

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **CHIPPING NORTON SCHOOL**

Chipping Norton

LEA area: Oxfordshire

Unique reference number: 123231

Headteacher: Mr R Graydon

Reporting inspector: Mr C R Warn  
4293

Dates of inspection: 7 – 11 October 2002

Inspection number: 249841

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

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Burford Road  
Chipping Norton  
Oxon

Postcode: OX7 5DY

Telephone number: 01608 642007

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr John Cochrane

Date of previous inspection: 9 December 1996

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## **PART A: INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Chipping Norton School is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school of average size with 1082 students. They attend from the town of Chipping Norton and from a large rural area of North Oxfordshire served by school buses. The area served by the school is moderately advantaged socially and economically, but some of the students come from relatively disadvantaged home circumstances. Approximately 4% of students are from ethnic groups other than white British. The proportion of students who are eligible for free school meals (5.2%) is below average. A very small proportion of students (0.4%) speak English as an additional language, but all of these are also fluent English speakers. Nine students come from Traveller families, most of whom live on a fixed site. There are 89 students (all in Years 7 to 11) who have a provision for their special educational needs (49 at the School Action stage, 20 at the School Action Plus stage and 20 with Statements). The largest groups within the latter two categories are for emotional and behavioural difficulties, moderate learning difficulties and other specific learning difficulties. The school is popular and is now near to its current maximum capacity. Presently, the overall standard of attainment of students on entry into Year 7 is just above the national average. Students' attainment is above average at the end of Years 9 and 11 and well above average at the end of Year 13.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

This is a good school with some very good features. It provides its students with a high quality of education. Many important strengths were identified in the last inspection in 1996. These strengths have been either maintained or improved upon further. Standards of attainment for students at the end of Years 9 and 11 are above the national average, whilst those for students at the end of Year 13 are well above average. Most students make good progress, particularly those with high ability levels and those with special educational needs. A few middle ability students, mostly boys, could achieve more highly in Years 7 to 11. The overall quality of teaching is good, with some that is very good or excellent. The school is very well led and is efficiently managed. The great majority of parents are very satisfied with the work of the school. The principles of 'best value' are being applied and good value for money is provided.

#### **What the school does well**

- Standards of attainment at the end of Years 9 and 11 are above average and rising, whilst those at the end of Year 13 are now well above average.
- Teaching is good, thanks especially to the training and support given to teachers.
- Students behave and work well and personal relationships are very good throughout the school.
- Students are supported very well by a very good pastoral system.
- The curriculum is imaginatively designed to meet the needs of all learners in Years 10 and 11.
- Parents and students are very satisfied with the work and achievements of the school.
- The leadership and management of school improvement are good.

## What could be improved

- Arrangements for monitoring and assessing the progress students make towards individual learning targets.
- The accommodation for design and technology and for science.
- The resources for information and communication technology (ICT).
- The sharing of good practice between subject teams and also between subject and pastoral teams.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Good improvement has been achieved since the last inspection in 1996. The strengths identified then have been maintained. Results have improved in all external tests and examinations since 1996. This is linked to improvements in the quality of teaching. The curriculum provision, especially in Years 10 and 11, has been successfully adapted to meet a much wider range of learning needs and styles. The provision for ICT has improved, although it is still insufficient. Religious education now meets legal requirements in Years 7 to 11. However, the school is still unable to provide its students with a daily act of collective worship. An improved range of choices of sixth form subjects at A-level is now available. Better procedures for supporting students with special educational needs are now in place. Effective systems for monitoring and reviewing the performance of teachers and subject teams are now operating. Recently there has been a greatly increased expenditure on learning resources to make up for a shortfall in recent years. A very impressive joint-use leisure centre has recently been opened, which greatly improves the provision for physical education. The school is now a centre of excellence for training new teachers. It received an Achievement Award in 2001 and is a designated Training School for new teachers.

## STANDARDS

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

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

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

*Note: At the time of the inspection, no national comparative figures were available for 2002.*



The school improved its test results in science and mathematics at the end of Year 9 from 2001 to 2002. The test results in English unexpectedly dipped in 2002 from a very high standard in previous years. Inspectors could find no evidence of reduced standards in English in the current Year 10. GCSE results in 2002 were higher than in 2001, exceeding the school's challenging targets. In the 2001 GCSE examinations, girls achieved more highly than boys. The difference was much greater than for most schools. This difference was reduced in 2002 by improving the results of boys. Gifted and talented students successfully achieve the highest grades. Most students make good progress from Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory progress from Years 10 to 11. Some middle ability students (mostly boys) make slower than predicted progress. Standards of attainment at A-level are well above the national average. The standards seen in lessons during the inspection week indicate that the school is on track towards gaining comparable results in external tests and examinations in 2003. Students with special educational needs are enabled to make good progress. There are a few students who speak English as an additional language: they achieve just as well as other students. Most of the students from Traveller families also attain well.

### PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	<b>Very good.</b> Students are well behaved, considerate, keen to learn and respectful of others.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	<b>Very good.</b> Behaviour seen in lessons was generally very good. Behaviour outside lessons and in the grounds was generally good. The relatively few cases of bullying that occur are effectively dealt with by teachers.
Personal development and relationships	<b>Very good.</b> Opportunities for personal and social development are effective. Many students are willing to accept responsibility and to participate in activities outside lessons.
Attendance	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Attendance rates are just above the national average. They fell gradually from 1996 to 2001 but have now begun to rise.

The school is characterised by high standards of behaviour amongst students and very good relationships between students and teachers. It is a school where students feel safe and free from harassment or disadvantage. These factors play an important part in the rising standards of attainment.

### TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

From a sample of 79 lessons seen (36 in Years 7 to 11, 43 in the sixth form), the quality of teaching was judged to be satisfactory or better in almost every case. In two thirds of lessons seen, teaching was good or better and in approximately one lesson in five teaching was very good or excellent. This sample indicates that the quality of teaching has improved since 1996, particularly in respect to the much lower incidence of unsatisfactory teaching. The overall quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science is good. In the sixth form over seven lessons in ten are characterised by teaching that is good, and in some cases very good or excellent. The main reasons for this improvement are the use of a wider range of learning strategies, better planning good staff development opportunities, and being a Training School.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	<b>Good.</b> A full range of subjects is offered in Years 7 to 11, with all statutory requirements being met except for some aspects of the application of ICT within subjects. A wide choice of A-level subjects is offered in the sixth form, but few vocational courses. The requirement to provide religious education is not fully met in the sixth form.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	<b>Good.</b> Students with special educational needs are supported well and make good progress as a consequence. There is a need for closer working between learning support and subject teachers, especially in helping to develop literacy skills across all subjects.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	<b>Good.</b> There are only a few students with English as an additional language, but they are given appropriate support and make similarly good progress to other students.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	<b>Good.</b> There are well-designed programmes for personal, social and health education and citizenship in place. The provision for supporting students' moral and social development is very good; it is good for cultural development and satisfactory for spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	<b>Good.</b> Students are advised well about personal matters and career intentions. Rewards and sanctions are fair and sensible. The information that students receive about how well they are doing in each subject and what more they need to do to reach their learning targets varies too much between subjects and individual teachers.

The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is very well designed. The arrangements for supporting students' personal development are good. Many students become involved in learning activities outside the classroom and some undertake tasks that require considerable personal responsibility. There is a need to improve the ways in which students receive guidance about the progress that they are making. After several years of gradual decline, attendance rates are rising again now. Very few students are permanently excluded. Parents are very pleased about the ways in which their children are supported by the school, and most are pleased with the subject choices available in Years 10 to 13.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	<b>Good.</b> The headteacher and senior managers provide very good leadership. The leadership provided by the heads of year and subject leaders is good. There is a need to share good practice more fully within the school, especially between subject teams and with pastoral teams. The school is very efficiently administered.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	<b>Very good.</b> Governors have a very clear overview of the strengths and future development needs of the school. They bring a great deal of valuable expertise to the school and play a very influential role in helping the school to move forward.
The school's evaluation of its performance	<b>Satisfactory.</b> The quality of teaching, learning and the curriculum is increasingly being evaluated diagnostically. There is a need for classroom teachers and form tutors to make better use of performance data to help students set and reach their own learning targets.
The strategic use of resources	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Financial resources are used wisely to support school improvement, even though until recently there has been insufficient money to meet many of the key priorities. There are still significant problems with the accommodation for design and technology and science. There are insufficient modern, networked computers. Sports facilities are superb. The principles of best value are being applied.

This is an effective and improving school with the capacity and desire to improve still further. Very capable leadership by senior managers and governors is playing a vital part in this process, together with the hard work of teachers and support staff. The expertise of teachers and support staff is well matched to the needs of the curriculum. The current buildings limit learning opportunities in science, and design and technology. Many subject departments are disadvantaged by a lack of access to adequate ICT facilities within their teaching areas

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• high standards in public tests and examinations</li> <li>• high expectations for their children</li> <li>• good teaching</li> <li>• very good behaviour and discipline</li> <li>• the wide range of extra-curricular learning opportunities</li> <li>• the accessibility of teachers to parents</li> <li>• the ways in which the school responds to ideas or complaints from parents</li> <li>• the quality of leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more information given to them about the topics that their children will be studying</li> <li>• more interesting and challenging homework activities in Years 7 to 9</li> <li>• a greater use of computers in school</li> <li>• the Year 8 reports and parents' evening come too late in the year</li> <li>• less mixed ability teaching in Years 7 to 9.</li> </ul>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the ways in which the school has continued to improve.</li></ul> |  |
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Inspection evidence supports parents' positive views. Homework was seen by inspectors to be set mostly in a systematic way, but they agreed that in some cases the tasks could be more imaginative and could involve more thinking and reasoning skills. Governors have noted the need for more information about the curriculum to parents, more computers in subject areas and earlier reports in Year 8. Teachers often ensure that all students in mixed ability classes are able to achieve their personal best, but there is scope for some further improvement in Years 8 and 9.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

There are 162 students in this average sized sixth form. Of these, 82 are male and 80 female. Most of these students have continued into the sixth form from Year 11 in this school. A few students join the sixth form from other local schools. Students are drawn from a relatively large area of rural Oxfordshire and adjoining counties. The overall standard of attainment of students on entry into Year 12 is above average. A few students have special educational needs. Those students who speak English as an additional language are fluent English speakers. The sixth form provides mainly AS and A-level courses with an enrichment programme which includes personal, social and health education, key skills and community service. A range of vocational courses is offered, but only two are currently running (intermediate General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) health and social care and Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) information technology). All applicants are interviewed for a place in the sixth form and all Year 11 students are free to apply. Most of the Year 11 students who achieve five or more grades A\* to C at GCSE continue into the sixth form. The sixth form has grown in size since the previous inspection.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

This is a good and improving sixth form. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection in standards of attainment. Students benefit from good teaching that enables them to learn well. They make good progress from GCSE to A-level. From 1996 to 2001, the standard of attainment at A-level has risen to well above the national average. Results in AS-level examinations in Year 12 in 2001 were also high but fell slightly in 2002. The courses provided meet the needs of the students currently studying in the sixth form well. Those students requiring a fuller range of vocational courses are appropriately advised to enrol with other local post-16 providers who have the capacity to meet their needs. Students attend well and have a very positive attitude towards their studies. A very high proportion of them complete their courses. The majority of students on AS-level courses proceed to full A-levels. The sixth form is well led and managed. The provision is cost-effective and provides good value for money.

