responses to the parents' questionnaire, written comments and views of those attending the parents' meeting were mainly positive although many comments were made about inconsistent practice across the school's work. Inspectors agree with most of these positive views. An excellent range of activities is provided, most students like the school and work hard and parents are made to feel welcome. For many students, progress is good but overall it is satisfactory. Inspectors found that information given to parents is frequent and of good quality. However, better use could be made of the home-school contact book. Behaviour was found to be good although a small minority of students need firm management in some lessons. Homework was seen to be appropriate.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form has 249 students on roll. It is larger than other sixth forms. Around two thirds of students continue into the sixth form from the main school and approximately a further 10 to 15 students join the sixth form from other schools each year. There are five students with special educational needs and none who speak English as an additional language. Attainment on entry is broadly average with the expectation that students who wish to follow AS and A-level courses will have the minimum of five GCSE A* to C grades; those who follow vocational courses are expected to have the minimum of four GCSE A* to C grades. Most students follow AS and A-level courses but a significant proportion combine these with one of the vocational A-levels offered. About three quarters of the students move into further or higher education at the end of Year 13. Retention rates are very good and very few students leave before the end of their courses.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a flourishing sixth form that provides a good quality of education that is cost effective. Standards are broadly average reflecting the relatively open nature of entry onto some courses. Overall, students achieve well because teaching is good; higher attaining students are particularly well catered for and they are prepared very effectively to continue their education. Results improved significantly in 2002 because students made much better progress in their courses than those of the previous year. Students' personal development is excellent and they learn extremely well how to research and to think for themselves. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Managers continually strive to support all students and to help them to benefit from the courses they are following; this is greatly appreciated by the students.

Strengths

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge that they use extremely effectively to support students on the courses they are studying. Students are taught how to research and to have enquiring minds.
- Relationships between staff and students are excellent.
- Significant improvement was made to most subject examination results last year.
- A very full enrichment programme of activities develops students' wider understanding of their place in society.
- Students' personal development is excellent; students develop into mature, sociable and confident young adults.
- Students make an excellent contribution to the life of the main school.

What could be improved

- Performance data are not used as effectively as they could be to help students to understand their own progress or to ensure they achieve as well as they could.
- Very good teaching practice is not identified systematically enough so that it can be shared and developed across all subjects.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Teaching is very good overall; students learn quickly as a result and achieve well.
Chemistry	Good. Good teaching and good learning are improving standards.
Product design	Satisfactory. Achievement is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory.
Physical education	Good. Enthusiastic teaching results in effective learning and good achievement. Standards are improving.
Art and design	Excellent. Very good teaching leads to high standards, very good achievement and well above average examination results.
Art and design V	Very good. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching. Standards are consistently above average.
Drama and theatre studies	Good. Students achieve well. Teaching is good and leading to current work that is above average.
Media studies V	Good. Standards are above average. Teaching is very good and is resulting in good and improving achievement.
History	Very good. Students have very good attitudes to work and achieve very well. Teaching is very good. Some features of provision are excellent.
Religious studies	Good. Teaching is very good. Students achieve well; standards are average and are improving.
Sociology	Good. Good teaching results in effective learning. Achievement is good.
English literature	Good. Standards are above average. Teaching is good and students achieve well.
French	Satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory with marked strengths. Standards are average and students' achievement is satisfactory.

Work was also sampled in physics, information and communication technology, AS and A-level media studies, English language and literature and German. In these lessons, teaching was good overall. Students' achievement is also good due to the support and good teaching they receive.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Good support and guidance is given to students. Induction procedures are very good; systems for pastoral support are clear and well understood. Assessment procedures including marking and feedback are good; procedures to monitor students' progress are satisfactory.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Good leadership provides a very clear direction for continued improvements. Daily management is very good with clear procedures to monitor attendance and students' welfare; all students are effectively included in activities. Monitoring and evaluation are good overall but the monitoring of achievement against national and local data is not sufficiently rigorous.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The choice of courses that suited their talents and career aspirations.• That teachers are accessible to help if difficulties arise.• They enjoy being in the sixth form.• The way they are taught and challenged to do their best.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Careers advice• Their progress towards their examination qualifications.• Sensitive support for personal problems.• Assessment of their work so they can see how to improve.

Students have very positive views of their school. Inspectors agree with these favourable views. Relationships in the sixth form are excellent and students are challenged in lessons and taught how to work independently. Teachers are accessible and courses are tailored to suit the needs of students. Inspectors found that students are guided and prepared very well towards higher education; careers advice is available. Teachers are well aware of the need for personal support if it is required. The school is at an early stage of setting targets and giving clear indication of how well progress is being made towards targets.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The quality of educational provision is greatly enhanced by the school's ability to secure significant additional resources through national and local initiatives.

1. Wheatley Park School is an outward looking and forward thinking school that seeks every opportunity to further its educational provision for its students. Strong and effective leadership from the headteacher, supported well by senior managers and the governing body, steered the school successfully through its bid to become a specialist Arts College and the first of its kind for the local education authority (LEA). This has brought enormous benefits to students by broadening the curriculum, developing links with the community and industry and giving students access to highly sophisticated technological equipment. However, these benefits have focused on personal development and have not as yet improved students' overall academic standards or their achievement.
2. The school is now in its third year for funding of Arts College status and has met its targets for each year even though it has had to overcome staffing difficulties. Whenever opportunities are presented the school looks to see how these can be used for its benefit. For example, it has gained the Sportsmark Award and is currently working towards Investors in People accreditation. These ventures are realised because of the very good support of the governing body. The governing body is comprised of active and well-informed governors; relationships between the governing body and school are excellent. The governing body fully understands its role as critical friend and also its responsibilities in holding the school to account. Governors welcome information about performance, achievement and students' successes and are keen to seek further improvements.
3. Additional funding enhances the school's basic budget substantially. Specific grants and bids have brought about benefits such as those of the start up monies for 'reading buddies' between older and younger students and monies to support conservation work in a local country park. Careful planning and budget monitoring ensure that all grants are used wisely and possible short-falls are foreseen. A constant watch is kept on where developments need to take place and even if the source of funding is unknown this does not prevent outline plans being made. For example, a premises plan is being formulated to rationalize the use of the school's grounds and buildings. The school is sited in extensive grounds and its buildings are wide spread and in various states of repair; much work is needed on many of these. Senior managers, with the governing body, have created a dedicated sixth form centre since the last inspection, as well as establishing the manor house as an arts centre. They are now using entrepreneurial skills to develop other areas of the school to provide a high quality learning environment for all subjects of the curriculum.

An exceptionally wide range of activities provided beyond the school day gives excellent opportunities for students to develop intellectually and personally.

4. An excellent range of clubs and sporting activities, visits and residential trips and an organized programme of outside speakers enhance curricular provision enormously. This has been recognized nationally and the school received a distinction award for its extra-curricular programme in 2001. Taken over a school year, the opportunities provided to students to extend their interests and learning beyond the school day are impressive. In Year 7, all students take part in a four-day camp during the summer term. This is considered to be an essential way of engendering social skills and group identity. To make this possible, the governing body ensures that subsidies are available to students who have the greatest financial need. In Years 8 to 10 the school makes use of outdoor centres in Devon and South Wales. One of the most exciting ventures for students to aspire to take part in is the World Challenge expedition that takes place bi-annually. In 2000, students went to Madagascar and in 2002 to Nepal; plans are already underway to visit Tanzania in 2004. As a result of taking part in these activities, students learn how to take on responsibility and their social skills are developed very well.

5. The opportunities for students to take part in drama productions, musical events and sporting competitions are excellent. At present, the school is producing West Side Story with many students and staff being involved. The school has a madrigal choir, a choral society, an orchestra and a soul band. These groups perform in public and have completed exchanges and taken part in visits to countries such as Canada and Austria. Physical education makes a good contribution to students' personal development and there are many opportunities for students to participate in extra-curricular activities. The first XI association football team is, for example, county champion and the first XV rugby union team reached the semi-finals of the county cup. A wide range of other sports is open to students from all year groups; these include fencing and trampolining as well as more traditional team games. The school benefits from the well-appointed sports centre on the school site.
6. Many departments organize visits or events to extend students' knowledge and understanding. For example, in the sixth form, a mock United Nations General Assembly is held each year. In commemoration of the Holocaust Day at the end of January, some students visited Poland and many other students were involved in activities within the school. The history department makes very good use of local history and has also led visits to the 1914 – 1918 battlefields. In Latin, both at GCSE and A-level, students visit Italy to investigate Rome, Pompeii, Herculaneum and Capri and incorporate this information into their course work. In art and design, an extensive range of extra-curricular activities is provided which includes well-attended classes in life drawing, visits to galleries in London, Paris and Barcelona and the use of visiting artists and in English there are many visits to the theatre. Languages visits and exchanges are very well established last year visits to Paris, Austria, Spain and Germany took place. As a consequence, not only is students' understanding deepened but also their cultural awareness and sensitivity to past and present issues are heightened.
7. The sixth form enrichment programme is very full and encourages students to think beyond their own social circles. Students are introduced to controversial and challenging ideas through the wide range of speakers who come to address them. They respond very well and debate and discuss issues with confidence and knowledge. They are actively encouraged to take part in work experience and to take study trips abroad. During one half term last year there were 165 students and 16 adults visiting five European capitals - Berlin, London, Paris, Moscow and Rome.

Extensive links with industrial and local community groups broaden the curriculum and are of enormous benefit to students in their learning.

8. The headteacher, senior managers and the governing body all work in unison to promote the school as a vital part of the community. Active leadership is provided to make appropriate links and good management skills ensure opportunities are used well and enhance students' learning. Partly through the school's specialist Arts College status but also because the school sees itself as part of the local community it welcomes the links it has with the outside world. Apart from excellent equipment provided for the arts, students receive regular opportunities to work with professionals, for example with a journalist on the school magazine, or a local film company on the production of a short film commissioned by the local health trust on weaning practices in the Asian community. Professional groups such as Coral Arts, who are a local media arts organization and who are based in the school, also use the state-of-the-art media technology. The manor house, which is also the arts centre, is shared with professional artists; further links are promoted through the arts vicar. These opportunities extend students' learning very well because they extend learning beyond the classroom making very good links with theoretical knowledge and practical application.
9. Extremely strong links are made with partner institutions. Within its local cluster group of primary schools, Wheatley Park School has made strong curricular links and contributes to a joint primary partnership orchestra. It has organized arts days for primary school pupils and ensures that their induction and transfer at the end of Year 6 are conducted as smoothly as possible. In the sixth form, students are prepared very well for continuing their education into higher education and careers visits are made to universities as part of this process. Especially good links are made with the two local universities through research projects and the school's role in initial teacher training.

Trainee teachers are very well prepared by Wheatley Park School to enter the profession through the well-organized programme of support and oversight of their training.

10. Industrial links are very good and growing. The school values its links with the education business partnership. The work experience programme for Year 10 is well organized so that students gain positive experiences of the world of work. Students in the sixth form have excellent opportunities to take part in problem-solving events with industry and to take part in Young Enterprise activities. Professional musicians bring an added dimension to the school through their work in the digital recording studio.

The sixth form and its students have a very positive and beneficial influence in the school.