**Strengths**

- A very high standard of attainment at A-level in 2001, with this standard being maintained in 2002.
- The very positive attitudes to study of students, and the excellent relationships within the sixth form.
- The very high retention rate of students on both one and two year courses. A high proportion of Year 13 students go on to higher education.
- Good overall quality of teaching.
- Good leadership and management that has led to successful implementation of new courses and examinations and improvement in standards since the previous inspection.

## What could be improved

- The accommodation for science, design and technology and sixth form study.
- The use of ICT to support teaching in subjects.
- The consistency from subject to subject of the feedback that students are given about their progress against course requirements.

*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	<b>Good.</b> Standards are very high at AS/A-level. Teachers' expertise and teaching are good. A wide range of courses caters well for students' needs. Students are not always clear on how to improve.
Biology	<b>Good.</b> Teaching and learning are good, particularly independent learning. ICT is not used enough and the accommodation needs to be improved.
Chemistry	<b>Good.</b> Teachers' expertise and teaching are good. Students know what they have to do to improve. ICT is not used enough and the accommodation needs to be improved.
Business	<b>Good.</b> Standards are very high at A-level. Teachers' expertise is very good. Teaching and learning are good, though students could be helped more to learn for themselves and have more access to ICT.
Sociology	<b>Very good.</b> Standards are high and students make better progress than in many other schools and subjects. Teaching and learning are very good, but could be enriched by more visits and speakers.
Art and design	<b>Good.</b> Management and relationships are very good. Assessment supports students well. Use of ICT and group discussion could be improved.
Geography	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Standards at A-level improved in 2002 as a result of effective tracking of students' progress. ICT is not systematically used. There is insufficient participation by students in lessons.
Design and technology	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Standards of attainment are high at A-level. Teaching and learning are good. Accommodation and resources, particularly for ICT, are inadequate.
English	<b>Very Good.</b> Standards of attainment are high at A/AS-level. Teaching and learning are very good, though ICT is not used sufficiently to enhance learning.

	Students' understanding of how they can improve is very good.
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Lessons in eleven other subjects were also sampled. The quality of teaching is a strength in the sixth form. It was at least satisfactory in all of the 43 lessons seen and was good, very good or excellent in eight out of ten lessons. An excellent lesson was seen in the psychology of sport and performance and very good lessons were seen in art and design, biology, drama, English, French, German and sociology. In work seen, students were achieving at least in line with the standards they were expected to reach based on their GCSE results.

### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	<b>Very well.</b> They receive high quality pastoral care and academic support. They are inducted well into the sixth form and their progress is monitored well. Performance of students is analysed and translated into meaningful targets. Students would benefit from more detailed and consistent information about how well they are progressing against course requirements.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	<b>Good.</b> The sixth form is successfully led and managed as an integral part of the whole school. New courses have been successfully implemented. Planning has successfully concentrated on providing an increasing breadth of subjects.

### 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"> <li>• students enjoy being in the sixth form and would warmly recommend it to others</li> <li>• the good teaching that challenges students to do their best</li> <li>• the accessibility of teachers</li> <li>• the help and encouragement that they are given by teachers to study and research independently</li> <li>• their treatment as responsible young adults</li> <li>• a range and choice of courses that meets their aspirations</li> <li>• their work is helpfully marked and assessed</li> <li>• the very clear information about subjects courses and very good arrangements to help new members of the sixth form to settle in.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advice on opportunities after leaving school</li> <li>• more objective advice on what to study in the sixth form whilst they are in Year 11</li> <li>• more detailed information about progress in relation to course expectations</li> <li>• support for personal problems.</li> </ul>

Inspectors endorse all of the aspects that students like. The school has responded to its own survey of the views of sixth formers by providing information and advice on what courses to follow in the

sixth form earlier in Year 11 this year. Inspectors agree that more detailed advice on how well each student is progressing against course requirements could be given in some subjects. Students completed the questionnaire when they had only been in the sixth form for a month. Year 13 students have received some guidance on university application, but are keen to know more about university life, courses and employment earlier. There is an active sixth form committee, which is listened to by senior managers. Relationships between staff and students are a major strength of the school. There is a trained counsellor available should sixth formers need him. Some have taken advantage of this provision.

## **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**

**Standards of attainment at the end of Years 9 and 11 are above average and rising, whilst those at the end of Year 13 are now well above average.**

#### *Overview*

1. The overall standard of attainment of students in the national tests held at the end of Year 9 are above the national average. Similarly, overall standards of attainment are above the national average in the GCSE and GNVQ results of students taking these examinations by the end of Year 11. The overall standard of attainment is well above the national average in the A-level examinations. The results of the AS-level examinations taken by students at the end of Year 12 were relatively high in 2001, but slightly less so in 2002. Even so, the 2002 AS-level results equate quite closely to the GCSE results obtained the year before by the students concerned. Of the parents who replied to the questionnaire 93% said that they were satisfied with the progress that their children were making. Students make good progress from Years 7 to 9, satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11 and very good progress in Years 12 and 13. Forty-seven per cent of these parents were very satisfied with this aspect of the work of the school. This represents a very high level of parental satisfaction with the standards of attainment.

#### *Standard of attainment of students entering Year 7*

2. The school receives a fully comprehensive intake, with nearly all students performing between Levels 3 and 6 of the National Curriculum by the end of their primary schooling. (Level 4 is the national benchmark for performance at this age.) The overall standard of attainment of students entering Year 7 is rising annually, and is now above the national average. The main factors that account for this are judged by the school to be the impact of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, a much greater use of information and communication technology (ICT) and improved teaching strategies in the partner primary schools. In the current Year 7, most students (after a month in the school) were seen by inspectors to be working at Levels 4 or 5 in English. Written work was often imaginative, with a strong sense of audience and textural structure. In terms of reading, most students could tackle demanding texts and make sense of them. They spoke with confidence and fluency when given the opportunity to do so. However, a significant proportion of students still had problems with spelling. In mathematics in the current Year 7, most students are securely working at Level 4 and about a third at Level 5. They are confident in using place value, written calculations, fractions and decimals, for example.

#### *Standards attained by students by the end of Year 9*

3. In national tests in 2001 (the most recent year for which national comparisons were available at the time of the inspection), students attained well above the national average in English, just above it in mathematics and in line with it in science. Since the last inspection, average point scores have remained well above average in English, just above the national average in

mathematics and have risen in line with the national average in science. Overall standards measured by national test results have risen at the end of Year 9 since the last inspection in 1996 at a faster rate than nationally. In comparison with the national average, overall results in 2001 were not as high as in 2000. The 2001 performance in mathematics and science was disappointing compared to similar secondary schools. However, results in these two subjects rose considerably in 2002. This reflects the way in which subject teachers and senior managers have identified and rectified weaknesses in the schemes of work and teaching strategies that led to lower results in 2001. In contrast, the very high standards achieved in English in 2000 and 2001 unexpectedly were not maintained in 2002. Inspectors could find no evidence of reduced levels of attainment in English amongst this cohort who are now in Year 10.

4. In 2001 there was a relatively small gender difference in English, with girls achieving 2.5 points above the national average and boys 1.5 points above it. There was no significant gender difference in mathematics or science. The percentage of students reaching the benchmark Level 6 and above was well above the national average in English and above it in mathematics and science. This was also the case for the proportion of students reaching Level 7. These results are in contrast to those gained at the time of the last inspection when more able students were not achieving sufficiently.
5. Students with identified special educational needs are given useful additional tuition by members of the learning support team, sometimes within small groups and often alongside other students in lessons. This help could be even more effective if the English and learning support teams worked in a more integrated way, for example, in designing and operating approaches together to enable Year 7 students working below Level 4 to reach this standard by Year 8. Inspection evidence shows that the majority of students with special educational needs make good progress from Years 7 to 9.
6. Indeed almost all students make similarly good progress throughout these three years. There are only two exceptions to this pattern. A relatively few students (mostly boys), who find it hard to sustain concentration throughout a 50 minute lesson or to undertake extended pieces of individual enquiry or research without close supervision. A few capable students (mostly in Years 7 and 8) do not undertake enough extension work to enable them to go further or deeper into the subject.
7. There are nine students from Traveller families in Years 7 to 9, all of whom are making appropriate progress towards their learning goals. Their attendance rate is much higher than for similar students nationally. They are well integrated and well supported. This is also the case for a small number of students who are from ethnic origins other than white British. There is a very small number of students who speak English as an additional language. All of these students are able to speak English fluently and so can gain access to the full curriculum without impediment.

*Standards attained by students by the end of Year 11*

8. The figures for 2001 show that the school was performing above the national average in terms of the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE/GNVQ passes at grades A\* to C. The 2001 national figure of 48.4% of students reaching this standard was considerably exceeded, with a figure of 62%. This successful result indicates that more able students are performing relatively well, which was not the case in 1996. The students who completed their Year 11 course in 2001 had previously achieved highly in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 1999. This meant that the majority of these students made the progress expected of them from 1999 to 2001.
9. The average total point score of students entered for GCSE/GNVQ examinations in 2001 was above the national average. The main areas where the school could have done better at GCSE in 2001 were in the proportion of students who achieved five or more A\* to G passes and at least one A\* to G pass. The main reason for this was the lack of completion of coursework by a few students, plus the alternative “flexible curriculum” followed by some students which made it harder for them to achieve five or more GCSE passes. On the credit side, most of the students who followed the “flexible curriculum” gained valuable vocational experience, which was recognised in other forms of accreditation to GCSE. The gap between boys’ and girls’ achievement (as measured in average total point scores) was relatively small in 2000 (4.3 points) and considerable in 2001 (8.8 points). The national picture is that boys achieve 5.2 points below girls. The gap widened in Chipping Norton School between 2000 and 2001 because the girls did extremely well, rising from an average total point score of 41.6 points to 48.4 points. At the same time, boys improved from 37.3 points to 39.6 points. The boy/girl gap narrowed significantly in 2002, mainly because of an increase in the boys’ results. In some subjects (such as mathematics, science and art and design) boys and girls attain equally well. The school has introduced several strategies to raise the attainment of boys, which are visibly working.
10. In 2002 the school exceeded its challenging target of 61% achieving five or more GCSE/GNVQ grades A\* to C by over one percentage point and its target of 46 average points by two points. This improvement in results was achieved by increasing the number of students who reached grade C standard and those gaining the highest grades. Overall, gifted and talented students successfully gained the top grades in the majority of subjects. Every student attending the school gained at least one GCSE pass. This included two students taken in to Chipping Norton School after being permanently excluded from neighbouring schools. There were six students in Year 10 last year (mostly from overseas) who were aged 16. They will be entered for GCSE examinations in 2003 along with the rest of the students in their year group, but statistically they appeared in the 2002 results as having achieved no passes. This slightly lowered all of the GCSE indicators for 2002. Compensating for this factor, the proportion of students in Year 11 in summer 2002 who gained five or more grades A\* to C was 63%.
11. In relation to subject performance in GCSE/GNVQ, students performed particularly well in English and French in 2001, but underachieved in comparison in art and design, drama and music. Action to raise standards further in these subjects, so as to bring them in line with other subjects, has been productive, especially in art and design. Here, new subject leadership, improved schemes of work and better teaching techniques and assessment

procedures have all contributed to much higher GCSE results in 2002. Over 70% of students reached a grade C or above in English, English literature, French and geography. One hundred per cent of students gained a grade G or higher in drama, English, English literature, French, geography, German and history. Attainment in the newly introduced religious education short GCSE course has been good. This is a tribute to good teaching and an intelligent solution to the problem of how to ensure that all students in Years 10 and 11 receive a religious education programme that meets the requirements of the Local Agreed Syllabus. New GNVQ courses have proved very successful, especially where they have catered for a wide range of ability.