11. The school is right to be proud of its sixth form students as they contribute a great deal to the life of the school. They take part in many different aspects of its work and provide very good role models to younger students. For example, sixth form students volunteer to assist with paired reading that takes place before school. They are reliable and give valuable assistance to those students whose reading skills need developing.
12. Sixth form students are self-motivated and take their responsibilities seriously. These positive characteristics are transmitted to younger pupils through activities such as the school council where sixth form students organise and chair proceedings. Such leadership skills demonstrate to younger students how to conduct themselves and reinforce learning about citizenship as well as contributing to social and moral development.
13. The overall impact of this flourishing and vibrant sixth form can be seen in the way that the school embraces opportunities to develop as a learning community. Relationships between staff and students are excellent in the sixth form and are built on mutual respect; they are very good in the main school. Students praise the support given to them by their teachers and this contributes extremely positively to the ethos in the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Although many students make good progress and attain high standards, achievement could be even better by giving greater attention to improving the consistency of teaching across the school.

14. Standards are above average at the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11; students make satisfactory progress and achieve as might be expected given their attainment when they enter the school. Value added measures for 2002 show that from entry to school to the end of Year 9 students made very good progress in mathematics. In science, students' progress is satisfactory but in English in 2002 progress is well below what might have been expected. Progress from the end of Year 9 to the GCSE results of 2002 was satisfactory overall but in the previous year, across a range of indicators, it was well below expectations showing that a significant proportion of students underachieved.
15. The school has actively sought to develop teachers' understanding of how students learn and what they need to do to ensure that learning is effective. Teachers have worked on the Kings College project on assessment in learning and in the sixth form, a research project on good teaching that is seen as pivotal in working for improvement. Throughout the school, higher attaining students are usually challenged well and make good progress and lower attaining students receive work suited to their stage of learning. However, some teachers do not manage well those students who are less motivated; this impacts on achievement and progress. The proportion of very good or excellent teaching has increased since the last inspection but the overall quality of teaching has remained similar. This is partly because of staffing difficulties in the previous years but also because the school has not regularly and systematically shared good teaching practice through a consistent monitoring programme. For example, although a significant proportion of teaching is good there is a lack of consistency between teachers on how lessons are started and teachers do not always tell students what they are going to learn or why; sometimes they do not recap at the

end of lessons to reinforce what has been learned. The school is very aware of where very good and excellent teaching exists and is well placed to introduce a more rigorous programme of monitoring teaching to share good practice in both the main school and the sixth form. It also wants to eradicate the unsatisfactory teaching that is caused by lack of challenge or lack of sufficient variety to capture students' enthusiasm or to meet their learning needs well.

Assessment information is not used as effectively as it could be to analyse and improve performance at either whole school or department level.

16. The school has a wealth of assessment data which it has begun to use at whole school level to set targets and to seek ways of improving performance. This is still at an early stage of development and whilst the use of data to raise standards is understood by senior managers, not all middle managers, classroom teachers or pastoral staff demonstrate similar confidence in their understanding. With further support, and greater understanding, teachers could use data more effectively to track progress and to intervene at an earlier stage, either in their lesson planning or in their marking, to ensure that students make good progress.
17. In Year 11, good use was made of data last year to identify those students who were not achieving as well as predicted. Additional mentoring and support was given to borderline students and most subjects ran revision classes; parents commented on how useful these were. However, students are not universally monitored in this way and pastoral staff are not sufficiently well informed to monitor students' academic progress across subjects.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

18. To ensure that students achieve as well as is possible, and standards are as high as they could be, the school should implement strategies to:

- (1) Enable all students to make good progress and achieve* well by :
- implementing a rigorous monitoring programme to ensure that all lessons start with objectives that are shared with students and that learning is reviewed at the end;
 - ensuring that the management and motivation of students is consistently dealt with by teachers;
 - using information gained from assessment to inform lesson planning and teaching in all subjects.

(See paragraphs : 15 and 16)

- (2) Use data* from examinations and tests and other information more effectively to :
- ensure that all students attain the standards they are capable of;
 - collate and analyse results against national and local information to benchmark performance;
 - use information to set targets and monitor progress against these at individual student and department level to ensure that attainment is as high as it should be in all subjects;
 - ensure that pastoral staff use data to monitor progress across subjects and are able to identify underachievement and give support where necessary.

(See paragraphs : 15, 16 and 17)

Sixth form

19. To raise standards and students' achievement in the sixth form, governors, senior and middle managers and other staff should :

- (1) use assessment information* more rigorously to ensure that examination results are as high as they should be given students' GCSE results on entry to the sixth form.

(See paragraphs : 52, 53, 64, 76, 83, 98, 132, 137)

- (2) ensure that senior and middle managers have a regular programme* for evaluating the quality of teaching so that good practice is identified and shared systematically.

(See paragraphs : 35, 36, 63, 70, 77, 81, 83, 91, 103, 119, 124, 131, 136, 137)

The following weakness should also be considered for inclusion in the school's action plan : improving the access to information and communication technology (see paragraphs : 68, 78, 81, 83, 85, 118, 125, 138).

*Denotes that the school has identified these items within its school development plan.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	54
	Sixth form	46
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		49

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	1	13	16	20	3	1	0
Percentage	2	24	30	37	6	2	0

Sixth form

Number	4	17	16	8	1	0	0
Percentage	9	37	35	17	3	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1141	249
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	98	5

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	12	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	149	5

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	24

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	49

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.5

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	2.1

National comparative data	7.8
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National comparative data	1.2
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	125	115	240

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	74	97	101
	Girls	90	84	86
	Total	164	181	187
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (67)	74 (74)	77 (72)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	28 (46)	57 (55)	42 (39)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	79	109	86
	Girls	87	97	85
	Total	166	206	171
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	72 (77)	88 (75)	71 (72)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	66 (67)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (45)	58 (56)	42 (39)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	33 (34)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	92	119	211

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	45	81	89
	Girls	74	113	116
	Total	119	194	205
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	55 (45)	92 (88)	97 (97)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results	GCSE point score
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Average point score per pupil	School	44.0 (43.0)
	National	39.8

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	N/a
	National		*

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	59	63	122
	Average point score per candidate	217	260	239
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*

		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	46	56	102	8	6	14
	Average point score per candidate	209.1	242.5	227.5	123	110	117
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1233	46	4
1	1	0
43	1	0
4	2	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
24	0	0
11	0	0
5	0	0
0	0	0

Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	20	2	0
Black or Black British – African	3	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	8	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	4	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	44	2	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	78.32
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.1:1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	28
Total aggregate hours worked per week	715.5

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	26.5
Key Stage 4	23.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/2
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	£
Total income	4092173
Total expenditure	4048331
Expenditure per pupil	2906
Balance brought forward from previous year	125893
Balance carried forward to next year	169735

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	15.34
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	14.84

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	3.12
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.12
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	1.00

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1390

Number of questionnaires returned

356

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	32	59	6	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	34	58	5	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	13	45	27	4	12
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	53	21	5	3
The teaching is good.	16	68	5	2	8
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	17	44	32	5	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	40	49	8	2	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	35	57	4	1	3
The school works closely with parents.	11	49	28	7	5
The school is well led and managed.	19	53	13	3	12
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	26	54	12	1	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	59	37	2	0	1

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

20. Results overall in the school's A-level examinations were significantly better in 2002 than in 2001. On balance, 2002 results were as might be expected, given students' GCSE scores on entry to the sixth form. As national comparative data for 2002 are not yet available, the school's 2001 results are used to compare its performance with that of all schools nationally.
21. Students take examinations leading to accreditation at Intermediate GNVQ, AVCE, AS, and A-levels. In 2001, the school's results for Year 13 students, averaged across all such examinations, were in line with those of all maintained schools nationally. The proportion of students gaining A or B grades was roughly the same as that found nationally; so too was the pass rate. Female students did rather better than male students, but the gap in performance was similar to that found nationally. AVCE results were considerably better than AS and A-level results. Results for Year 12 students in 2001 were somewhat similar; the percentage gaining A or B grades in their AS-level examinations was just above the national figure of around 32 per cent; the pass rate was broadly average.
22. Results in different subjects vary from year to year. In 2001, A-level results were well below average in chemistry and in design and technology. They were below average in biology, economics, sociology and English literature. Results were average in most other subjects, but above average in art and design, geography and history. Numbers taking examinations in a few other subjects were too small for reliable comparison with national results. Since 1998, results have been above average in history; they have been consistently well above average in art and design. 2002 results show improvement across a range of subjects, with considerable gains in average points score in mathematics, chemistry, biology, design and technology, physical education, history, religious studies, sociology, and English literature.
23. In general, retention rates are very good. In almost all subjects, students who start courses complete them. It is only at the beginning of AS-level courses in Year 12 that some students change to another course. Very few sixth form students leave the school during an academic year and great efforts are made by teachers to support students so that they complete and gain grades in the courses they have embarked on whether these be AS or A-level courses. The take-up to courses depends on students' interests and aptitudes. Inevitably, there is competition between subjects to recruit students as a wide option choice is available and most students lessen the number of subjects studied from following four AS-level courses in Y12 to three A-level courses in Year 13.
24. From work seen during the inspection, standards are broadly average; in some subjects they are above or well above average. The improvement shown in results in 2002 is continuing with present work so that students are achieving well compared to their entry from Year 11. Higher attaining students frequently achieve very well due to focused and knowledgeable teaching. Those students with special educational needs also achieve well as they are given appropriate support to learn well. Standards were seen to be well above average in art and design and history. They were above average in mathematics, physical education, drama and theatre studies, media studies and English literature and they were average in chemistry, product design, religious studies, sociology and French.
25. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The number of students entered for examinations has increased and the school has continued to gain results comparable to those nationally. A high proportion of students gained the highest grades of A and B in A-level examinations in 2002 and many students achieved well to attain these standards.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

26. Sixth form students display very good attitudes in their willingness to work hard in their chosen subjects. Students are extremely keen to acquire knowledge. They are able to think and work independently and show great confidence and high levels of motivation in all their learning activities. The great majority of students demonstrate a very good level of maturity in their co-operation with others and in the positive way they respond to the many opportunities available to contribute to the life of the wider school community.
27. In lessons, students listen well to their teacher and to each other and a high level of interest and involvement are apparent in the sharing of learning experiences. Students have been trained to work independently and display well-developed research skills in the use of library resources and the Internet. The competitive nature of the students and the positive and challenging approach they have to learning have a significant impact on the good learning and progress to be seen in lessons. In a Year 13 registration period, students offered, and discussed sensibly, a thought for the day related to the apparent ease with which people wrongly stereotype others. Very good examples were observed during the inspection of the various learning skills practised by students in pursuit of quality learning experiences. These included the social context in history being used to support English coursework, sociology course-work embracing information and communication technology to aid learning, and drama work being closely linked with choral art group activities in support of media studies activities.
28. The quality of relationships between students and between students and their teachers is excellent and contributes greatly to the quality of learning to be seen in the school. Students appreciate being treated as sensible young adults and respond with friendly respect for their teachers, adding to the effective climate for learning that exists. Students collaborate well with each other and with younger students in the wider school environment. Most show a natural pride in the school and believe they receive high quality of learning and personal development during their time in school.
29. The voluntary involvement of the majority of students in community and extra-curricular activities is excellent. Sixth form students act as very good role models for the other students in the school. Their everyday contact with the younger students, as they move around the school site and share classrooms, has a beneficial impact on the overall good attitudes and behaviour to be seen in the whole school. The range and diversity of personal development opportunities taken up by the students is impressive. These include, acting as trained confidential counsellors for other students each lunchtime, involvement in paired reading activities with younger students in school and at local primaries, and taking a major part in a whole school production of West Side Story, all of which add considerable value to the students overall learning. Of particular note are the mock United Nations General Assembly held each year, and for which students research and represent the interests of a particular nation, and the annual party and student performances organised by many of the students to entertain elderly residents in the local community.
30. Attendance in the sixth form is very good. Students' enthusiasm for their learning results in regular attendance at lessons with few staying away without good cause. However, a minority of students does not comply with the requirement to attend morning registration and this has a negative effect on recorded attendance figures. Monitoring systems have been introduced to capture actual lesson attendance and these show that students go straight to lessons in the mornings instead of registering in tutor groups. Students' behave in a very mature and responsible way and there were no recorded exclusions in the reporting year.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

31. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13 is good; a significant proportion is very good. Teaching was good or better in over eight out of every ten lessons seen. It was very good, and sometimes excellent in about four out of every ten lessons. In the subjects inspected, teaching is very good in art and design, history, mathematics, media studies and religious studies. It is good in chemistry, drama and theatre studies, English literature, sociology and physical

education, and it is satisfactory in French and product design. As a result of good quality teaching, students are learning well and they gain the skills and confidence to work independently. The teaching of key skills is effective; they are taught to all students through the extension studies programme in Years 12 and 13; not all students are entered for the examination. The key skill of communication is reinforced well across the curriculum but fewer opportunities are presented for the teaching of application of number and information and communication technology.

32. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and they challenge and extend students' thinking and learning very effectively. They have enthusiasm and a genuine desire that this should be shared with students so that they too can gain a love of the subject. For example, in subjects such as physical education teachers' enthusiasm, interest and very good knowledge and understanding of the different units of work ensure that students make good progress and develop their interest in the subject and in religious education teachers' excellent knowledge of the subject is demonstrated in their ability to answer questions, open discussion and guide debate. Teachers use their subject knowledge skillfully to engage students in learning and finding out for themselves. They question students, impart information and encourage high quality discussion of subject issues. For example, in mathematics, students are encouraged to present and explain their own ideas and solutions to their peers, and in drama and theatre studies, students are encouraged to experiment and test which movement, facial expression, gestures, voice and use of space are most effective; this leads to some very imaginative interpretation. Many teachers have close links with local universities and industry and these are exploited to introduce students to resources, materials and knowledge beyond lesson times. In history, for example, excellent use is made of an exciting range of visits and the impact of visiting speakers is considerable and in product design, students in Year 12 have benefited by discussing their coursework with an experienced engineer through the link with the Learning and Skills Council.
33. Relationships in lessons are excellent between staff and students and between students themselves. Classroom management techniques are very good. Teachers respect students and treat them as young adults who have chosen their courses. The quality of feedback and on-going assessment is very good. This is appreciated by students who feel that teachers give them very good support and guidance on how to improve. Examples of this were found in subjects such as chemistry where students appreciated the detailed marking and assessment of their work and felt this helped them make progress and raise their attainment and in sociology where very good support and guidance and very good quality marking ensures students are aware of what they have to do to improve the standard of their work
34. Teachers have very high expectations of students and in particular their ability to research and enquire for themselves. For example in English, because there were high expectations of students research and analytical skills, students were able to analyse the work of Thomas Hardy from different critical viewpoints and understand the complexities of the moral and social issues underlying his work. Teachers give good explanations and instructions are given clearly but they expect students to be active participants and expect to be questioned by them. Students respond extremely well and their learning skills have been developed very well for them to cope with these expectations. For example in mathematics, students respond positively to the challenging work that they are set, asking perceptive questions to ensure they understand what is being taught and in art and design, a significant impact is made on learning because students are challenged to think for themselves and not to be content with instant or easy results. In a lesson observed in media studies, while students were planning their presentations to market short action films they rose to the challenge to adjust their presentations in the light of recent public concern over the increase in gun violence.
35. Most subjects ensure that different tasks and the pace of lessons are varied to suit the way that students learn. For example in French, lessons are very thoroughly prepared with a variety of tasks to sustain interest. However, there are occasions across most subjects when these aspects of teaching need further consideration so that teaching is lifted from good to very good or even excellent. Teachers' planning covers course requirements but it is at this stage that further identification of students' learning needs does not always take place.

36. Even though teaching is good overall, there is a lack of consistency to the structure of lessons and a proportion of teaching that should be raised from satisfactory to good or better. Managers expectations of good teaching are not being promoted through a monitoring and evaluation programme. At present, not all teachers automatically share their learning objectives with students and they do not always summarise lessons against these objectives. For example in physical education, summaries at the end of lessons sometimes lack substance because the learning objectives have not always been made explicit at the start and in drama and theatre studies, learning objectives could be made more explicit and time used more tightly, particularly in a double lesson. Opportunities are sometimes missed to ensure that students know exactly what they will be doing and why; teachers assume that students know but do not make it absolutely clear. In the one unsatisfactory lesson seen, the teacher did not introduce the lesson well or check on learning by questioning and refocusing the task.

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

37. Very good learning opportunities are provided for students through the formal curriculum and the programme of activities beyond the timetabled school day. The curriculum is well planned to provide a very good match of subjects and courses for its students' attainment and future aspirations. There is a wide range of AS and A-level courses. These include subjects that build on GCSE courses taught in the main school as well as new courses such as psychology and sociology that are offered to extend students' interests to new areas. A modest range of vocational courses leads to AVCE qualifications; these reflect the school's Arts College status and build on the work in earlier years very well. Links with local tertiary colleges provide a balance for vocational courses in technological areas. The school makes use of the on-site community education provision to offer retake GCSE courses.
38. Very close attention is paid to advising students on the courses appropriate to their learning requirements and to ensuring that the timetable is flexible enough to accommodate combinations of courses. New courses are introduced where appropriate and timetabling increasingly allows combinations of A-level and AVCE courses. All students study key skills in communication, the application of number and information and communication technology in Year 12 and Year 13.
39. A very good extension studies programme which includes general studies and personal and social education, ensures that students are prepared for life beyond school. The programme covers a wide range of topics from study skills and managing finances to issues of stereotyping and youth culture. External speakers add significantly to the breadth and interest of these studies. Many students are actively involved in learning about citizenship through planned activities. For example, they are involved in preparation for the special activities about Holocaust Day on the 27th of January; these have involved students in visits to Poland. The sixth form council and its social committee contribute well to students' development as they enable them to help regulate their own affairs and cultivate their own social life. However, religious education is not taught to all students in the sixth form.
40. The quality of provision for careers education and information on higher education is good. The head of sixth form provides high quality support and guidance in the advice he provides for students but he expects students to be proactive in seeking information and guidance. Careers interviews are available for those who request them. To supplement the resources available in the sixth form centre, the school also provides talks, for example on taking a gap year, as well as the opportunity for visits to various universities. The Education Business Partnership supports the school well by providing day conferences, placements and mentors.
41. All modern foreign languages students undertake work experience in France and Germany and other Year 12 students are encouraged to take up work placements in July. Many choose to do so and find placements locally as well as in London and abroad, for example in New York. This makes a valuable contribution to their development as citizens and helps in writing their personal statements for their applications for higher education. There is careful preparation for the large number of students going on to higher education along with significant tutorial support.

42. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities further enhances the personal development of sixth form students. These include an outside speaker programme, community service opportunities, study trips abroad, and the opportunity for students to participate in the world challenge trips as well as attendance at conferences and university activities. During one half term last year there were 165 students and 16 adults visiting six European capitals - Berlin, London, Paris, Moscow, Rome and St Petersburg.
43. The school has extensive community links with a wide range of industrial contacts, national institutions and local community groups. Many of these links are associated with the school's Arts College status. For example; the support given by professional artists from Coral Arts who are based at the school; interaction with professional musicians who work with the digital recording studio; and the appointment of an Arts Vicar by the local diocese. Many students in the sixth form are fully involved in many of these links, often supporting pupils from the main school. They also have links with industry through Young Enterprise and with academia and national institutions via outside speakers, visits and participation in competitions such as public speaking. The on-site sports centre is well used by students.
44. Good progress has been made in developing the sixth form curriculum since the last inspection. The range of A-level courses has increased, as has the flexibility to combine traditional A-level and vocational courses. Key skills are now taught to all students and the range of extra-curricular activities has expanded greatly.
45. The quality of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. There is a school policy for sixth form provision and the majority of departments have identified where pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education could be extended. Many opportunities are planned through the extension studies course and extra-curricular provision to develop students' social awareness and to broaden their cultural horizons.
46. Provision for students' spiritual development is satisfactory and has improved since the previous inspection. The school has made some efforts to resolve the issues brought to its attention through the previous report. Weekly assemblies that are broadly Christian are held for all pupils. Thought for the day has been recently introduced and is being piloted in some registration groups. Although not all subjects include a spiritual dimension specifically in their work, there are examples where opportunities for spiritual development are created. For example in English, the power of music is used to convey the sense of evil that permeates Othello, and in art students engage with issues that make them reflect and respond.
47. Provision for students' moral education is very good. Students are encouraged to be aware of, and decide for themselves what is acceptable behaviour or not, both in school and in society. Sixth form students take a leading role in organizing and delivering activities that demonstrate moral and social commitment. For example, charity work is encouraged and students take part energetically in mentoring of younger students providing them with excellent role models. In addition, the sixth form committee is raising funds for a local Family and Adolescent Unit this year and traditionally runs events such as Children in Need and Red Nose Day.
48. Opportunities for pupils' social development are excellent. There are many opportunities for students to exercise their social responsibilities and to work together. They willingly take active roles in activities such as paired reading, school productions and work in the community. They also assist in lessons and their efforts make a substantial contribution to the life of the school. The school provides a wide range of music and sporting activities that are well supported by students in the sixth form.
49. The provision for cultural development is good overall. The many course-related visits to theatres, museums, art galleries and other countries provide students with a wealth of experience that broadens their understanding of their own and other cultures. For example, in recent years, students have visited Prague, Moscow, Berlin and China and groups have also visited French and Spanish destinations under the auspices of the modern foreign languages department. A number of subjects make significant contributions to cultural development. For example, in music a

madrigal choir has toured Europe; and in English, students have discussed issues such as Othello, a black Moor, marrying Desdemona who is white. Religious studies students study the Greek doctrine of Monism, the theories of Italian philosopher and theologian Aquinas and the British philosopher Bentham. In art, students study the work of Aztec, African and Chinese cultures and in French, students use French web sites for independent study.

50. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The school now has written guidance for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Although opportunities abound for students' moral and social development less consideration is given to planning for their spiritual and multi-cultural development. The school does not offer a daily act of collective worship and it does not teach religious education to its students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

51. Overall, the assessment and monitoring of students' attainment and progress are satisfactory. There are clear, whole school expectations for regular assessment and reporting through regular progress checks; these are implemented effectively by departments. Although the quality of assessment varies across departments, it is good overall but it is not under-pinned by a whole school approach that helps teachers to track students progress. In general, teachers assess students' performance effectively and thoroughly. Students' work is marked regularly; detailed comments, helping students to know how to improve their work, are commonplace. Assignments are assessed regularly and rigorously against examination criteria; teachers' very good understanding of their subject and of examination requirements ensures that assessments are generally accurate and reliable. Assignments are returned with grades relating to performance at advanced level, so that students know how well they are doing at any particular point in time. Overall, teachers' assessments help students and their parents to have a good understanding of strengths and weaknesses and a realistic understanding of likely performance in examinations. They also enable teachers to prepare students well for examinations and in many instances to adapt their teaching to meet students' individual learning needs.
52. The monitoring of students' progress, to ensure they achieve at least as well as they should do given their GCSE scores at the start of the course, is much less secure. Currently, students' GCSE scores, and national value-added data, are used to set a minimum overall target grade for performance at the end of Year 13; these overall grades are given to heads of department, to tutors, to parents and to students. However, this process has been in operation for only one term. At present, students are not finding the overall target grade particularly useful or challenging. Teachers and tutors are not able to use it to monitor and support performance within their subject, or performance across subjects, effectively. Current practice is not yet being particularly successful in establishing a culture wherein minimum expectations for achievement in different A-level subjects are clear to students and teachers alike from the start of Year 12.
53. In some subjects, such as mathematics, teachers use their own professional intuition effectively to set end-of-course targets and to monitor and support students' progress towards meeting these targets. However, this good intuitive assessment and monitoring of students' academic performance is not yet underpinned by a rigorous whole school approach to the use of performance data. The effective use of assessment to raise standards is at a very early stage of development.

Advice, support and guidance

54. The advice, support and guidance given to sixth form students are very good. Induction to the sixth form is very good, and starts in Year 11, when students are given insight to, and informed of, the provision on offer. Good efforts are made to offer students their preferred subject combinations and flexible procedures are in place to accommodate students who wish to change courses early in Year 12. A number of students interviewed during the inspection acknowledged they had made a wrong subject choice and gave high praise for the staff guidance and support they received in changing to another subject course.

55. The flow of information to students is very good. Daily morning registration enables students to link informally as a group with their form tutor on any issues or concerns and to discuss any general matters of interest. There is a good practice for each student to meet up with their tutor at least half-termly on a one-to-one basis to review their time in school, discuss subject learning opportunities and exchange views on progress being achieved. Feedback from students interviewed during the inspection stated that these meetings were very beneficial and made an important contribution to their learning and personal development. These very positive views contrast with many of the comments of disagreement expressed by a minority of students in the pre-inspection questionnaire and support the findings of the inspection that student support, guidance and information is very good.
56. Systems for academic and pastoral support are clear and well understood. Tutors and subject teachers are willing and readily available if students need extra help or guidance over either academic or personal matters. Secure software filter systems are in place to monitor and protect students from unsuitable Internet web sites. Worthy of note is the employment by the school of a professional counsellor and the high level of expertise and support this provides to students needing someone to talk things over with. Tutors and subject teachers know their students and staff are aware of the need for vigilance in monitoring the well-being and welfare of the students in their care.

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

57. Parents are supportive of the school, have a good regard for the staff and believe their children receive a good quality and standard of care and education. Parents like the support and guidance available to sixth form students and consider staff willing to listen and involve them in aspects of their children's learning in the home. Parents like the range of extra-curricular activities and the inclusive nature of the school and feel that students were treated appropriately as young adults.
58. Students are equally positive in their views of the school. The school has a good practice of surveying students on their views and makes good use of the sixth form council and the whole school council structures to discuss and influence the way the school operates. Students take their council roles seriously and have made good use of the council structure to raise, and bring into fruition, suggestions for improvements in how the school operates.
59. Responses to the student questionnaire were largely positive with some nine out of ten students considering themselves well taught and challenged by accessible teachers, happy with their choice of subject courses and enjoying their time in the sixth form. A minority of students expressed more negative views around the area of advice and support available, including ongoing assessment of work by teachers. However, these negative views were not supported in interviews with students during the inspection. More significantly, the sensible point was made that sixth formers are expected to take responsibility for their own learning and should know when and who to ask for help, and not expect the school to know their every need
60. Students who were talked with stated they had a clear understanding of how they were progressing, although a few considered that those struggling in subjects and those doing very well in subjects, were actually receiving more teacher support and feedback on subject learning targets than the average student. Year 13 students consider they receive a high quality of information and support from staff in completing their applications for university places

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

61. Overall, the leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The headteacher and senior managers, including the head of sixth form, provide good leadership in setting the ethos and educational direction for post-16 provision. There is a shared belief that students should be independent learners and all who can benefit from the courses offered are welcome to join the

sixth form; these principles reflect the school's aims well. There is a clear rationale for the courses provided with the aim being to offer as wide a choice as possible. Entry requirements are applied but a flexible approach is taken to try and accommodate students who are committed to work and are perceived as having the potential to gain grades in their chosen courses. Management is also good; structures and systems to underpin the school's work are securely in place.

62. The governing body is very well organized and is proud of the sixth form and its students. Governors are well informed and take a keen interest in the sixth form. The governing body committees meet regularly and report to the full governing body so that a good overview is kept of both strengths and areas for development. Governors know the school well and speak very knowledgeably about sixth form activities. However, they have not ensured that all students are taught religious education or that a daily act of collective worship is held for all students in the main school; this curtails students' entitlement to full curricular provision.
63. Overall, the monitoring and evaluation of performance in Years 12 and 13 and the action taken to secure improvements are good. Systems to monitor attendance and students' welfare are securely in place and promote very good attendance and effective pastoral support well; students appreciate the half-termly meetings with their tutors. Procedures to support sixth form tutors in their work are clear and regular meetings are held between tutors and the head of sixth form to guide future work. Research work on teaching has created a climate for sharing good practice. A more formal and rigorous programme of monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is not apparent; this is a missed opportunity to bring about improvement.
64. The monitoring of academic results and progress by managers is not as secure as it could be. An analysis of results is undertaken but this is not as detailed as it should be and a full range of data is not used. Senior managers analyse performance of students and differences between subjects but are not sufficiently pro-active in taking action to bring about greater future improvement. Departments are not expected to undertake a rigorous analysis of what students should have achieved, given their GCSE results, in relation to national patterns. At present, the school is not as aware as it should be of how students have achieved on different courses. Neither is it sufficiently aware of any differences in the performance of students with differing levels of prior attainment. Managers are not able to demonstrate conclusively that students' achievements are at least as high as they should be.
65. Priorities for development are identified and published in a section of the school development plan. They include raising achievement, the curriculum, progression post-18 and ethos and community, all of which are appropriate. Although the plan gives intended outcomes and some time frames these are not specified in sufficient detail or clarity to assist the school with monitoring how well it is progressing. Students' achievement in 2001 was not as good as in 2002 but there is no indication of targets that are being set to improve or maintain standards that have now been reached in subjects, or for targets for average points scores that are to be attained by each year group of students.
66. The school makes very good strategic use of its resources to support its sixth form. The budget is both managed and administered efficiently; it is carefully monitored to ensure that best value principles are applied. The school is adept at procuring additional funding and relies on this to supplement its basic budget in order to fund priorities. Some links are made with the school development plan but future financial priorities are not identified in advance and funding for these is provided as and when money becomes available. At present, the head of sixth form is awaiting additional funding to complete plans for the very pleasant, spacious and well-furnished sixth form study area so that it is supervised and better equipped with computers.
67. The sixth form is cost effective as it provides a good education for its students without depleting the main school funds. The income generated for the sixth form matches expenditure. The school monitors all spending closely and ensures that specific grants are used for the purpose intended.

Resources

68. Overall, the sufficiency and quality of learning resources are satisfactory. Despite the schools best efforts to raise the level of computer resources with both national funding for information and communication technology and specialist Arts College status funding, the school's ratio of computers to students remains below the national average. This leads to several subjects such as history and design and technology being unable to make adequate opportunities available for students to either research or develop their work. However, specialist Arts College status has allowed considerable investment in information and communication technology including a recording and production studio. The projects resulting from this resource have won both local and national interest of specialist professionals in the work of the school; subjects such as media studies, art and design and drama benefit enormously from this state-of-the-art technology. Although the provision of textbooks is satisfactory for the majority of subjects, students in some subjects such as physical education and design and technology are requested to buy their own and in religious education there are insufficient textbooks for individual study.
69. Funding has been used well to ensure that the school has sufficient well-qualified staff to teach the specialist subjects offered in the sixth form. There is good provision of technical support in subjects such as science, art and media studies, which frees up the teachers to focus on their teaching. Very good induction procedures are used for teachers who are new to the school. The provision for teachers' continuing professional development is good. Currently, two very good research programmes run jointly with universities in which several teachers are involved. With Kings College they are studying assessment for learning and with Oxford Brookes University they are identifying good teaching practice in the sixth form. Twelve teachers are currently following a continuing professional development programme that is accredited by Westminster College.
70. The school's strategy for performance management is good and is being used as part of the school's bid for the Investors in People award. However, the monitoring of teaching to improve standards and achievement is not rigorous enough to spread consistency of good practice across departments.
71. Overall, the accommodation for sixth form courses is satisfactory. The sixth form centre provides good accommodation for subjects such as sociology, business studies, economics and psychology, with good-sized classrooms dedicated to these subjects. There is a spacious study room with adjoining information and communication suite, both of which provide students with a quality learning environment in which to undertake private study. The Manor House accommodation for the arts including media studies, music and drama is good and is a conducive environment for the display of student work. In contrast, although there is good use of display to support learning, the accommodation for art and design, English, mathematics and science is less welcoming. The science block has poor lighting and acoustics, the stable block, where English is taught, is cramped with some small and poorly lit classrooms, and the design and technology block has unsuitable dust extraction systems and insufficient area for work preparation and displays of students work. The war-time 'A' block and the mobile classrooms are not ideal learning environments and require teacher ingenuity and imagination and student co-operation to enable a stimulating learning environment to be achieved.
72. The school is aware of the limiting factors associated with some of the learning accommodation and plans are being discussed by governors to address this issue. The positive attitudes displayed by students and the challenging approach of teachers ensure the school accommodation does not impact on the quality of students' learning. The students are proud of their school and there is no evidence of damage to property or graffiti around the school. Litter is recognised as a problem due to the openness of the site to prevailing winds, the public access to the adjacent parkland and the nearby major roadways and, not least, the high volume of students moving across the site between lessons. However, the effective positioning of litter bins and the efficient litter clearance help to keep litter within acceptable levels.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

GCE AS level courses 2002

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	17	88	*	47	*	39	*
Chemistry	11	91	*	9	*	30	*
Biology	30	67	*	30	*	26	*
Physics	15	80	*	13	*	27	*
Design and Technology	7	100	*	29	*	36	*
Economics	15	73	*	20	*	27	*
Physical education	12	100	*	25	*	41	*
Art and design	18	94	*	83	*	53	*
Music	5	100	*	60	*	48	*
Drama and theatre studies	16	100	*	38	*	43	*
Media Studies	18	94	*	56	*	44	*
Latin	7	100	*	29	*	40	*
Geography	17	94	*	35	*	39	*
History	35	100	*	49	*	42	*
Religious studies	10	100	*	60	*	60	*
Sociology	22	73	*	32	*	30	*
Psychology	13	77	*	15	*	25	*
English literature	19	100	*	68	*	49	*
English language and literature	28	68	*	21	*	24	*
French	12	75	*	25	*	31	*
German	3	100	*	100	*	54	*
Spanish	4	100	*	75	*	48	*

**National comparison data for AS-level results in 2002 are not yet available.*

GCE A level and AVCE courses 2002

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	19	95	*	79	*	95	*
Further mathematics	2	100	*	50	*	90	*
Chemistry	12	75	*	42	*	68	*
Biology	11	100	*	55	*	76	*
Physics	17	100	*	65	*	84	*
Product design	8	100	*	50	*	75	*
Economics	14	79	*	50	*	57	*
Physical education	9	89	*	67	*	78	*
Art and design	28	96	*	93	*	104	*
Art and design AVCE	10	100	*	30	*	64	*
Music	3	100	*	67	*	80	*
Drama and theatre studies	22	100	*	73	*	84	*
Media Studies	20	100	*	55	*	70	*
Media Studies VCE	14	73	*	5	*	43	*
Latin	8	88	*	63	*	63	*
Geography	14	100	*	71	*	83	*
History	18	100	*	100	*	102	*
Religious studies	9	100	*	78	*	94	*
Sociology	25	96	*	64	*	75	*
English literature	27	100	*	81	*	89	*
English language and literature	15	87	*	53	*	66	
French	3	67	*	33	*	40	*
German	3	100	*	100	*	87	*
Spanish	3	100	*	67	*	80	*

**National comparison data for A-level and AVCE results in 2002 are not yet available.*

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
GNVQ Leisure and Tourism	9	55	*	22	*	21.6	*

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

At the time of writing national comparison data were not available for AS and A-level courses in 2002.