12. The great majority of students who took their GCSE/GNVQ examinations in the summer of 2002 made satisfactory progress from the end of Year 9. This includes the small proportion of students for whom English is an additional language and students from minority ethnic origins. A “value-added” graph that compares the GCSE/GNVQ average total points scores of individual Year 11 students with their previous attainment in the end of Year 9 National Curriculum tests that they took in 2000 confirms this. This graph also shows that a cluster of students (mostly higher attaining girls) gained results that were better than predicted, whilst some middle ability students (mostly boys) did less well than predicted. The school is rightly concentrating on strategies to tackle this pocket of under-achievement, mostly by ensuring that coursework is completed on time and to a higher standard. Many of the students with identified special educational needs made good progress from the end of Year 9 to the end of Year 11, thanks especially to the imaginative curriculum provided for them. However, some of their attainment was assessed using other forms of accreditation than GCSE and GNVQ.
13. During the inspection, high standards of speaking and reading were observed in Years 10 and 11. Plenty of good examples of extended writing were seen, not only in English lessons, but also in other subjects such as science, geography and history. Some good cases of writing being redrafted and edited to incorporate improvements were also seen. Students’ numeracy skills were generally strong, especially in handling numbers and statistics. Students possessed reasonable levels of competency in using information and communication technology (ICT) as a result of a period each week in a specialist ICT lesson. However, they were given far too few opportunities to use these skills in their subject lessons. This is mostly because of a lack of access to modern computers outside the specialist ICT rooms and the library, and some teachers’ lack of experience of using ICT within lessons.
14. Most students have a relatively clear understanding of their past and present performance and their target grades for GCSE or GNVQ. In some subjects students would benefit from more dialogue with their teachers about the best way to proceed to reach these target grades. Where such dialogue frequently takes place (as in design and technology for example), students make particularly good progress and take more personal responsibility for their own learning.
15. In most cases students with identified special educational needs were observed to be making satisfactory (and sometimes good) progress in lessons in Years 10 and 11. Those students

who took part in alternative courses concentrating on work-related learning were reaching their objectives well, and were gaining ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) silver or bronze accreditation.

### *Standards attained by students by the end of Year 12*

16. From September 2000 sixth form students were able to follow new AS-level courses for the first time. The AS-level examinations involved gaining grades for up to three units in a course which, when continued, led to a six unit A-level course (sometimes referred to as an A2 course). The initial results for the AS-level examinations in 2001 were good, with many students attaining highly. Most of these students went on to gain good grades at A-level in 2002. In comparison, AS-level results were not as high in 2002, although inspection evidence shows that most students made at least satisfactory progress from their GCSE attainment at the end of Year 11. Students did better than predicted in art and design and English, but in history, psychology and textiles (the latter two being new subjects at AS-level) students did not achieve as well as the school would have wished. The staff have particularly highlighted a number of instances where students appeared to ease off in one of the four AS-level courses during Year 12 after a decision had been made not to continue with it into Year 13.

### *Standards attained by students by the end of Year 13*

17. The 2001 A-level results were very good because they were well above the national average and because they showed no significant gender difference. Students achieved well above the national average in art and design, biology, business, design and technology, mathematics, physics, sociology and physical education. They achieved above the national average in English and history and in line with it in chemistry and geography. All students gained an A or B grade in art and design, French, design and technology and German.
18. In 2002 the record results of 2001 were nearly matched with a cohort that achieved slightly less well at GCSE in 2000 compared to the students who left Year 11 in 1999. Further details of attainment patterns in Years 12 and 13 are given in Section D.

### **Teaching is good, thanks especially to the training and support given to teachers.**

#### *Overview*

19. The quality of teaching is good in all years. From a sample of 79 lessons seen during the inspection (36 in Years 7 to 11, 43 in the sixth form), the quality of teaching was judged to be satisfactory or better in all cases bar one. In two thirds of these lessons the quality of teaching was good or better and in approximately one lesson in five teaching was very good or excellent. In the sixth form the quality of teaching was good or better in three quarters of the lessons. This sample indicates that the quality of teaching has improved since 1996, particularly in respect to the much lower incidence of unsatisfactory teaching.

### *The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9*

20. The overall quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 in the sample of 21 lessons seen was very good or excellent in nearly a quarter of cases. It was good in a further four lessons in ten and satisfactory in a third of lessons. Teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory in only one instance. More lessons were seen in Year 9 than in the other two years to enable inspectors to obtain a picture of the standards being reached by students towards the end of Key Stage 3.
21. An example of excellent teaching was seen in a religious studies lesson in Year 9. The lively, imaginative and exciting teaching enabled students to learn a great deal about Buddhism in a practical way through origami, demonstrations, wall displays and music. Very lucid demonstrations and searching questioning made all students think hard and come to sophisticated responses. The lesson was an excellent means of encouraging students to think about their own spiritual and ethical values and to express them in appropriate language. Students of all abilities were strongly challenged and all had a great sense of achievement.
22. Examples of very good teaching were seen in a Year 7 English lesson, and Year 9 lessons in art and design, design and technology and German. In the English lesson a small group of eight students who were working towards Level 4 in a “progress group” were developing their phonic skills extremely well and were rapidly gaining confidence in their speaking and use of vocabulary. The teaching enabled them to experience a wide range of learning styles including discussion, paired reading and personal exercises. In the art and design lesson students were actively involved in recalling work previously done and working with the teacher to define the objectives for the lesson. Lucid and imaginative demonstrations of techniques enabled students to see clearly how they could improve their own work to bring it up to a high standard of technical accuracy. Students with identified special educational needs in the class were given additional help with instructions and their progress was frequently checked as the lesson proceeded. Very high standards of individual and group tuition occurred throughout the practical session, with the consequence that students were able to see how to improve their techniques and to apply that insight to good effect.
23. In the design and technology lesson students were making a decorative mounting for a clock using plastics. They had a very clear understanding of the route that they were taking through the processes of designing, making and evaluation. Their progress along this route was assessed jointly by the teacher and the students using clearly defined criteria. Students worked safely and productively. They were able to adapt their designs to ensure that the finish was good and that the product functioned well. In the German lesson a group of students were working in an ICT room on health and fitness tips. Expectations were high, with students working in German on screen. They actively searched for new vocabulary and better ways of expressing their thoughts. The teacher supported and coached students individually according to their learning needs and set a very relevant homework task to consolidate the work done during the lesson.

24. Examples of good teaching were seen in English, geography, German, mathematics and music within the 21 lessons sampled in Years 7 to 9 during the inspection. The features that were present in these successful lessons (as well as the case studies in the three paragraphs above) were:
- teachers had a very good knowledge and understanding of the subject content and the syllabus objectives;
  - students were given a clear picture of what they were expected to achieve and how they were going to do it;
  - teachers had high expectations of what all students should achieve and enabled more able students to extend their capabilities;
  - questioning techniques enabled some students to give extended, thoughtful answers;
  - students were actively involved in practical activities;
  - teachers gave detailed, individualised help to students as they worked independently or in groups;
  - homework was set that enabled students to consolidate, extend and apply the work that they had done in class;
  - work was marked critically with praise where it was due, but also clear indications of how each student could improve further.
25. In some of the lessons where the overall quality of the teaching was good there was scope for further improvement, especially in
- ensuring that students of all ability levels were enabled to progress towards their own learning targets at a pace that was suitably challenging for them;
  - using new technology and visual materials more fully to illustrate facts and concepts;
  - drawing together at the end of the lesson an evaluation of how well the learning objectives set out at the beginning had been met, and where to go next.
26. In the lessons where the quality of teaching was judged to be satisfactory, students made adequate progress within an orderly and purposeful environment. In addition to the points raised in the paragraph above, the quality of teaching in these lessons could be raised relatively easily by involving students more in responding to questions and in undertaking practical activities that required higher order thinking and reasoning skills.

#### *The quality of teaching in Years 10 and 11*

27. The quality of teaching in Years 10 and 11 in the sample of 15 lessons seen fell equally into the three categories of very good, good and satisfactory. In no instance was the quality of teaching judged to be unsatisfactory. More lessons were seen in Year 11 than in Year 10 to enable inspectors to obtain a picture of the standards being reached by students towards the end of Key Stage 4.
28. Examples of very good teaching were seen in drama, geography, German, science and work-related learning. In the drama lesson the teacher was using a technique learned at a National Theatre course to very good effect. Expectations were very high and students were focused and committed as a consequence. Explanations of new ideas were followed up immediately with activities that developed them. This enabled students to evolve rapidly



more effective ways of interpreting the texts. In the geography lesson students were enabled to use statistics to quantify statements about the economic progress of countries in South America. These statistics were derived from several sources, including websites which some students gained access to in the library. The teacher constantly probed students' understanding and invited them to go deeper into the issues. There were notably good examples of middle ability boys who, on the basis of their Year 9 test results might have been expected to reach a GCSE grade E, but who were now working at grade C standard.

29. In the German lesson the teacher provided a well-structured learning experience for a group of higher ability students. They explored narrative techniques well, so developing their understanding of the text to a high standard. The teacher identified a website for students to visit which contained appropriate revision material. In the lesson on work-related learning, a group of fifteen students who were following the "flexible curriculum" were working off site in an area of woodland. They were building a shelter reached by a small bridge that could be used by primary school students as a base for environmental studies. The students were enabled to exercise considerable personal initiative and responsibility. They also were able to work co-operatively in teams to achieve a common goal. The very thoughtful and innovative teaching approaches used helped a group of students to achieve things that they never thought possible. This raised their self-confidence enormously and also helped to rectify the emotional and behavioural problems that some students were currently encountering in school. In the science lesson, the teacher enabled students to see how to reduce sources of error in experiments by using a range of well designed resources. Thanks to the teacher's enthusiastic and accurate delivery, students gained a great deal of insight into a difficult concept. They knew clearly what their learning targets were and what they had to do to achieve them. The teacher's relationship with the class was sufficiently good to enable students to ask tentative comprehension questions without a fear of being wrong.
30. Examples of good teaching were also seen in citizenship, design and technology, mathematics and English. The main strengths and areas for further improvement in the quality of teaching in Years 10 and 11 are comparable to those for Years 7 to 9 outlined above.

#### *The quality of teaching in Years 12 and 13*

31. The overall quality of teaching in Years 12 and 13 in the sample of 43 lessons seen was very good or excellent in a fifth, good in three fifths and satisfactory in a fifth of cases. In no instance was the quality of teaching judged to be unsatisfactory. Excellent teaching was seen in a physical education lesson and very good teaching in lessons in biology, drama, English, French and German. A fuller commentary on the quality of teaching in Years 12 and 13 is provided in the sixth form annex.