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics and chemistry. One Year 13 A-level physics lesson was also sampled. In this lesson, teaching was satisfactory, as was students' learning.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Results improved significantly in 2002; students did considerably better than might be expected, given their GCSE scores at the start of the course.
- Teaching is very good; students respond positively to challenging work and learn quickly.
- Students benefit from an unusually wide range of curricular provision, which meets their needs very well.
- Very good leadership and management are helping to raise standards.

Areas for improvement

- The drive to improve recruitment into Year 13 needs to be sustained.
- The department's already good use of assessment data to monitor progress should be refined further.

73. The school offers courses at AS and A-level in both mathematics and further mathematics. Students can choose to study modules in pure mathematics, decision mathematics, mechanics and statistics. Thus, they benefit from an unusually wide range of provision, which supports their learning in other subjects very well. Currently, there are 24 students in Year 12 and 12 students in Year 13 studying at AS and A-level respectively. Retention rates are good; it is relatively unusual for a student not to complete a course.
74. In 2001, A-level results for Year 13 students were in line with those for all schools nationally, with no significant difference in results for male and female students. In 2002, A-level results improved significantly. There are no comparative national data as yet, but students' A-level results in 2002 were well above last year's national average. Almost 50 per cent of students gained grade A; the proportion of A and B grades was double that in 2001. Students achieved very well and did considerably better than had been predicted, given their GCSE scores. AS-level results for Year 12 students, which were broadly in line with national figures in 2001, showed a similar improvement in 2002.
75. Standards of work seen during the inspection reflect this positive picture. Standards attained by current Year 12 students are above average. Students have the necessary prerequisite skills to cope with AS-level work; they manipulate algebraic and trigonometrical expressions accurately and with ease. Students' ability to work independently and to think ideas through for themselves is more highly developed than is usual. Further mathematics students already have a very good understanding of a wide range of mathematical topics; they use the Internet and graphics calculators effectively to research and to enhance their knowledge. In Year 13, standards of work are very varied; on balance, they are in line with course expectations. A significant proportion of students are on target for grades A and B. For example, further mathematics students quickly grasped how to use the modulus argument form of complex numbers. For others, standards are more modest. In general, progress in lessons in both year groups is good; students are achieving well given their GCSE results.
76. Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent; students learn quickly as a result. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are able to use a range of strategies to maximise learning.

Students respond positively to the challenging work that they are set, asking perceptive questions to ensure they understand what is being taught. Teachers adapt their teaching well to meet individual needs, whilst making students think ideas through for themselves; there is little 'spoon-feeding'. All students spoken to value the quality of teaching they receive and the high level of individual support provided by teachers. Teachers assess students' work well; marking is helpful and thorough. The department also analyses its own assessment data effectively in order to estimate the progress made by students; conclusions are discussed with individuals and targets are set to support future learning. This good departmental practice is not yet underpinned by a rigorous whole school approach to the use of performance data; teachers are given little information to help them know what students should achieve, given their GCSE scores at the start of the course. Hence, monitoring of students' progress is not as effective as it might be.

77. Leadership and management are very good. There is a clear focus on raising standards; results are evaluated thoroughly and priorities for improvement are identified. The department is already working to ensure that numbers in Year 13 remain viable, so that the broad range of provision currently offered can be sustained. The department has started to monitor and evaluate its sixth form teaching in order to share good practice.
78. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Whilst access to computers is still difficult, teachers make effective use of other information and communication technology resources to support students' learning.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- There are very good relationships between teachers and students.
- Students demonstrate very good attitudes to their work.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and well qualified.
- The course is well planned to deliver the examination syllabus.

Areas for improvement

- The use of information and communication technology is not exploited fully to support learning well.
- Students who have low prior attainment at GCSE need to be supported to ensure that they achieve well.

79. In 2001, A-level results were well below the national average. However, in 2002 they were significantly better. Results show a variable pattern over the past six years since the last inspection. The department uses the prior attainment of each student at the end of Year 11 to set potential targets. 2002 results demonstrate clearly that the majority of students reached their target grades. There is no significant difference between the attainment of male and female students. Standards at AS-level are lower than at A-level and this is due, in part, to the previous relative low attainment of students at GCSE. Overall, achievement is good, especially in Year 13, when based on GCSE and AS-level results.
80. In Year 12, the standard of work seen was wide ranging but overall it is broadly average. Students show a good understanding of equilibrium and are able to discuss covalent bonding. Year 13 pupils demonstrate a standard of work that is also broadly average. Students perform practical experiments accurately and analyse the resultant data about energy changes. Written notes and assessments of students are complete, accurate and well presented. These notes form a very good revision base for use in examination preparation.
81. Teaching is good overall. Teachers are well-qualified with good subject knowledge which they demonstrate with enthusiasm when teaching. Lessons are well-planned and resourced and incorporate structures that enable students to make good progress. However, in those lessons seen, teachers used a limited variety of teaching styles and strategies and made limited use of

information and communication technology in their teaching. Students show a lively interest in lessons and are actively involved in the planned activities; they have very good attitudes to their work. Students answer questions asked of them with confidence and are prepared and willing to enter into detailed discussions about aspects of their work. Very good relationships between teachers and students as well as between the students themselves produce a very productive learning ethos. The atmosphere within classrooms is relaxed and co-operative; teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. In discussions, students stated that they greatly appreciated the support and guidance given by teachers and that teachers are prepared to help and assist them when necessary. Year 12 students said that they found the transition from GCSE relatively easy due to the guidance from teachers.

82. The leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department was appointed two years ago and has worked closely with the other two experienced teachers. Together, this team has implemented effective development plans aimed primarily at raising the attainment of students; courses are well-planned to ensure that the examination syllabi are covered. The progress and attainment of all students are assessed well by the department and records are reviewed on a regular basis. Assessments and homework for students are marked in detail, with many constructive comments that help the students improve. Students also said that they appreciated the detailed marking and assessment of their work and felt this helped them to make progress and raise their standards of attainment.
83. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The department is aware of the need to maintain the assessment of students' progress and to give support where needed, especially to the lower attaining students. The department is also aware of the need to review the range of teaching styles and to extend the use of relevant computer software within lessons to better support students' learning.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on product design.

Product Design

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving and students are now working in line with national expectations.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good and this creates very good conditions for learning.
- Students are well motivated, willing to learn and have developed a good range of independent learning skills.

Areas for improvement

- A limited range of textbooks and coursework literature are available for students to reference information.
- The use of information and communication technology is insufficient for students to demonstrate their awareness of using industrial manufacturing techniques.
- Teachers' planning does not always provide sufficient structure and guidance to meet the needs of individual students.

84. In 2001, A-level results were well below the national average. In 2002, results improved significantly. The AS-level grades also improved in 2002. The improved AS-level results in 2002 and the standard of work seen during the inspection, indicate an improving trend that reflects the department's recent work to raise standards. Numbers are too small to make valid comparisons between the performance of male and female students. Overall, achievement is satisfactory given students' GCSE results on entry to courses. Retention rates are good.

85. Standards of work seen during the inspection are broadly average. Year 13 students' work is of a better standard than that attained by students in previous years. Their enthusiasm to do well and their ability to follow the design process enables them to work independently. Coursework is linked to the examination mark scheme and this ensures that all the important aspects of the examination course are covered; the quality of coursework is improving. Students' graphics skills are well developed and they use the design process well to show each stage of their development work. They consider both standard production processes as well as mass production possibilities. The majority of students use information and communication technology well to process and present data from market research; this improves the quality and presentation of their final work. However, the use of information and communication technology to gain experience in computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture is not covered and this limits the quality and depth of students' coursework.
86. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Teachers have placed good emphasis on improving standards. They have good knowledge of the subject and readily provide help and guidance to students. Very good relationships between students and teachers create a positive impact on learning. Students take their work seriously and are keen to do well. They discuss their work with teachers, and readily take on board the help and guidance they are given. In the lessons seen, teachers did not always provide sufficient guidance to ensure clarity and understanding of the tasks they were setting or insist on students following a logical sequence in the development of their work. For example, some students produced a range of their initial ideas before formulating a design specification to guide them in their development. As a result, their ideas were less focused on the specific requirements set by a specification. In discussion, students said that they felt they needed greater help and support with the coursework. Teachers' planning is satisfactory but does not take enough account of the needs of students joining the course from different material areas; generally, teachers do not provide sufficient opportunities for students to work in a wide enough range of materials and specialisms. For example, there are limited opportunities and resources for students to design and make products in systems and control for those who did electronics at GCSE level. As a consequence, students are designing products from a lower knowledge base with fewer opportunities to develop the more advanced skills using knowledge and materials with which they were familiar. Students have benefited from being taught by additional teachers through the school's link with the Learning and Skills Council. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson where students were able to discuss their coursework with an experienced engineer. This opportunity enhanced their understanding of materials and processes used in industry and they applied this knowledge well to their coursework.
87. The management of the subject is satisfactory. The head of department has made a start on raising standards, which are now broadly average. Planning is satisfactory but does not yet provide sufficient detail to support the individual needs of students. Systems to monitor students' progress are satisfactory. Resources are limited and this is having a negative impact on standards overall; there is only a very limited range of textbooks and subject literature available for students to use in the department. There is also a need to improve the dust extraction systems for the smaller machine tools located in the workshops.
88. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory; the course is now established and standards are improving.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

One lesson of information and communication technology was sampled. In this lesson, teaching and learning were satisfactory.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was on physical education.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good and results in effective learning.
- Students' enthusiasm for the subject and their positive attitudes help to promote a good learning atmosphere in lessons.
- Standards of work seen are above average and represent good achievement since students did not study anatomy and physiology in the GCSE course.

Areas for improvement

- Analysis of assessment and examination data over time in order to help plan the curriculum and further develop improvement strategies.
- There is no dedicated room for the teaching of physical education; this has an adverse effect on the quality of the learning environment.