*A summary of the main factors that have led to improvements in the quality of teaching from 1996 to 2002*

32. In 1996 inspectors found the quality of teaching to be satisfactory or better in 88% of lessons. In 2002 inspectors found teaching to be satisfactory or better in all but one of the lessons sampled. In 1996 just over 50% of the teaching seen was judged to be good or better. That figure has risen to approximately 70% in 2002. In 1996 unsatisfactory teaching appeared sporadically in most subjects, but now it is very uncommon. The main factors that have led to this improvement include:
- a much greater understanding amongst teachers of the ways in which students learn effectively;
  - improved subject and lesson planning;
  - the impact of an effective staff appraisal programme (which was a weakness at the time of the last inspection, but which is now a considerable strength);
  - a systematic programme of lesson observation undertaken by senior and some middle managers;
  - the enquiries into the performance of subject teams initiated by governors;
  - the greater use of performance data to interpret the underlying reasons for the patterns of examination and test results;
  - the impact of teachers' professional development activities, including attending courses run by examination boards and involvement in marking public examinations;
  - the impact of being a designated Training School which has greatly increased teachers' understanding of contemporary thinking about good teaching and learning strategies;
  - very effective help from high quality support staff;
  - the designation of the school as a centre of excellence for the training of new teachers which has invigorated many teachers who act as tutors and mentors;
  - the impact of newly appointed members of staff who have brought with them energy and new ideas from other schools.
33. Very effective leadership from the headteacher and senior managers has driven these improvements forward. This has been done through the production of clear policies and guidelines, the appointment of capable practitioners and an insistence on the use of better teaching and learning strategies. Being a Training School has required all teachers to discuss and demonstrate good teaching approaches. Senior managers have motivated and empowered subject leaders to focus directly on points of action that will improve the quality of teaching within their subject area.
34. There is scope for the quality of teaching to keep on rising. The main factors identified by inspectors for this to occur are:
- a greater emphasis on helping students to set and reach ambitious personal learning targets, with more consistency across all subjects and years;
  - creating a greater level of staff expertise in using ICT within subject lessons, coupled with a much increased provision of computers and software;
  - enabling the areas of good practice that already exist within the school to be more widely shared;
  - encouraging students to contribute more and to be more active in some lessons.

**Students behave and work well and personal relationships are very good throughout the school.**

35. In the previous inspection report of 1996 it was stated that:
- Most students had good attitudes to learning: they worked hard, listened carefully and concentrated well.
  - A small minority of students misbehaved, but teachers used effective strategies to deal with this.
  - Overall this was an orderly and purposeful school.
  - Students responded well to the many opportunities for personal development provided for them.
  - Many students made a strong contribution to the life of the school.
36. The strengths outlined above for 1996 are equally true in 2002. The school remains very orderly and overall standards of behaviour are very good. In the questionnaire used in this inspection, 91% of parents who replied said that they were pleased with the standards of behaviour and dress within the school. Students are polite and respectful. Throughout the school, relationships are very good, between students themselves and also with their teachers. The relatively few students from minority ethnic groups (including students of African Caribbean, South American, Scandinavian and Vietnamese ethnicity) and students from Travelling families are very well integrated with other students. Sometimes their cultural values may in practice be slightly under-emphasised in the life of the school. There is scope for their values and traditions to be used more to enrich the cultural life of the school through displays and discussion.
37. The systems within the school for supporting good behaviour are very effective. The arrangements for tackling bullying work very well on the relatively few occasions when they are needed. There are still a few students who can exhibit behavioural problems. Some of these receive specific advice about such matters as anger management and working with others. A “bridge club” is operated with the purpose of helping students with challenging behaviour to make a smooth transition from their primary schools into Year 7. Some students who find it hard to concentrate for long periods or to work on their own are given support within a homework club. Some students in Years 10 and 11 who are known to benefit from a more practical approach to learning are given the opportunity to take part in a “flexible curriculum” option that includes pre-vocational elements and college-based work experience. This type of work has greatly increased their confidence and sense of responsibility, and has given them different ways of achieving. Relatively few students are excluded and there are instances of the school taking in and successfully managing students who have been excluded from other schools.
38. Punctuality to lessons is very good. Students’ attendance rates declined gradually from 1996 to 2001, but since then have begun to rise. The reason for this upturn is mainly because of an increased emphasis on checking and following up absences, and persuading parents not to condone absence that is not justified.

39. The many strengths outlined above are the result of very capable leadership by the headteacher, senior managers and heads of year. A great deal of inspired and thoughtful work has been done to ensure that these high standards have been reached and are routinely maintained.

**Students are supported very well by a very good pastoral system.**

40. In the previous inspection of 1996, it was reported that:
- There was a strong and very effective pastoral system that had a very beneficial impact on standards and progress.
  - Students were very well known and supported.
  - The arrangements for students transferring from Years 6 to 7 were excellent.
  - Good support was given to students transferring from Years 9 to 10 and from Years 11 to 12.
41. These strengths have also been maintained into 2002.
42. The child protection arrangements are very good. Health and safety arrangements are well designed and are effective. Systematic risk assessment exercises are undertaken, linked to swift corrective action following the identification of any causes for concern.
43. The great majority (97%) of parents who made their views known to inspectors considered that the school expects their child to work hard and to achieve his or her best; and 91% of parents said that the school is helping their child to become mature and responsible. These are very high approval ratings for the teaching and the standard of pastoral care. The great majority of students value the ways in which they can obtain helpful advice from their form tutor. In many forms there is an assistant tutor also. This helpful arrangement increases the length of time available for student-teacher discussions about personal issues.
44. The heads of year are influential middle managers who play a pivotal position in ensuring good behaviour and attendance, and also in helping students with their personal development. The quality of the careers advice in Years 10 and 11 is good. Students benefit from having access to a well-equipped careers room. Students also benefit from a well-organised programme of work experience that successfully matches the majority of students to a relevant placement. An area for further improvement is to ensure that form tutors and year heads have a clearer overview of the patterns of progress that students in their care are making across all of the subjects that they are studying. This would help them to offer more precise guidance at an early stage about how to overcome any factors that may be leading to under-achievement.
45. The programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE) has been recently revised and improved. It is now very well designed and taught. Very good use is made of external speakers and agencies, such as a counsellor and the community policeman. Students also experience a relevant and valuable programme of citizenship education. For example, in one Year 10 citizenship lesson sampled by inspectors, the class were actively simulating the work of magistrates in deciding the guilt of a person accused of theft, and were deciding on

the most appropriate penalties, given differing disclosures about the personal circumstances of the accused. This exercise greatly improved students' awareness of how the justice system worked.

46. The school works hard to ensure that students from all social, economic and ethnic circumstances are fully integrated into the life of the school. The students from Travelling families are especially well cared for. They receive specific support and guidance from an advisory teacher who is also a governor of the school. A third of the students from Travelling families also receive additional support for their special educational needs. A much higher proportion of these students remain at school into Year 10 than is usually the case. In recent years two students from Travelling families have gained some GCSE results and have continued into post-16 education. One student is currently receiving tuition at home for GCSE examinations and uses some of the facilities of the school. The work undertaken with students from Travelling families in the school is regarded by Oxfordshire local education authority (LEA) to be a model of good practice.
47. The school also has been very successful in supporting a small number of students from minority ethnic groups. Some of these students have come from overseas to study in Britain and in some cases are a year older than other students in their lessons. They are made to feel very welcome and are very well integrated into the life of the school.
48. Students who are gifted and talented usually achieve the highest grades at GCSE and A-level. They are suitably challenged in the majority of lessons, especially from Year 9 onwards. There is scope for more extension activities to be provided for them, especially in Years 7 and 8. Students who benefit from a more practical and vocational curriculum are well provided for in Years 10 and 11. In some instances, their learning needs could be more directly addressed in Years 7 to 9. The majority of students have access to a personal computer at home and are encouraged to use it for homework. The school seeks to offer a partial compensation to other students by making the ICT rooms available for students to use after school. A "late bus" is provided on some evenings to enable students who live some distance away from the school to get home after participating in a wide range of "out-of-hours" learning and recreational activities.

**The curriculum is imaginatively designed to meet the needs of all learners in Years 10 and 11.**

49. The curriculum in Years 7 to 11 suitably contains all of the required subjects for appropriate lengths of time. It is a balanced curriculum that is accurately timetabled in a ten-day sequence. By using six periods each day, each of fifty minutes duration, it is possible to be very flexible within a sixty-period timetable.
50. There are particular strengths in the curriculum provision for Years 10 and 11. In these two years all students have a period each week for religious education and another one for development of skills in ICT. Both of these subjects are taught using a GCSE short-course syllabus and many students are successfully entered for examinations. This overcomes a difficulty that many schools experience of providing these two subjects for all students. All

students follow a core curriculum for 50% of the week. This includes English, mathematics, a single science, PSHE, religious education, ICT and physical education. This ensures that all students receive a full entitlement to key elements of the curriculum. There are then six option columns from which students can select. There is a work-related course (which includes aspects of humanities and languages) that replaces the first three option choices. Vocational GCSEs are offered for business, art and design, and manufacturing. Students have benefited greatly from having such a wide and flexible choice. This total curriculum package is a very imaginative solution to a difficult problem of meeting a diverse range of needs and is a model of good practice. Students who intend to proceed into the sixth form are prepared well for their AS-level and vocational courses in Year 11.

51. The pre-vocational work-related course is a valuable innovation. Approximately sixteen students from each of the two year groups are selected by teachers (with appropriate consultation with students and their parents) for a course which includes the core subjects of the National Curriculum plus opportunities for work-related learning. The students selected for this course are young people who, their teachers consider, would experience problems in following a learning programme that contains a full range of GCSE subjects. They have opportunities to attend sessions in a college of further education, have extended work placements and to participate in team-building exercises. One such exercise has been to build a wooden shelter in a forest for students in partner primary schools to use. These students are benefiting very considerably from this programme by improving their motivation, interest and self-esteem. Some elements of the course are successfully accredited through the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) scheme.

### **Parents and students are very satisfied with the work and achievements of the school.**

52. Parents are very supportive of the ethos and aims of the school. The great majority of parents consider that the school has a good reputation and that it is continuing to improve. Whilst there are a number of things that could be better still, parents consider this to be a good school and are pleased that their children attend it. Eighty-two per cent of parents who responded to the inspectors' questionnaire said that they were kept well informed about how their child or children were getting on. Ninety-four per cent of parents felt comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem and 84% of parents considered that the school worked closely with them. These are high figures and reflect well on the quality of leadership, management and teaching within the school. They also reflect the friendly and welcoming approach that the support staff provide when talking to parents on the telephone or at the reception desk.
53. The parents' meeting held just before the inspection began was characterised by high levels of satisfaction with the way that the school was performing. Parents were willing to offer constructive suggestions for further improvement, but made it clear that these suggestions were to 'make a good school even better'. Parents were very pleased with the test and examination results, the standards of behaviour, the work of teachers and the way in which the school was led. Some would have liked to see more able students being challenged further, especially in mixed ability classes in Years 7 and 8. Many parents were keen to support their children's learning at home. To help them do this better, they would like to

have more information about the syllabuses and schemes of work that their children were following. They would also appreciate more information about the progress that their children were making, especially in Years 7 to 10. These are very constructive comments which the inspectors endorsed and which the governors have agreed to follow up.

**The leadership and management of school improvement are good.**

54. The 1996 inspection report contained a number of significant strengths in the quality of leadership and management. These included:
- a clear and decisive leadership and vision provided by the headteacher and governors;
  - an effective committee structure in place to oversee the budget and policy development;
  - good systems in place for monitoring the quality of the teaching and the effectiveness of the curriculum;
  - an appropriate division of resources between the 11-16 and 16-19 parts of the school;
  - good day-to-day management.
55. All of these strengths have been maintained in 2002, and in some cases have been improved upon further.
56. Some additional strengths are now evident also. These include:
- effective appraisal arrangements for teachers;
  - good leadership of subjects and of pastoral arrangements;
  - good procedures for managing the existing buildings and grounds;
  - 93% of the parents who replied to the questionnaire considering that the school is well led and managed;
  - improving arrangements for evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the school.
57. There are many indications that the school, which was judged to be a good school in 1996, has moved on considerably since then. Results have improved in all external tests and examinations since 1996. The school exceeded its targets and obtained its best ever GCSE results in 2002 and achieved some outstanding A-level results in 2001. The curriculum, especially in Years 10 and 11, has been successfully adapted to meet a much wider range of learning needs and styles. This includes a core curriculum that enables all major National Curriculum requirements to be met. A flexible range of options enables students to prepare well for either post-16 education or the world of work. Religious education now meets legal requirements in Years 7 to 11. An improved range of choices of A-level sixth form subjects is now available. Increasing numbers of students are attending the school, some from homes that are located nearer to other secondary schools. All of these strengths have been brought about by very effective leadership and management.
58. The quality of teaching has risen since 1996, particularly in terms of an increased proportion of inspected lessons where it is good and an almost total elimination of instances where it is unsatisfactory. Far better arrangements for staff appraisal and the internal evaluation of the school's strengths and weaknesses are now operating. Better procedures for supporting students with special educational needs are now in place. These now meet statutory requirements and enable most students with identified learning difficulties to make good

progress. Recently there has been a greatly increased expenditure on learning resources to make up for a shortfall in recent years. A very impressive joint-use leisure centre has recently been opened, which greatly improves the provision for physical education. The school is now a centre of excellence for training new teachers. It received an Achievement Award for improving examination and test results in 2001. Again, these important successes are linked to capable and effective leadership by senior and middle managers and by the governors.

59. The headteacher continues to provide high quality leadership. This has been a very important factor in securing this impressive list of improvements. He has a very clear understanding of the strengths and future development needs of the school, which he communicates well to members of staff and governors. He has secured the full respect of parents, members of staff and governors for his approach to school improvement. The headteacher's clarity of vision has enabled governors and senior managers to be able to see how their own work contributes to the key priorities for the school as a whole. There is, however, further work to be done to ensure that different teams co-operate more fully with each other to achieve the common aims of the school and share their expertise about good practice more readily. (An example would be in improving approaches to setting individual learning targets for students and monitoring their progress towards achieving them). The school is not complacent, nor self-satisfied with its current levels of success.
60. The governing body contains people with a wide range of very valuable expertise, which they use to good advantage. Governors are very good at strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation and exemplify the concept of "critical friends" extremely well. They are fully aware of the principles of best value and how they could be applied (such as in the contexts of staff appointments, examination results, deployment of support staff, asset management, curriculum design, catering contracts and the sixth form provision). Governors are prepared to hold the staff to account for the performance of students and regularly receive presentations from subject leaders. They have a very comprehensive overview of the strengths and development needs of the school and of the rationale for target setting.
61. The members of the senior management team provide a powerful force for school improvement. Their skills and expertise on such aspects as professional development, timetabling, curriculum design, data analysis, asset management and pastoral care are considerable. The members of the senior management team complement each other well. One member of the senior management team is a seconded middle manager. This has succeeded in bringing new ideas into the team and in supporting the career development of the seconded person. Each member of the senior management team is attached to several subject teams to offer guidance and support and to monitor improvements. This helps the flow of information between the senior management team and departments and year teams considerably. The flow of information between subject departments is, as yet, not nearly so strong. As a consequence subject teams sometimes work in isolation on improvement projects and do not share ideas freely enough with other teams.
62. The leadership and management of most subject departments are good. Schemes of work are detailed and enable teachers to meet syllabus and course requirements well. Since the



last inspection, subject leaders have played an important part in raising the quality of teaching in their subjects and in using assessment data more productively to pinpoint the impact of successful strategies and any pockets of underachievement that need to be tackled. Support staff are well used and provide extremely valuable help to teachers and students as a consequence. For example, in science, laboratory technicians enable teachers to gain access to the full range of resources needed for practical work.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

### **Arrangements for monitoring and assessing the progress students make towards individual learning targets.**

63. Subject departments are at very different stages of using individual learning targets for students in Years 7 to 9. In some cases, as in design and technology, the syllabus for each unit of work is divided into steps, with clear definitions of what students have to do to reach different levels at each step. Students are provided with this information and are given a clear indication of how well they are doing at each stage on the way. In some other subjects, by contrast, students are given marks or letters that signify their effort and attainment, but these are not always related to clear performance criteria. In general, students know whether they are making good progress or not, but they receive this information in different ways and with differing degrees of precision between subjects.
64. The previous inspection report said that marking ranged from good to unsatisfactory and that there were pockets of very good practice but an overall lack of consistency. The position in 2002 is that the overall quality of marking in all year groups has improved, but the approaches adopted still lack consistency across the school. For example, different systems of marking and grading work are in use in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9. In general work is marked frequently with helpful, encouraging comments. However, many of these comments do not indicate clearly enough the standard being attained and whether the work shows if students are on track towards meeting their target levels or grades. When talking to students about their work, especially in Years 7 to 10, inspectors found that in some subjects students were unsure about the level that they were currently working at and what more they had to do to reach their learning targets. For example, some Year 9 students who said that they were working at Level 5 found it hard to locate information which told them what that meant, or what more they had to do to reach Level 6.
65. Whilst some schemes of work and lesson plans show clearly what students of differing ability will be expected to achieve at the end of each unit, this is not universally the case. This information is not always accessible to students and their parents. At the parents' meeting held before the inspection, several parents said that they would like to receive more information about the work that their children would be doing term by term so that they could support them at home. Some parents of students in Year 8 regretted that the progress reports and the consultative evening took place in the summer term. They said that they would like to know how well their children were doing in the two terms before then.

66. Some parents of students in Years 7 and 8 also expressed concern that, in some instances, the specific learning needs of the full range of ability of students within mixed ability classes may not always be met. Some lessons seen in Years 7 and 8 included activities that challenged high, middle and lower ability students in different ways most successfully. However, in other lessons sampled, all students proceeded at the same pace from the same starting point regardless of their individual capabilities. The solution to all of these issues may be connected through publishing to parents and students schemes of work with clearly defined levels of attainment, helping students to set an appropriate target levels or grades and informing them whether they are on track towards meeting them.
67. Different subject departments use a wide variety and styles of identifying and recording students' progress and attainment. For example, in Years 7 to 9 the English, mathematics and science departments mark and grade students' work differently. This makes it hard for form tutors and heads of year to compile a secure record of students' performance patterns across all subjects in order to advise students about their learning. The school has investigated efficient and diagnostic methods of plotting students' overall progress and progress in subjects for several years. Different approaches have been tried in different subject departments. There is now a need to draw up a more consistent whole-school approach to marking, assessment and individual target setting that uses the best approaches currently in use.

#### **The resources for information and communication technology (ICT).**

68. In the previous inspection report, it was stated that the ICT provision was insufficient to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. The position has improved since then, but the investment in new technology has not kept pace with national developments. The basic requirements of the National Curriculum for ICT are now largely met in the work done in specialist ICT lessons but not within the ICT work required in many of the other subjects taught. Overall the number, range and accessibility of ICT equipment and software are still inadequate to meet the full requirements of the school's curriculum. Presently the ratio of computers to students is 1:13. This is a very low figure compared with the majority of secondary schools. The national average figure is 1:8. Most computers are located within three specialist ICT rooms or in a section of the library. The largest room has 30 computers, the two other ICT rooms have 14 in each room and the library has 10. Very appropriately, all students receive timetabled ICT lessons in these rooms twice every fortnight. This has the effect, however, of making it hard for students to use these facilities during other periods in the school day. There are plans to convert two other rooms into specialist ICT suites with a combined total of 53 additional machines. This would make a valuable and much needed improvement.
69. Access to the Internet, CD-ROMs and the school intranet within subject teaching areas other than ICT hardly exists. It is therefore difficult for new technology to be used as an integral part of subject lessons by the teacher. Examples of students leaving a lesson to use a computer in the library were seen, but not of ICT being used as a central part of the lesson for all students. There are no electronic whiteboards in use outside the ICT rooms and no

laptop computers that can be used by students in subject lessons. The facilities for data-logging, control technology and computer-aided design and manufacture are very poor.

70. Some students, particularly those in the sixth form, prefer to use their own computers at home which are more powerful than those readily available in school and which can access the Internet. This puts those students who do not have such facilities at home at some disadvantage, although this is partially compensated for by opening up the ICT rooms for independent study after school. A “late bus” is provided on two evenings each week to take students home if they rely on a school bus for transport.
71. Most teachers are in the course of completing ICT training funded by the New Opportunities Fund. The elements of this training programme that were provided by external trainers were not judged by the school to be good enough. As part of its ‘best value’ review, the school elected to use experts from within the staff for the rest of the training. Whilst most teachers are knowledgeable about how they could use ICT to enrich their teaching, many are frustrated by the lack of provision to enable them to do so. Some parents also expressed concern about the relative lack of access to new technology that their children have.
72. A newly appointed ICT co-ordinator is now in post. That person has already recognised all of the above deficiencies and has begun to draw up an ambitious action plan to deal with the problems. This is confirmed in the current school development plan. The action to be taken will require a considerable amount of financial commitment to bring the school up to the normal level of provision expected of a secondary school with a sixth form in 2002.

### **The accommodation for design and technology and for science.**

73. The current accommodation for design and technology is unsuitable for the needs of the curriculum. Despite good teaching and careful course planning, the constraints of the buildings and equipment limit what it is possible for students to do. In particular it prevents them from being able to use ICT as required within the National Curriculum for their work involving designing, manufacturing, modelling, finishing, controlling and research. The range of specialist rooms is limited and space for design work is cramped. Specialist resources for design work cannot be stored easily, neither can students’ work. There is no equipment for computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing (CAD/CAM). The personal computers in the resistant materials area are old, insufficient in number, are not networked and are unable to run modern design programs. There are no ICT facilities at all in the textiles area. There is no dedicated area for sixth form work.
74. In the resistant materials teaching area, the rooms are cramped when a full class is working on practical assignments. The work benches are small and have to be used both for practical and design work. There is no dedicated clean area for graphics work. As a consequence, students have to do their graphics work in a dusty and noisy environment. Again, there are no ICT facilities for graphics.

75. Some of the science laboratories have not been refurbished for thirty years and contain benches, services and equipment that are not in line with contemporary standards. This makes it hard for teachers and students to undertake investigative and experimental work within a convenient, modern environment.