89. In 2001, A-level results were broadly average. More female students took the examination than male students making comparison of performance unreliable. The overall AS-level pass rate was 100 per cent. Female students attained a greater proportion of A and B grades than male students. Results in A-level examinations in 2002 show that the proportion of students attaining A and B grades almost doubled and that the overall pass rate, 89 per cent, remained similar to 2001. AS-level results show that the 100 per cent pass rate was maintained but the proportion of students attaining higher grade passes declined. Only two female students took the course and the proportion of male students attaining A and B passes was similar to 2001. Achievement in 2002 was satisfactory in relation to students' attainment at the beginning of the courses. Recruitment and retention rates have now stabilized and are good overall.
90. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are above average. Students have developed a secure knowledge and understanding of anatomy and physiology. Through investigation of contemporary case studies, they are deepening their knowledge and understanding of the effects of performance-enhancing drugs and the physiological impact of these. Key skills are used and developed as shown, for example, by the quality of students' personal performance portfolios; good use is made of information and communication technology in the presentation of work. Year 12 students have made a good start to the AS-level course and, despite having not studied anatomy and physiology in GCSE physical education, they have come to grips well with this aspect of the course. They are also developing their knowledge and understanding of theories of motivation as applied to sport well.
91. The quality of teaching is good and results in effective learning. Crisp and efficient starts to lessons ensure that students are quickly involved for example, through effective recapping of previous lessons. Teachers' enthusiasm, interest and their very good knowledge and understanding of the different units of work ensure students make good progress and develop their interest in the subject. A structured variety of activities helps keep them on task. For example in a Year 12 lesson, students were involved in practical activities to help them deepen their knowledge and understanding of theories of motivation. Teachers use questions effectively to challenge and stretch students' intellectual capacity, engage them in learning and to ensure they understand the terminology being used. Students are prepared well for the personal performance portfolio they produce at the end of Year 12. There is, though, some inconsistency in the quality of the marking of students' work. As a result, students are not always provided with sufficient guidance on what they need to do to improve the quality of their work. Challenging and appropriate homework is set that helps develop students' independent learning skills. At the end of lessons, summaries sometimes lack substance because the learning objectives have not always been made explicit at the start.
92. Leadership is good. Teaching is monitored and evaluated within the department and teachers are allocated to teach their specialisms. However, the department does not have use of a dedicated room for teaching examination work and this restricts the use of display and other resource materials. Physical education makes a good contribution to students' personal development and

there are opportunities for them to participate in extra-curricular activities. The first XI association football team is, for example, county champion and the first XV rugby union team reached the semi-finals of the county cup. Non-examination physical education is not available to all in the sixth form. Though the department has analysis to show the value-added improvement of students, this information is not used as well as it could be; there is little diagnosis of the performance in the different units to assist the department in developing further improvement strategies.

93. Post-16 physical education was not reported on in depth at the last inspection and therefore a judgement on progress cannot be made.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on A-level art and design, AVCE art and design, A-level drama and theatre studies and AVCE media studies.

94. AS and A-level media studies were also sampled. In 2001, A-level results were average. There was a slight decline in 2002 in the numbers of students attaining the highest grades, but all students attained pass grades. Compared to their attainment on entry to the course this indicates good achievement.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching with some excellent features leads to well above average examination results and very good achievement.
- The attention given to the teaching of observation drawing is very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes and they respond very well to opportunities for independent work.
- The range of extra-curricular activities extends students learning extremely well.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment data are not used as effectively as they could be to inform planning or set targets for students.
- The accommodation is not well suited to support high quality work.

95. Results in the 2001 A-level examinations were well above average with a very high proportion of students attaining the higher grades. Although at the time of the inspection there were no national data for comparison, the results for the 2002 examinations were similar to those for 2001, maintaining the high standards of recent years. There were also no national data for the AS-level examinations taken at the end of Year 12, but the school's results are very encouraging with a high proportion of students attaining the higher grades. Although most students have attained higher than average GCSE results, achievement is very good because of the rapid progress students make in adjusting to the new and more difficult demands of A-level study. There are no significant differences between the results for male and female students. The subject is very popular and most students complete their courses. A high proportion take up art and design in higher education.

96. For current students in both Years 12 and 13, standards are well above average in relation to AS and A-level course expectations. Achievement is very good. This is because students learn quickly to pursue personal research and to think and work independently. By the time they reach Year 13, students demonstrate self-confidence and maturity in their ability to shape the direction of their own work. Students also develop very well in their ability to draw from direct observation. This, too, makes a significant contribution to the very good achievement. In discussion with one higher attaining Year 13 student, the student was able to explain how his drawings from still-life, the human figure and from the landscape around the school had provided him with a secure grounding

in the visual language needed in order to complete an extensive range of accomplished and sensitively observed paintings. This example of how a student has learned to articulate his thoughts and intentions, both verbally and visually, and to use the vocabulary of the subject in a critical and analytical way, is characteristic of the majority of students.

97. Teaching is very good with some excellent features. The relationship between teachers and students is very good. This creates a sense of teamwork and contributes to the ethos of artistic effort and common goals that exist within the department. Teachers plan work that meets the individual needs of all students and they provide opportunities for students to extend their ideas further. This has a significant impact on learning because students are challenged to think for themselves and not to be content with instant or easy results. Students respond to these opportunities and challenges with enthusiasm and commitment. They work well together, arrive for lessons prepared for work and make good use of the facilities during their private study time, as, for example, in the use of information and communication technology, where students use the computers to experiment with ideas that can be used in their paintings or mixed-media work. One very good example of how students have been taught to use information and communication technology creatively was seen in the portfolio of a Year 13 student who had taken photographs of himself with a digital camera which he had then distorted as part of his preparation for self-portraits based on his study of the artist, Francis Bacon.
98. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department has clear aims and values and has established a sense of direction for the development of the subject. Teachers share these aims and values, for example, in the consistent approach to the teaching of first-hand observation drawing. The emphasis which is given to this fundamental aspect of art and design is a significant strength in the subject and contributes to the high standards overall. Teachers are clear about their responsibilities and there is an established system for the monitoring of teaching and the observation of each other's lessons. They provide very good support for students who benefit from the regular and constructive verbal feedback about their work and progress. A weakness, however, is the insufficient use of assessment to inform curriculum planning and of attainment data to set individual targets for students. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities is provided which includes well-attended classes in life drawing, visits to galleries in London, Paris and Barcelona and the use of visiting artists.
99. Although the accommodation is extensive, it is cramped and cluttered with inadequate storage provision. Although teachers have endeavoured to make the best use of display in order to inform students and to celebrate their achievements, the overall appearance of the accommodation is unwelcoming and uninspiring.
100. Insufficient information was given in the last inspection report to make a firm judgement on progress since then. However, it is evident from examination results that teachers have worked hard to maintain the current high standards and students' very good achievement.

Art and design AVCE

Overall, the quality of provision in art and design (AVCE) is **very good**.

Strengths

- Very good teaching leads to above average examination results.
- The carefully structured course, and the emphasis given to the reinforcement of skills in drawing and basic techniques, enable all students to achieve well.
- Students have positive attitudes and respond well to opportunities for independent work
- The range of extra-curricular activities extends students' learning extremely well.

Areas for improvement

- Use of assessment to inform curriculum planning and of attainment data to set individual targets for students
- Accommodation, in order to provide more inspiring and appropriate spaces for teaching

101. Results in the 2001 AVCE examinations were above average. Although at the time of the inspection there were no national data for comparison, the results for the 2002 examinations were similar to those for 2001, maintaining the good standards of recent years. There are no significant differences between the results for male and female students. Standards on entry have been broadly average, although few students have attained the highest grades at GCSE. Overall, achievement is very good and most students complete the course.
102. For current students in both Years 12 and 13, standards are above average. This represents very good achievement since, although most students have at least average GCSE results, some are allowed to enter the course without having studied GCSE art and design. Most students also make very good progress in adjusting to the new demands that this course imposes. This is particularly evident in the way that students learn to develop design ideas based on personal research and also in their understanding of how to use information and communication technology to assist their design work. This makes a very good contribution to students' knowledge of the applications of the computer in the art and design industries. Although lower attaining students show some shortcomings in their ability to accurately observe and record visual information, they show a good understanding of how to research and develop ideas. Higher attaining students show that they can observe and draw with greater accuracy and their written work indicates a very good ability to use a critical subject vocabulary.
103. Teaching is very good. There is a very positive relationship between teachers and students which enables all students to learn well. Teachers plan work that meets the individual needs of all students. Students appreciate the support they are given and they respond with enthusiasm. In one Year 12 lesson, for example, the teacher succeeded in motivating some initially unenthusiastic students in their work based on the study of Aztec designs. The teacher's interest and enthusiasm for the subject, and the clarity with which the objectives of the lesson were explained, enabled all students to make good progress with a challenging task. Teachers spend a lot of time providing individual help and students welcome the attention that is given to the teaching of skills and techniques. Students make good use of the facilities during their private study time, especially in their use of the computers to assist in the designing of their creative work.
104. Leadership and management are very good. Teachers work very well together and have created a carefully structured course that enables all students to make very good progress and to achieve well. The emphasis that is given to the teaching of observational drawing, and also to the reinforcement of basic skills and techniques, is a strength in the subject. There is an established system for the monitoring of teaching and the shared observation of lessons. Although students benefit from the regular and constructive verbal feedback about their work and progress data are not used as well as they could be to inform curriculum planning or to set individual targets for students. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities is provided which includes visits to galleries in London and abroad.
105. The accommodation is not conducive to good learning. Lighting in some rooms is very poor and this creates difficulties for the way in which students make correct judgements about colour and tone. Although teachers have endeavoured to produce informative displays the overall appearance of the accommodation is unwelcoming and uninspiring.
106. It has not been possible to make a judgement about improvement since the previous inspection but teachers have worked hard to achieve and maintain the current high standards.

Drama and theatre studies

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

Strengths

- Good teaching is leading to well above average standards of performance.
- Good leadership and management ensure that standards are maintained through staff changes.
- Very good opportunities for curriculum enrichment are provided through work with professional practitioners and with strong community links.

Areas for improvement

- Reinforcement of learning and assessment objectives and the use of time in some lessons.
- Emphasis on the precise use of drama vocabulary and terminology in order to develop the written expression of lower attaining students.

107. In 2001, A-level results were average; all students attained pass grades A to E. In 2002, results were slightly better with half of the students attaining A and B grades. At AS-level in 2002, results were not quite as good as in the previous year, but all students attained A to E grades and 38 per cent attained A and B grades. There is little difference in the results of male and female students although no male student has recently achieved an A grade. Achievement based on prior attainment on entry to both the AS and A-level course is good. Retention rates are good. Recruitment to the A-level course has attracted fewer students than previously but 11 students are currently following the AVCE course in performing arts. Fewer male students choose the subject than female students.

108. Standards of work seen are above average overall. The standards of physical performance are well above average. All students are focused, disciplined and expressive in their movement. They work very well on ensemble work using very good negotiation skills and supporting each other very effectively. They use rehearsal techniques well, for example to develop character during the course of a lesson, and show good understanding of drama theory such as Stanislavski's technique and concepts such as 'inner psychology'. They are able to improvise and sustain dramatic monologues, evaluating their own performances constructively and building on them over time. They translate text imaginatively into tableaux and movement. Their written work shows individuality and personal response and all students show improvement over time. The written evaluations of devised work by higher attaining students is beautifully presented and illustrated and is very thoughtful. They make informed references and assimilate the ideas of playwrights, directors and designers they have studied very well. There is very good evidence of research, for example into the Victorian period and the Gothic horror genre, with very perceptive analysis of performance and audience response. Lower attaining students use language less precisely. They tend to describe rather than analyse and do not consider a writer's or director's intentions sufficiently. Some written expression is clumsy and some key vocabulary is mis-spelt.