**The sharing of good practice between subject teams and also between subject and pastoral teams.**

76. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good across the school. There are examples of good practice in all subject departments. A lot of innovative work is taking place within different subject teams. This includes work on syllabus design, raising the attainment of boys, supporting students with special educational needs, developing thinking skills and challenging more able students. Many subject teams have produced incisive plans for the development of their subject that are based on self-review findings and the analysis of past examination and test results. These plans have been produced in response to a clear specification defined by senior managers. Inspectors considered that the development plan for the modern foreign languages department showed particular strengths and was a model of good practice.
77. It is evident that some departments are unaware of how other departments are interpreting similar whole-school policies and improvement priorities. For example, good practice in marking and assessment in the history and design and technology departments is not compared between heads of department. Subject departments have different approaches to setting, banding and mixed ability teaching. The advantages and drawbacks of these different approaches are not fully compared between subject teams. Teachers undertake relatively little investigation into how the same students respond to different teaching approaches in other subjects. For example, in geography in Years 10 and 11 there are some very effective strategies in place to raise the attainment of middle ability boys which provide a good example for some other subjects to follow.
78. The learning support department provides valuable and thoughtful assistance for students with identified special educational needs through small group tuition and in-class mentoring. Their expertise in dealing successfully with this group of students is not shared sufficiently with subject teachers. The learning support and English departments sometimes work independently of each other in developing literacy strategies for students working below Level 4. Other subject departments would welcome additional advice from the learning support team about successful ways of meeting the specific learning requirements of students who experience difficulties with the use of their literacy and numeracy skills.
79. Teachers in Chipping Norton School work very hard and achieve a great deal of success with their students. Sometimes their workload is increased by replicating documents, resources and ideas that have already been produced elsewhere in the school. There are examples of teaching and learning approaches within the school that can serve as very good case studies for other teachers to draw from. The wider use of ICT for recording information would assist in the dissemination of good practice.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

80. This is a good and improving school with many important strengths. Some features of the school are very good. The staff and governors are strongly committed to the continuing improvement of the school. In order to do this, they should:

- (1) **continue to improve arrangements for monitoring and assessing the progress that students make towards individual learning targets** by ensuring that:
  - in all subjects (especially in Years 7 to 10) students are helped to set their own learning targets and understand how well they are progressing towards achieving them;
  - the marking of work uses similar criteria and grading systems across all subjects, so that students, parents and form tutors can gain an accurate overview of attainment patterns and trends;
  - students of all abilities are always individually challenged, especially in mixed ability classes.

*(see paragraphs 6, 9, 12, 14, 24, 25, 26, 30, 34, 44, 63-67, 107, 116, 117)*
  
- (2) **increase the number and range of information and communication technology (ICT) resources available for students to use**, especially by providing
  - more access to ICT within subject departments and private study areas;
  - access to modern design, manufacturing, graphics, data processing and other specialised applications of new technology as required to meet the full requirements of the National Curriculum and examination syllabuses.

*(see paragraphs 13, 25, 34, 68-74, 112, 123)*
  
- (3) **improve the accommodation for design and technology and for science**, so as to enable the full requirements of the National Curriculum and the examination syllabuses to be taught without constraint.

*(see paragraphs 73-75, 139, 145, 148, 151)*
  
- (4) **ensure the increased sharing of good practice between subject teams and also between subject and pastoral teams**, especially with regard to
  - effective approaches of raising the attainment of specific groups of students (such as some middle ability boys);
  - expertise about how to respond to the specific needs of students with learning or behavioural difficulties;
  - publicising more widely amongst staff examples of successful teaching approaches that exist within the school.

*(see paragraphs 6, 12, 21-34, 61, 76-79, 124, 146)*

## Sixth form

81. In order to improve this good sixth form further, governors, senior managers and members of staff should:

- (5) **improve sixth form accommodation for independent study;**  
*(see paragraphs 94, 123, 169)*
- (6) **improve the use of ICT in lessons** by increasing the resources that can be used to support learning within subject contexts;  
*(see paragraphs 112, 123, 139, 146, 148, 151, 157, 168, 177, 191)*
- (7) **establish consistent strategies to ensure that, as well as receiving good feedback about the level at which they are working, students are told how to improve to the next level.**  
*(see paragraphs 107, 116, 117, 150, 157, 176, 183, 190)*

*[Note that paragraph references are to examples of good practice as well as to areas for improvement]*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### *Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection*

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	36
	Sixth form	43
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		55

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 – 11</b>							
Number	1	11	11	12	1	0	0
Percentage	3	31	31	33	3	0	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	1	10	25	7	0	0	0
Percentage	2	23	58	16	0	0	0

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

### *Information about the school's students*

<b>Students on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	922	160
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	51	2

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y12	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	19	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	111	9

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	17





**Student mobility in the last school year**

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	7

**Attendance****Authorised absence**

	%
School data	7.7
National comparative data	8.1

**Unauthorised absence**

	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	90	95	185

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	61	61	64
	Girls	82	69	67
	Total	143	130	131
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (80)	70 (78)	71 (73)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	47 (46)	47 (52)	42 (40)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	48	66	62
	Girls	72	61	68
	Total	120	137	130
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	65 (59)	74 (77)	70 (69)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	27 (30)	51 (52)	38 (38)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

*Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year (i.e. 2000).*

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	88	88	176

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	35	73	85
	Girls	59	84	86
	Total	94	157	171
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	53 (49)	89 (87)	97 (96)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year (i.e. 2000).

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	44.0
	National	39.0

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	21	32	53
	Average point score per candidate	19.5 (11.9)	19.5 (14.4)	19.5 (13.6)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.1)	18.0 (18.0)	17.5 (17.6)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	21	32	53	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	19.5	19.5	19.5	0	0	0
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

*Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year (i.e. 2000).*

<b>International Baccalaureate</b>		<b>Number</b>	<b>% success rate</b>
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those students who achieved all they studied	School	0	0
	National		81

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

<b>Categories used in the Annual School Census</b>	<b>No of students on roll</b>	<b>Number of fixed period exclusions</b>	<b>Number of permanent exclusions</b>
White – British	1053	63	1
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	8	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2	0	0
Black or Black British – African	4	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	11	4	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

*The table refers to students of compulsory school age only. It gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of students excluded.*

### ***Teachers and classes***

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	62.97
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.5

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Year 11**

Total number of education support staff	16
Total aggregate hours worked per week	351

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Year 11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.5%
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 2	N/A
Key Stage 3	23.7
Key Stage 4	22.7

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	31
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	32

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

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	2,914,726
Total expenditure	2,878,607
Expenditure per student	2,739
Balance brought forward from previous year	140,883
Balance carried forward to next year	177,002

## ***Results of the survey of parents and carers***

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1082
Number of questionnaires returned	297

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	42	51	5	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	48	45	3	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	31	60	5	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	53	13	2	5
The teaching is good.	33	61	1	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	44	10	2	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	35	3	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	37	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	32	51	12	0	4
The school is well led and managed.	55	38	1	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	45	4	1	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	43	40	8	1	8

### **Summary of parents' and carers' responses**

82. These responses show very high levels of parental satisfaction with the work of the school. Of particular significance is the very strong approval of the standards of attainment, the behaviour of the students, the high expectations, the curriculum provision and the quality of leadership of the school. Within this overall pattern of approval, a minority of parents would welcome further improvements to the reporting arrangements for Year 8 and the types of

homework set, particularly for students in Years 7 to 9. Some parents would also welcome more information on the schemes of work that their children are following so that they can provide additional support for learning at home.

### **Other issues raised by parents**

83. At the meeting for parents held before the week of the inspection, some of the 57 parents present expressed the wish for inspectors to investigate whether students of all ability levels were being suitably challenged in mixed ability classes, especially in Years 7 and 8. Inspectors concluded that in about half of the mixed ability lessons sampled the teachers had made suitable arrangements for extending the more able students whilst also supporting those who found the lesson content difficult. In the remaining lessons there was a tendency to teach all students at the same pace and in the same way and to allow students of differing abilities to respond at different levels. In general, this gave some opportunities for able, but less industrious students to achieve to a satisfactory, but not outstanding level.



## **PART D: THE SIXTH FORM**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and students' achievements**

84. Sixth formers are offered a choice of courses in Years 12 based upon their GCSE point scores. All students wishing to enter the sixth form are considered, interviewed and guided to appropriate courses. In practice, the school is successful in recruiting most of the Year 11 students who gained five or more GCSEs at grades A\* to C into the sixth form. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is above the national average level. Students with special educational needs are admitted to the sixth form. Their specific learning needs are suitably met.
85. The standard of attainment of Year 13 students in A-level examinations has improved since the previous inspection in 1996 and was well above the average for all schools in 2001. Results were the second highest in Oxfordshire LEA in 2001. The pass rate increased from 91% to 95% and average points score per student from 16.6 to 19.5 between 1996 and 2001. The overall pass rate for A-level increased in 2002 and, though average points score fell slightly, the school met its challenging target for points scored per subject. The standard achieved by Year 12 students in the new AS-level examination was also high in 2001, the first year of the new examination. Results fell slightly in 2002 as a result of under-performance in some students' fourth subject and a few students who did not achieve the A grades that were predicted. Average points score fell from 38.9 to 35.3, the pass rate from 96% to 90% and the proportion of A and B grades from 37% to 32%. Relatively few students follow one-year intermediate vocational courses. The percentage of candidates achieving the qualification in these courses in 2001 was above the national average and improved in 2002, when all candidates achieved the qualification.
86. The overall standard of attainment of students in A-level examinations in each year has been at or above the national average from 1996 to 2001. Three quarters of grades were A, B or C in 2001 and 2002, and although A grades were down in 2002, five candidates achieved grade As in three or four subjects. The school is successful in attracting similar numbers of male and female students. In 2001 male students gained similarly high average total point scores to female students. Nationally female students do better than males. Most students who achieved only modest grades at AS-level in the summer of 2001 went on to achieve better A-level results in the summer of 2002.
87. In 2001 the A-level results were well above the national average in art and design, biology, business education, design and technology, mathematics, drama, physics and physical education; above the average in English and history and in line with the national average in chemistry and geography. Standards in business education, design and technology and mathematics were especially high. Over 90% of students reached a grade E or above in all subjects except drama, history and physics. All students gained a grade A or B in art and design, French, design and technology and German.

88. The great majority of Year 12 and Year 13 students are making progress that is at least as substantial as would typically be expected given their GCSE results. Many are making better than this prediction of progress and are aiming for ambitious personal learning targets. Between 1999 and 2002 over 80% of students performed in line with or better than these predictions based on their GCSE points scores. These predictions were based upon statistical data provided by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) that relates to national patterns of progress from GCSE to A-level. Over half of all students performed better than typically expected, representing very good 'value added' in the sixth form.
89. The factors that have been responsible for this recent improvement in performance include higher teacher and student expectations of success, improved teaching approaches and a stronger emphasis on independent learning. Members of staff have also benefited from training for teaching sixth form courses and from whole-school initiatives on raising the quality of teaching to improve standards of attainment. Other contributory factors include high attendance rates and a high proportion of students following courses that were their first choice preferences. The experience of some staff in examining at A and AS-level is also an advantage in preparing students for examinations.
90. The school has opted to teach key skills as part of Year 12 personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons in the context of topics such as the world of work or healthy living. Key skills are not externally assessed and accredited, but the school internally assesses students at Levels 2 to 3 and reports this in their references for university. A number of students are receiving tuition to help them gain a GCSE C grade in mathematics, English or science as part of their Year 12 course. The proportion of these students who achieved passes at grades A\* to C compared well with results nationally.
91. Numeracy skills are sufficiently well developed to enable students to complete assignments in the context of the subjects where the application of these skills is needed. Literacy skills are generally satisfactory, though a weakness in spelling persists from Years 10 and 11. ICT is not used enough within subjects, particularly in design and technology and art and design, where students' progress and attainment are adversely affected by the absence of suitable equipment.
92. The majority of students do well compared with their prior attainment in most subjects. A high (and much greater than average) proportion of students stay on to complete their courses. Students of minority ethnic background achieve equally as well as other students. This is also true for the small number of students with identified special educational needs. This reflects highly on the ways in which students' specific learning needs are recognised and met, and on the way in which all students are fully integrated into sixth form life. The relative performance of male and female students was equally good in 2001. This contrasts favourably with the national picture where female students are performing better than male students. It also contrasts with a gender difference in the GCSE results of students when they entered the sixth form.

## **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

93. Students' attitudes and values are very good. They quickly develop into mature and responsible young adults. This is a very friendly sixth form. Relationships between students and with their teachers are excellent. Students behave very well and are fine role models for students in the main school. Students invariably have very positive attitudes to their learning, and are willing to work independently. Students who have joined Year 12 from other schools commented very favourably about the way in which they had quickly become accepted within the common room and in lessons. Some students are trained as mentors to younger students who require support. Many students participate in charitable work. There is an active sixth form council that is influential as a means of securing improvements to the sixth form provision. Student representatives attend and give brief reports to governors' meetings where their contribution is very valued. Students have also been involved in staff selection.
94. The great majority of students are very keen to succeed and work hard. They are attentive and very co-operative in lessons and most complete essays and assignments on time. Many students make good use of the time made available to them for independent study during the working day, although the places available for this study to happen are inadequate for students' needs. Some students work in spare rooms or in study spaces within subject areas. Some use a rather cramped converted corridor. In general, students would benefit from greater access to ICT facilities for research, designing and writing during their "private study" time.
95. Students are highly successful in gaining places on local and national residential courses, including the Eton College pre-university course and have other valuable opportunities to experience higher education.
96. The attendance rate of Year 12 students is good, and that of Year 13 students is satisfactory. Between September 2001 and May 2002 the overall attendance rate was 94% for Year 12 and 90% for Year 13. One Year 12 tutor group achieved a figure of 96% during this period, which is very high. The school's systems for recording attendance fulfil statutory requirements and are very rigorous. Students are punctual for their lessons and remain on site throughout the working day.
97. The very positive attitudes that students have, the friendly and supportive ethos of the sixth form and the high levels of attendance and punctuality all contribute significantly to the high standards of attainment and the good quality of learning.

## **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

98. The overall quality of teaching in the sixth form is good. It has not been possible to assess improvements in teaching within the sixth form since the previous inspection, because of a lack of specific information from 1996. However, the overall quality of teaching in the whole school has improved significantly between 1996 and 2002. Recent initiatives to enhance professional development opportunities for teachers, linked to performance

management and better self-review, have been important contributory factors to this improving picture. In almost two thirds of the 34 lessons seen, the quality of teaching was good. Of the remaining lessons, half were very good or excellent the other half were satisfactory. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen.

99. The great majority of students consider that they are taught well and are challenged to do their best. They also consider that they are enthusiastically encouraged to study and research topics independently, using the library and the available ICT resources of the school. Most students think that their work is thoroughly assessed and so can see how to improve their performance further. However, the ways in which this is done and the extent to which advice is linked to syllabus requirements and grade criteria varies considerably between subjects. Teachers are regarded as being friendly and accessible by students, especially if they experience difficulties with their work. More able students are often given scope to exercise their thinking and reasoning skills to a high level. Weaker students are frequently given appropriate support to ensure that they reach at least pass standard in their courses.
100. The lessons where teaching was very good or excellent were characterised by:
- the ways in which the teachers' high level of knowledge and understanding enhanced explanations;
  - the ways in which individual students' learning needs were taken into consideration;
  - the opportunities provided for demanding and creative thinking;
  - the ways in which students were enabled to undertake investigative enquiry work;
  - the setting of ambitious learning objectives;
  - the frequent checking of students' progress towards their personal learning objectives.
101. In such lessons students of all ability levels made very good progress. Students have well developed study skills and very good study habits. They are able to debate and discuss in a very mature way with each other and their teachers. These exchanges are usually accompanied by good humour. Much of work is related very well to examination criteria, and the examining experience of several staff is a valuable asset in this respect. There are many examples of good practice, some of which are illustrated in the following paragraphs.
102. In an excellent Year 13 A-level physical education lesson on Weiner's Model of attributional theory in the context of squash games, planning was detailed, objectives were clear and demanding and students were well briefed. The lesson was very well paced as a result of interim monitoring of progress and time checks by the teacher. Relationships were excellent and discussion was highly focused on evaluation criteria by the skilful guidance of the teacher. Using cards to focus comments and to build up a grid of criteria worked extremely well to produce the categorisation underpinning the theory of attribution as a final flourish. This technique was learned by the teacher as part of the school's literacy training. Students learned from their own experiences and from their own evaluations, well supported by the teacher, to attribute success to external/internal causes. The review at the end of the lesson reinforced learning objectives very well and students' responses were rewarded by "Champion" and "Most Progress" awards.

103. Very good teaching in a Year 12 art and design lesson on collagraphic printing involved skilful demonstration of technique including:
- the very effective use of the teacher's own work to exemplify points;
  - very good questioning to check students' understanding and involve them in learning about the process.
104. Through focused exploration of tactile materials, the students discovered surfaces suitable for printmaking. They worked hard to develop their compositions using observations of natural forms. Students listened to advice and instruction in a mature way, reflected on what they had done and made changes as necessary. As a result, they were attaining very high standards at an early stage in the course.
105. A very good Year 13 practical biology lesson was well organised so that the teacher was able to give adequate time to check individual students' planning of a pilot experiment by means of challenging questions which probed their reasons for designing the activity to produce the statistical outcomes required by the learning objectives. Attitudes were very good and relationships reflected mutual respect which helped the students' development as confident learners and reflected very favourably on their acquisition of practical skills.
106. Teaching in a very good Year 13 sociology lesson began powerfully with clear exposition and objective setting that related the lesson very well to previous and future lessons. Unprompted, students took notes, demonstrating shared and clearly understood ways of working. Effective use was made of video clips, linking them to previous lessons. The ensuing discussion showed that students were very comfortable with subject-specific language and concepts, and that they had very good understanding of methods of enquiry (including discussion of the evidence base of a school inspection) and an appreciation of ethical issues. Students were drawn to a conclusion without the intervention of the teacher. Good humour characterised the lesson throughout and students made very good progress in their learning about interactionist approach through the concept of moral panic.
107. In the instances where the quality of teaching was satisfactory (which in the sample of lessons observed by inspectors amounted to one lesson in five), students made satisfactory progress, but not as much as they were capable of doing. Their progress was sometimes hindered by the teacher giving information in a way that, whilst accurate and well presented, did not involve students sufficiently. In such instances, the same information was conveyed to the whole class at the same pace and in the same way regardless of individual students' capabilities, sometimes in a lecture format. Opportunities for students to debate issues, give extended and reasoned answers or to apply their new learning were too few. Sometimes this was because the teacher wished to move on quickly or because students were reluctant to give extended answers. In a few cases the learning objectives were not fully explained to the students or the learning reviewed at the end of the lesson. In these instances the lesson involved a series of activities or tasks that were not put into the context of students' wider learning objectives. Many lessons did not end with a summary of what had been learned or a review of the initial objectives.

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

108. The overall quality and range of the curriculum provision in the sixth form are satisfactory. Courses match students' aspirations and potential, building on their attainment at GCSE well. There is good provision for those few students each year who have special educational needs. As at the time of the last inspection, a broad range of subjects is offered to A-level. The majority of Year 12 students study four subjects to AS-level and then in Year 13 three subjects to A-level. Most students are able to take their first subject choices and the school responds flexibly in endeavouring to provide all first choices. As a result some courses are taught outside the normal school day, for example A-level textiles, with the support of parents and students. New courses are introduced to meet demand, such as further mathematics. The school has opted not to have its work on key skills externally accredited. This decision has been carefully considered and justified.
109. The sixth form curriculum provision is cost-effective and provides good value for money. Its operating costs are paid for from the income calculated on the basis of student numbers without any subsidy from the 11-16 provision. Currently 24 subjects are on offer at AS/A-level, resit GCSE and GNVQ/AVCE. Courses with small numbers of students are effectively subsidised from other sixth form courses with very large student numbers. Courses with small numbers of students include AS-level courses in music, further mathematics, French and German and A-level courses in physical education, French, German and music. Music continues to be taught in both Years 12 and 13 despite the small numbers of students involved because of the subject's cultural importance in the life of the school. Some popular courses, such as English and mathematics, have relatively large numbers of students. There are currently no shared arrangements with other local post-16 providers, mainly because of the distance between the school and other post-16 institutions.
110. A successful enrichment programme supplements the A-level, AS-level and vocational courses. There is a well-structured Year 12 PSHE and tutorial programme. Key skills are successfully taught in tutorial time to all students in Year 12 using a published scheme. The PSHE programme includes key skills taught in the context of project work. This covers number, literacy and communication skills in the context of projects such as the world of work and healthy living. This provision goes a reasonable way towards meeting current national recommendations. Many students already meet the equivalent of Level 2 in number and literacy.
111. Tutorial time is also used well in both Year 12 and Year 13. The time allocated for tutorial work is used in a systematic way and also provides time for individual discussions between tutors and students. The provision for careers advice and guidance is generally good. In Year 13, students are given constructive help to select the universities that they wish to apply for and are given useful support for the writing of individual statements. Some students understandably wished to receive more information about higher education opportunities open to them once they had received their GCSE results and had been given initial A-level grade predictions at the start of Year 12.

112. Students are expected to remain on site throughout the taught day. They comply with this requirement well and arrive promptly to their lessons as a consequence. Students are expected to use much of their time between lessons and activities for private study. The space and the supportive ICT facilities available for this to happen need to be enlarged to meet the needs of the present number of students in the sixth form. Students are able to work within small assigned spaces in some specialist subject areas. However, in design and technology, science and art and design there is little or no space for independent practical work to take place because all of the facilities are needed to support timetabled lessons.
113. Opportunities for sport or recreation for sixth formers are timetabled and students use the excellent on-site facilities at the leisure centre. Some students have had training from professional school counsellors and use these skills as assistant tutors in Years 7, 8 and 9. This venture is hugely beneficial to both the students and to the form tutors that they work with. All students take part in community service as part of the sixth form enrichment programme. Many students train as sports leaders and work in local primary schools as part of their community service. Other community service includes helping local senior citizens, and work in local hospitals with people who have physical and mental disabilities. Students compile a record of achievement that provides very good evidence of their accomplishments for future employment or university.
114. The great majority of students considered that the choice of courses available allowed them to follow a programme that was well suited to their talents and career aspirations. Many students with modest GCSE scores have successfully completed A-level courses in two subjects. Most thought that the printed information about courses and subjects in the sixth form was clear, accurate and helpful and that they were given good advice on which subjects to study before they joined Year 12. They would, however, like more impartial advice in deciding which subjects to choose as subject teachers sometimes were keen to make a particularly strong case for their own subject. Induction arrangement in Year 11, after GCSE examinations are complete, successfully allow students to take part in “taster sessions” of sixth form lessons. This helps them to give further consideration to their choice of courses.
115. There are many valuable opportunities for the promotion of students’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in lessons. This was seen to good effect by inspectors in some sociology, geography, history and psychology lessons. Moral and ethical issues are discussed in tutorial sessions and in relation to the work of the sixth form committee. “Speaker” sessions provide a very valuable forum for exposing students to a wide range of views and beliefs. Students have a well-developed sense of fairness and justice that is often focused on charitable causes. Students’ attitudes, behaviour, relationships and levels of personal responsibility are all very good, reflecting the positive impact of approaches supporting their personal development.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

### **Assessment**

116. The overall quality of the use of assessment information as a means of advising students about their progress is satisfactory. Students are each given personal target grades in all their subjects and courses, though they get this information earlier in some subjects than others. The use of data to set realistic and challenging targets has improved. In many subjects, such as in English, art and design, sociology and chemistry they know with reasonable precision the standard that they are currently working at and what they need to do to improve. However, teachers are not, in lessons or in the marking of work, consistently making specific reference to what more students need to do to reach or exceed their target grades. There are no systematic arrangements in place to track the overall progress of all students throughout Years 12 and 13. This means that tutors do not get an overview of how well every person in their care is proceeding at frequent intervals. The lack of detailed information on the progress of each student makes it hard for sixth form managers to track the progress of different groups of students, such as average students, those doing predominantly science subjects, or those who are making different rates of progress in different subjects.