109. The quality of teaching and learning is at least good and sometimes very good. There is a high degree of challenge and expectation that students will work independently. Students rehearse willingly in their own time. One strength of teaching lies in the way complex theory is introduced, explained and then illustrated through translation into practical performance during the lesson. For example, students were helped to appreciate Stanislavski's ideas by applying his rehearsal techniques of relaxation and 'getting inside' a character in the plays they are studying. By the end of the lesson, they were able to develop their characters in depth and to see for themselves the worth of the method. There is also a strong emphasis on experimentation and students are encouraged to test which movement, facial expression, gestures, voice and use of space are most effective. This leads to some very imaginative interpretation, for example of the use of the Chorus in Euripides' *The Trojan Women*. Where teaching could be improved, the learning objectives could be made more explicit and time used more tightly, particularly in double lessons. Although key vocabulary and concepts are reinforced, teachers need to insist that lower attaining students use them regularly in their responses.

110. The subject is well led and managed so that although there have been changes of teachers, standards have been maintained and less experienced teachers have been well supported. There is a good development plan with some interesting projected initiatives to increase the use of visual media in performance. Technical resources such as lighting, and performance and rehearsal spaces are good. Students feel that teachers are accessible and give them a clear indication of how well they are progressing and what they need to do to improve. They enjoy the opportunities for creativity the subject provides. Opportunities for personal development and enrichment for students are very good with regular opportunities to work with professional practitioners and the local community and regular visits to professional productions.
111. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards have improved and the subject has been developed well.

Media studies AVCE

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

Strengths

- Standards observed in lessons, particularly of practical production work, are above average.
- The quality of teaching is very good and provides very good opportunities for practical experience.
- The quality of resources: equipment and technician support are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Further support for female students is required to raise their confidence and achievement in the practical areas of the course.
- The written and spoken expression of lower attaining students is not as well developed as that of other students.

112. The school offers single and double award AVCE courses in media, communication and production and AS and A-level courses in media studies. Results in 2001 for the GNVQ advanced examination were above average; all students attained A to E grades and half attained the highest A and B grades. Results in 2002 for the AVCE examination were not as good with only one student attaining the highest grades. Students' achievement was satisfactory. Extenuating circumstances such as teacher illness account for this temporary dip. Fewer female students than male choose the subject and their attainment in practical aspects of the course is lower. However, retention rates are good.
113. Standards of work seen are above average with some very good practical production work. Year 13 students show a high level of technical proficiency, for example in their production of short action films, employing an effective variety of camera angles and shots and adding looped music and text. They are able to edit their video-films efficiently, making improvements in the light of classroom discussion. Higher attaining students show very good understanding of marketing techniques and marketing strategies based on thorough research. They plan independently and their written work is very well organised, clearly argued and presented with increasingly precise use of analytical language and media concepts. Lower attaining students, although showing improvements in language use, do not develop and argue ideas as coherently, both in discussion and in writing. Female students are less confident in producing media, for example in using cameras and editing film, but show good analysis and appreciation. Year 12 students working on brief radio broadcasts are producing sound packages of very high, near professional quality. In both Year 12 and Year 13, students' achievement compared with prior attainment is good.
114. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Lessons are challenging and teachers have high expectations of students' ability to work independently and to translate theory into practice. Students are provided with very clear assignment sheets and are also encouraged to make their own action plans with specific time schedules and objectives for completing a production unit. Year 12 students had already planned and recorded interesting interviews for a variety of short radio broadcasts. In an excellent lesson the teacher demonstrated the use of cues in a radio

broadcast. Students then wrote their own and began to improve their productions: editing to meet duration requirements, recording cues and links and embedding musical background. They benefited greatly from the teacher circulating and reinforcing learning through the practical opportunities provided and from excellent resources: both state-of-the-art equipment and the ready availability of an experienced technician. In a very good Year 13 lesson on media marketing, students were constantly challenged to think on their feet. While planning their presentations in a simulated focus group to market short action films, students rose to meet the challenge to adjust their presentations in the light of recent public concern over the increase in gun violence, and to take account of possible recession in planning a budget.

115. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department has only been in post for one term, but students are very appreciative of the improvements made in clarifying course requirements and assessment objectives, and providing a clear timetable for each unit. There is a very clear and imaginative development plan for the subject; valuable equipment is now stored and booked out efficiently; students know what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. The curriculum opportunities provided through the school's Arts College status are excellent. Apart from excellent equipment, students receive regular opportunities to work with professionals, for example with a journalist on the school magazine, or a local film company on the production of a short film commissioned by the local health trust on weaning practices in the Asian community. Additional sessions, including girls only groups are offered to increase students' confidence and proficiency in the use of technical equipment.
116. Progress since the last inspection has been good. The facilities and equipment have been transformed into a high-quality learning environment. The new head of department is making a very positive impact; potentially the quality of provision could be very good.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on history, religious studies and sociology.

History

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good and preparation for the individual study is excellent
- Standards are well above average and students achieve very well.
- Student response is very good; they learn to work independently and their analytical approach is very good.
- The department provides valuable study guides for its students and library resources are used well. Management is very good
- Support for the highest attaining students and those who find the subject more difficult is very good
- Excellent support for students is provided in the range of visits and visitors.

Areas for improvement

- Computers are not available in classrooms and access to them is not a regular part of teaching and learning.

117. Results in AS and A-level examinations were above average in 2001. In 2002, A-level examinations results improved; all students gained pass grades and more than three quarters were awarded A or B grades. AS-level results were equally as good as the previous year and many students were awarded A and B grades. The overall trend, both in student numbers and standards, is upward. Students achieve very well in relation to their results at GCSE. There is no significant difference between the results of male and female students although the gender balance varies from year to year. Retention rates are very good and even students who encounter difficulties at AS-level have opted to stay on to the A-level course. Standards in the present Year 13 are very high and the quality of preparation for the individual study is very impressive. It is clear from the number of

higher grades that the highest attaining students are achieving well. In 2001 individual students did well in the optional higher papers. Many students in Year 12 are already working at a high standard.

118. From work seen, students in Year 13 have a very good level of knowledge and real maturity in their approach to the subject. Their written work shows that they understand complex issues, for example, when examining the revolutionary and later developments in Russia. All students conduct independent investigation and use computers effectively. The highest attaining students discuss their research into a variety of topics with confidence. Their oral and written work shows a very analytical approach and the ability to use a wide range of sources effectively. The key skill of communication is developed well in written work and tutorials. Students can use information and communication technology well but computers and projectors are not available in the teaching rooms and this limits some approaches to learning. In Year 12, students are already showing a good understanding of the background to the English Civil War, although lower attaining students were unprepared for the challenge of using role-play to explore the developing rift between crown and parliament. In a lesson on Russia in 1917 all students showed an understanding of why there is a range of opinions amongst historians about the role of Lenin. Higher attaining students were able to explain the view that the revolution might have been the result of a popular movement rather than a coup.
119. Teaching is very good. As a result, students learn very well because they are encouraged to take responsibility for their own work by researching different themes and also participating in discussion in class. In both year groups, students are active participants in lessons. They make decisions about the past based on what they have read rather than relying on class notes, although they have very valuable handbooks and study guides available. Teachers are really knowledgeable and enthusiastic about the subject and students share this enthusiasm. Teachers' questioning is particularly effective and it focuses classroom and tutorial discussion very well. Assessment procedures are good and students in Year 13 are very clear about examination criteria. Self-assessment is being used to raise attainment. Support and guidance for students engaged in preparation of their individual study is excellent and reflects the quality of teacher knowledge on a range of historical themes.
120. The high standards and the quality of teaching and learning are a result of the very good management and development of the subject. Leadership is also very good. Procedures and documentation are very good and teachers work together effectively as a team. Support for newly qualified and trainee teachers is very good and they in turn make a really valuable contribution to the raising of standards. Resources have been developed very well and they are readily accessible in the classroom and the library. The department makes excellent use of an exciting range of visits and the impact of visiting speakers is considerable; this aspect of provision is outstanding.
121. Good progress has been made since the last inspection; this is clearly evident in the well above average standards and the students' very good achievement as well as the range of opportunities and experiences offered to students. In discussion, students state that their experience in the subject is very good.

Religious studies

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good with excellent features and is leading to improvement in standards.
- Students achieve well; they are provided with practice in extended writing and tutorial support out of lesson time.
- Students show a good understanding and Year 13 students are able to articulate their views with confidence.

Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient text books provided for individual study; this limits independent work.
- Access to information and communication technology is limited in lessons, but students in Year 12 are encouraged to use the school facilities in their study time.

122. In the A-level examination in 2001, all of the eight students who took the subject completed the course. Numbers are too small to make valid comparisons for the distribution of grades attained.. However, the proportion gaining A and B grades was similar to that nationally. Students made good progress from a relatively low starting point and results represent good achievement. There is no significant variation in standards attained by male and female students. A-level results in 2002 show a significant improvement in A and B grades. These results indicate that the proportion of those students gaining A and B grades has doubled. AS-level examination results in 2001 were average. Retention rates are good.
123. The work seen during the inspection both in lessons and from an analysis of students' writing, confirms that students are achieving well; this is attributable to the very good teaching that they receive. Work is clearly set out in lessons although some students' files are not clearly labeled for later retrieval of work. Students in Year 13 use specialist language, evidence, examples and argument with increasing confidence and accuracy. In ethics, they are discussing the morality of war and in particular the Just war theory of Aquinas and how it can be applied to the issue of nuclear war. Students demonstrated maturity in this lesson and time was given for students to interact with one another on the issue of conscription and the criteria for waging war.
124. From work seen, standards are close to average in Year 12. Students are achieving well and have made a very good beginning to the course given their attainment on entry. Students are being well taught and are learning to rely less on the teacher as the sole source of accurate information; they are developing fluency in debate as a result of teachers' very good skills of guiding discussion. For example, in two philosophy lessons seen, students were beginning to understand the wide dimensions of the problem of evil through discussion and very good questioning by the teacher. Students are aware of the nature of reasons for the Augustinian theodicy of rejection of dualism. They are able to discuss Monism and know that this argument is held in Christian Science and Hinduism. However, students do not each have a copy of the appropriate textbook to reinforce their learning through independent study. Students are aware of their expected grades; work seen includes evidence of research on the Internet. Students are pleased with their progress and when spoken to, they thought that the skills they are acquiring in the subject are valuable to them in other subjects.
125. Overall, teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject and this is demonstrated in their ability to answer questions, open discussion and guide debate. Lessons move at a good pace and are planned to make use of a variety of activities to develop understanding. Teachers have very good knowledge of the course and the examination requirements and this makes students confident. Teachers' classroom management is excellent and there are many examples of this in lessons seen. They make very good use of video clips and information and communication technology to enrich students' understanding. In one lesson seen, two video clips demonstrated clearly to students how easy it is for us to stereotype people. However, students' access to information and communication technology in lessons is limited. Teachers give focused attention to study skills, which are built into all activities and assessed. Work is marked and students spoken to are clear about their grades and targets for improvement. However, learning outcomes and goals are not always evident in lessons although when spoken to, students were clear about what was expected of them. As a result of very good teaching, students learn very well. They are attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching and different styles that they experience from teachers. Students work well together and this has a positive impact on the quality of discussion and debate in lessons.
126. The subject is well led and well managed. The two subject teachers work together, sharing views on successful ways of teaching the varying groups. They know their students well and there are formal procedures for monitoring the progress of individual students. Students have adequate

practice in extended writing and examination questions to familiarise themselves with what is required and to reflect on their own needs. Students' performances are carefully analysed and tutorial support is offered out of lesson time.

127. Progress has been good since the previous report. Although results have fluctuated since the previous inspection they have improved overall. Assessment procedures and monitoring have been developed. However, although the range of books is wide and relevant to the examination course, the number is insufficient to ensure availability for all students.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is good and is resulting in effective learning in lessons.
- Students are very enthusiastic about the subject and there is a good learning atmosphere in lessons.
- Very good quality display, including the work of students, enhances the quality of the learning environment.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of students attaining higher grade passes at both AS and A-level.
- The achievement of lower attaining female students is less than expected and is not as good as the achievement of male students.

128. Since 1999, A-level examination results have declined and in 2001 were well below the national average. Department analysis shows this was linked to declining standards of entry to the course in relation to students' average GCSE points. However, analysis also shows that a significant proportion of students underachieved in relation to their attainment on entry to the course. More female students took the examinations than male students and because numbers were low, comparison of performance is unreliable. Results for 2002 show the decline has been arrested with an improvement in overall pass rate and a modest improvement in A and B grades. Male students performed better than female students, both in terms of A and B grades as well as overall pass grades. Recruitment and retention rates have been relatively stable over the last four years for A-level. Recruitment has recently declined as more subjects, such as psychology, are now offered and the competition to attract students has become greater.

129. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are average. Students have developed a secure understanding of theoretical perspectives of sociology. They are also, for example, developing their knowledge and understanding as to how official statistics are constructed in relation to crime and deviance. Their research skills are securely developed and they make good use of information and communication technology in this respect; this is indicative of their good independent learning skills. Their communication skills are also secure and some students produce cogent, structured and well-argued essays. In their research, many students analyse and handle statistical data well. Some, however, rely on supposition in discussion and are not using examples of sociological case studies and research to back up their arguments. Year 12 students have made a good start to the AS-level course and are gaining a good grasp of the issues and concepts of the sociology of education.

130. The quality of teaching is good and is resulting in effective learning. Lessons are well planned and paced, with a variety of structured activities that meets the needs of all students. The teacher's enthusiasm, interest and good knowledge and understanding of the subject ensure students make good progress and develop their interest. As a result of this, there is a good learning atmosphere in lessons, students are very positive about the provision and are keen to do well. In a Year 12 lesson, for example, students worked very well as pairs when discussing evidence to show the link between racism and educational achievement. Although the teacher referred to different theoretical perspectives effectively, there was not always sufficient reference to appropriate contemporary and

established sociological research to deepen students' knowledge and understanding and to extend their sociological thinking. Effective questioning stretches students' intellectual capacities and engages them well in discussion that draws on their own experiences as well as on the sociological perspectives they have learned. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students worked very well discussing different theoretical perspectives to individual case studies of coroners' suicide verdicts. They showed good insight and expressed their own ideas confidently as well as listening to and respecting the beliefs and views of others. Some, though, drifted off the intended focus because the learning objectives were not made explicit at the start of the lesson. Students receive very good support and guidance to help them with their coursework as well as structured guidance to help them with their essay writing. Very good quality marking ensures students are aware of what they have to do to improve the standard of their work.

131. Leadership is good. Analysis of recent assessment data has enabled the head of department to identify those students who need extra help and guidance in order to help them achieve more. The subject benefits from a dedicated teaching room. Very good displays of sociological terminology and good examples of students' work enhance the quality of the learning environment extremely well.
132. Sociology was not reported on at the last inspection and therefore a judgement on improvement cannot be made.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English literature and French. Work in English Language and literature and German was also sampled.

133. The provision for English Language and Literature is good. It is a popular subject at AS-level and standards are average. This represents good achievement given students' levels of attainment on entry to the course. Many students elect to study the subject for just this one AS-level year. At A-level, standards are again average and achievement good. The quality of teaching seen was never less than satisfactory and often good. The subject is well managed.
134. One lesson of German was sampled. The group is making good progress in bridging the gap from GCSE to AS-level. They benefit from experienced teaching which has identified the language areas that need development. Students show positive attitudes and a work experience visit to Germany has provided added motivation. Results at A-Level for the last three years have been good and justify the school's approach to second language provision.

English literature

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

Strengths

- Standards in A-level literature work for current students are above average because of the teachers' good subject knowledge and the quality of their curricular and lesson planning.
- The very good relationships between teachers and students, and the latter's positive attitudes to the subject, contribute significantly to the high quality of the work seen.
- Students achieve well because of the regular and detailed feedback they receive on how to improve their work.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers are not using information about student performance over time sufficiently well to set targets for further improvement and then to monitor progress.
- There is no effective system in place for staff to share good teaching practice.
- There is no distinct subject ethos as an aid to study in the teaching rooms because of the poor accommodation.

135. English Literature is a popular A-level subject and there is a very good student retention rate over the two years of the course. The school has recently introduced the alternative English Language and Literature course and examinations has been taken in the subject for the first time in 2002. Standards attained in GCE A-level examinations in English Literature in 2001 were below the national average for both male and female students. This represented unsatisfactory achievement given their average levels of attainment when starting the course. However, results improved significantly for male and female students in 2002. This improvement represents good achievement for all students. The standards attained in the 2002 AS-level examinations were also improved and students achieved well.
136. The quality of the work seen during the inspection confirms the improving trend in standards. They are above average in the A-level English Literature work and the achievement of these students is good given their average GCSE points on entry to the course. Standards have risen since 2001 because of the quality of teachers' planning and the detailed feedback they give to students on how to improve their work. Students are analytical and their extended critical writing is well structured and informed by detailed textual references. They are forming an independent view of what they read and many students make good use of critical works to help shape their judgements. All students make good use of the language of literary criticism and many produce research material of a high standard. The standards of work seen on the AS-level course are average and students' levels of achievement are satisfactory. Written work shows that these students are developing appropriate skills and expressing their ideas in well-structured essays.
137. The quality of teaching is good overall, although there were a small number of instances where lessons lacked sufficient challenge for the students. The strengths in the teaching are the depth of the teachers' subject knowledge, their careful preparation of lessons with close reference to the demands of the examination, and the detailed and helpful written feedback seen in students' files, with attention given to the varying needs of all students. Teachers have established very good working relationships and are rewarded with students' commitment to the subject. Their support and encouragement are enabling them to develop an independent approach to their work. The best teaching challenged students' thinking. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson where, because there were high expectations of their research and analytical skills, students were able to analyse the work of Thomas Hardy from different critical viewpoints and understand the complexities of the moral and social issues underlying his work. In some lessons, however, opportunities were missed to extend students' understanding of literature. Year 12 students' appreciation of Shakespeare's 'Othello' was limited because the lesson failed to explore the play's context in depth and the link between the forces which govern society and the play itself were not made sufficiently clear. The challenge facing the department is to raise the quality of the less rigorous teaching to that of the best.
138. The leadership and management of the subject are good and reference has already been made to the strengths of planning, the use of formative assessment and the excellent working relationships established with students. The head of department provides a clear direction to the work of her colleagues and has identified the developments needed to improve further the work of a busy department. She will be addressing the need to use information about student performance to set individual student targets for improvement and then monitor progress over time. Although there are some procedures in place to share ideas on good teaching practice, more needs to be done to raise the overall quality of teaching to that of the best. Provision for students to use computers to improve the standard of their work is patchy and access to such technology has yet to be improved.
139. Little was written in the previous inspection report on sixth form provision and so a judgement on improvement over the intervening period is not possible. What has not changed, however, is the poor accommodation for the subject and students are denied the stimulus of a creative working environment because the rooms are dull and uninviting. The subject has the capacity to sustain the improving trend and raise standards further because the teachers are self-critical and they constantly seek ways to improve the quality of their work.

French

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

Strengths

- The use of information and communication technology supports independent learning well.
- Staffing includes native speakers and a foreign language assistant to model speaking skills.
- The good quality of lesson preparation that includes a variety of tasks to sustain students' interests.
- The department's identification of its development needs.

Areas for improvement

- The use of data and outcomes of assessment to monitor students' progress more effectively and to contribute to target setting.
- A prioritised programme for the systematic development of identified issues.
- Co-ordination of the links between the development of grammar and the topics being covered.

140. In 2001, A-Level results in French were broadly in line with national averages although there were no students at the higher A and B grades. Achievement over the two years of the course was satisfactory. Entries in 2002 were too few for valid comparison with previous results. Recruitment to AS-level French in Year 12 has been good. Retention rates are good.
141. The standard of work seen of current students is average. In Year 13, both the listening and speaking skills are good and show the benefit of the teachers' sustained use of French in lessons. Students can discuss and express views on topics such as the impact of strikes on tourism in Paris. They speak with fluency and authentic pronunciation. In Year 12, students are showing increasing confidence in speaking but have not yet developed an easy fluency. Whilst there is a range of abilities in both groups, all students work comfortably on routine exercises and practices. It is the free written work that differentiates standards. In Year 13, where students cover topics such as racism, the state and the individual and health issues, all students can formulate arguments and justify opinions. The most able student can write accurately and at length on the ethical issue of screening embryos to determine a baby's sex. Where the other students have ideas of quality, their work still shows elementary faults of grammar and limitations of vocabulary. Students in Year 12 have adjusted to the expectations of independent learning and in some tasks use the Internet for research. The learning of students in both years is enhanced by their mature attitudes and application to learning. For several, there is increased motivation and purpose from their visits to France.
142. Teaching overall is satisfactory but has some marked strengths. Teachers now require only the experience and examination insights of teaching at this level to improve the overall quality of teaching. Native speakers who sustain the use of French provide a constant challenge to the students. The benefits are seen in the confidence in speaking, which exceeds that normally found. Sometimes, this challenge is lost where English is used in routine classroom negotiation. Native speakers are able to offer a range of contemporary language to enrich students' written work. Lessons are very thoroughly prepared with a variety of tasks to sustain interest. There is a regular focus on reinforcing and developing grammar, but this is often in isolation and would benefit from links to the topics covered. Homework is regularly set to reinforce or prepare for work in class. Marking is thorough with helpful comments.
143. The leadership and management of the department are good. The recent appointee has shown thoughtful insights in identifying the issues to be addressed and has already drafted documents for consideration. These issues have not yet been prioritised into a clear programme of action. The monitoring of teaching is established but does not include mutual and co-operative observation or observation of practice in other schools. Subject-specific target setting has recently been introduced; this now needs complementing with regular formal monitoring.
144. Progress since the last inspection has been good. The use of information and communication technology has been developed and is now a strength of the subject. A foreign language assistant

has been appointed and is deployed very well to reinforce learning. The department has the staff and the enthusiasm, commitment and the capacity to raise standards.