### **Advice, support and guidance**

117. The overall quality of the advice, support and guidance given to students is good. Students are generally advised well about courses before they enter Year 12. The Year 12 tutorial programme is well structured and relevant. Year 13 students are given good advice about university applications. When available, careers advice from the Connexions Service is effective. Half of all students responding to the questionnaire said that they would appreciate more and earlier advice about opportunities after Year 13 to help their course and career aspirations. Many also wanted more consistent and precise feedback from teachers about their progress towards their qualifications. Inspectors endorse the validity of these requests.
118. There is strong support for students who experience difficulties in their work, especially those who struggle to reach pass standard. Extra tuition to help those students who want it is provided by teachers in their own time. Most students consider that they were helped to settle in well to Year 12 work. Over 90% of students responding to the questionnaire said that they enjoy being in the sixth form at Chipping Norton School and would recommend others to join this sixth form.

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

119. Parents and students are generally well satisfied with the range of opportunities offered in the sixth form. Students in Year 11 who are considering joining the sixth form and their parents are able to participate in very helpful arrangements that enable them to select the most appropriate post-16 course. The sixth form prospectus is well produced and very



informative. Parents and students receive a brief interim progress report in November and a well produced annual progress report in February/March in both Year 12 and Year 13. There is a high attendance at the annual parent consultation meetings that follow the publication of the main reports in the spring term.

120. Students value the sixth form provision very highly. They are very committed to their studies and to service within the school and the wider community. They feel that the school treats them as mature young adults and listens to their views. This reflects very well on the school systems in place such as the tutorial system, sixth form committee, school council, sixth form representation at governing body meetings, their involvement in staff selection and their sixth form representation on the influential ethnic minority working party. The students who have been at the school since Year 7 make those who join the sixth form from other schools very welcome from the outset. All students show a very strong sense of belonging and loyalty to the school. Very few students leave or change courses once they have committed themselves to them. Very friendly relationships between students and staff enable useful suggestions to be taken up readily. Sixth formers are a fine role model to other students in the school.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SIXTH FORM LED AND MANAGED?**

### **Leadership and management**

121. The overall quality of both the leadership and management of the sixth form is good. A climate of care and support is created which enables students to mature and take advantage of the opportunities open to them. Excellent relationships are a feature of the sixth form. The sixth form provision has improved since the last inspection, with the successful introduction of new courses and the impact of initiatives aimed at improving further the quality of teaching and improved numbers of male students. Good leadership and management from the headteacher, senior managers and head of sixth form have made this happen. The recently appointed assistant head of sixth form is working to strengthen the arrangements for a better oversight of students' progress. The aims and values of the school are very evident in the work of the sixth form. This is especially so with respect to the work of the sixth form in the community. Initiatives such as performance management and improving teaching approaches through staff development have had a positive impact in the sixth form along with the rest of the school. Sixth form students play a significant part in creating a conducive environment for their own learning and personal development.
122. Governors are knowledgeable about the strengths and development needs of the sixth form. They bring valuable management expertise, particularly in the areas of finance, personnel, higher education and community involvement. Governors are very pleased with the many areas of success within the sixth form, particularly the increasing popularity of the provision, the standards achieved and the good relationships. They share a desire with senior managers of achieving a sixth form of two hundred students. They recognise the very significant rates of progress made by students in the sixth form. School development planning has a post-16 section with action points and aspirations, but at present there is no

strategic plan to ensure that the recent improvement in performance is consolidated and extended over several years in a methodical way.

## Resources

123. The sixth form is cost-effective, and financial resources are deployed well to support teaching, learning and attainment. The best value principles of challenge, consultation and competition have been used well to secure this cost-effectiveness, though not always in an explicit way. The patterns of current spending and the forecasts for future spending match the academic and social needs of sixth formers well. Specialist accommodation for the sixth form is generally well equipped, though there are shortcomings in science and design and technology. The provision and use of computers is insufficient in most subjects. There are aspirations to improve the accommodation for sixth formers for private study. A converted corridor known colloquially as “the tube” that they currently use is not conducive to independent learning and has no Internet access. The library with its ICT facilities is good, enabling students to work independently before, between and after their timetabled lessons. Many students make good use of these facilities. The common room is often overcrowded, but students feel “*That’s O.K.!*”
124. Teachers are dedicated and many are very experienced. They give unstintingly of their time in meeting the needs of individual students. Members of staff are knowledgeable about examination specifications and requirements and share these with students to familiarise them with the criteria against which they will be assessed. The after-school “clinics” provide excellent opportunities for individual and small group tuition and are particularly useful for students in subjects that have large numbers of students. There are many areas of strength in the work of teachers in the sixth form, for example good practice in managing learning, assessment and lesson design. These features are currently not systematically monitored with a view to sharing good practice between departments to ensure that all students experience consistently high quality teaching in all subjects. Performance data is analysed by the head of sixth form to generate targets for students’ grades and to calculate individual students’ ‘value added’ improvement. Subject teachers use this information well to track students’ progress. The information is not used as fully as it might be to identify trends in the performance of particular groups of students or subjects and deploy strategies for further improvement as a result.
125. Good leadership and management have ensured that this is an effective and improving sixth form with many strengths. It offers good value for money. There is the capacity within the school to secure further improvement whilst safeguarding the many positive features of a good sixth form that is well integrated into the life of the whole school and which reflects in action the values of the school.

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

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

*The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001 (which is the latest year for which national comparisons are available).*

**GCE AS level courses**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	13	100	n/a	54	n/a	n/a	n/a
Biology	16	81	53	44	3	n/a	n/a
Business studies	13	92	77	23	12	n/a	n/a
Chemistry	10	100	42	70	4	n/a	n/a
Design and technology	17	100	n/a	18	n/a	n/a	n/a
Drama	10	100	n/a	30	n/a	n/a	n/a
English	34	100	n/a	26	n/a	n/a	n/a
French	40	100	78	40	13	n/a	n/a
Geography	19	95	n/a	21	n/a	n/a	n/a
German	4	100	82	75	13	n/a	n/a
History	20	100	n/a	35	n/a	n/a	n/a
Mathematics	21	100	62	62	15	n/a	n/a
Physics	10	90	n/a	70	n/a	n/a	n/a
Physical education	7	100	n/a	14	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sociology	23	87	62	26	7	n/a	n/a

*n/a indicated that figures are not available.*

*GCE A-level and AVCE courses*

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	7	100	96	100	46	8.57	6.57
Biology	10	90	88	40	34	6.20	5.25
Business studies	6	100	92	83	32	8.00	5.50
Chemistry	10	90	90	30	43	5.60	5.90
Communication studies	6	83	93	50	31	6.67	5.53
English literature	23	96	95	57	37	6.43	5.91
French	1	100	89	100	38	10.00	5.59
Design and technology	5	100	91	100	30	10.0	5.38
Geography	23	96	92	30	38	5.57	5.74
German	1	100	91	100	40	10.00	5.81
History	7	86	88	29	35	5.71	5.45
Mathematics	22	100	87	68	43	8.00	5.80
Physics	9	89	88	78	40	7.56	5.67
Sociology	13	92	86	62	35	7.23	5.32
Sports/physical education studies	5	100	92	40	25	6.00	5.09

*Intermediate vocational qualifications*

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Manufacturing	5	60		20		20	
Health and social care	11	100		27		0	

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, chemistry and biology, but physics and accounts were also sampled. In physics, results were well above average in 2001 at A-level and this high standard was maintained in 2002. Students did as expected and several better, considering their GCSE results. Most students did as expected at AS-level in 2002. One Year 12 lesson was observed. Teaching was good. It helped students to explore their understanding of capacitance by a discussion led by students which demonstrated the maturity of their approach, enthusiasm and excellent relationships between students and the teacher. Students' learning was further reinforced by practical work which required them to apply their knowledge.

#### Mathematics

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

##### Strengths

- The standard of attainment at both A and AS-level is very high in comparison with national averages.
- Teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and structured. Teachers use their extensive subject knowledge to the benefit of the students.
- A wide range of mathematics courses is offered to cater for the needs of students.
- Students are committed and work productively.
- The support offered by teachers outside lessons is valued highly by students.

##### Areas for improvement

- There are not enough opportunities for independent learning in the classroom.
- The large teaching groups in Year 12 mean that the learning needs of a wide ability range are not being met sufficiently well.
- Assessment of work does not ensure that students are clear about what they have to do to improve.

126. The inspection covered AS and A-level mathematics courses as well as a course for those who are retaking GCSE mathematics. Enrichment courses in mathematics for those students studying psychology, biology and geography were also inspected. Seven lessons were sampled in addition to scrutiny of students' work and interviews with the head of department and representative students.

#### *Standards and achievement*

127. Standards of attainment at A-level are well above the national average. In 2001 68% of students gained an A or B grade, compared to 43% nationally, and all students received at least a pass grade. This high standard has been maintained for the last three years. Both male and female students perform equally well. AS-level results are similarly of a high standard with all students gaining a pass grade and 62% gaining A or B grades in 2001. The 2002 AS and A-level results maintain this impressive record of success. However, students' success rates in the GCSE retake examinations have declined over the last three years. Measures have been put in place to ensure that all students entered for GCSE now can attend all the lessons.
128. Students enter sixth form lessons from a range of attainment at GCSE, including students previously entered for the intermediate as well as higher GCSE examinations. The standard of work seen in lessons and in folders confirms that the overall quality of students' work is above average. Male and female students do equally well although, in some lessons, there is a tendency for males to dominate the discussion. Students have a good understanding of mathematical principles and rules and are able to apply these in a variety of situations with high levels of success. For example, even though early in the school year, Year 12 students were competent in using graphic calculators to plot regression lines to allow them to predict trends from three year moving average data. GCSE retake students can confidently apply their knowledge of angle properties to solve complex bearing problems. Psychology students are able find the equation of a line of best fit from a set of data.
129. There is clear progression in the standards achieved from the first to the second year of the A-level course. Year 13 students are more confident mathematicians. In a mechanics lesson students were able to use their previous knowledge of forces and apply them to problems involving circular motion successfully.

### *Quality of education*

130. Overall the quality of teaching is good. Lessons are well prepared and planned and, at their best, are structured to offer a variety of modes of learning. Teachers' good subject knowledge and experience enable them to give explanations of methods and processes that deepen students' understanding. In lessons teachers use questioning carefully to support students and stimulate discussion. In doing this, they reduce the problem or concept to smaller, more manageable parts. However, this also reduces the opportunity for more extended independent thought. Students are not having enough time in lessons to consolidate their learning or to experience sufficient challenge. Relationships are very good. Teachers are approachable and are always willing to discuss work with students outside lessons. Students value the private study sessions in the department where teachers are on hand to help as well as the after school mathematics clinic held weekly.
131. Students learn well, are highly motivated and work hard. They support each other and are willing to join in discussion that strengthens their understanding. Their assignments are handed in on time and they pay careful attention to comparing their solutions to the model answers that teachers prepare to accompany marked work. Whilst teachers support

students well, the grades and marks that students receive are not sufficiently detailed for them to recognise the clear criteria that will enable them to improve further.

### *Leadership and management*

132. Sixth form mathematics is well led and managed. The head of department has a clear vision of sixth form mathematics development. Teachers support each other and there is a sense of purpose. There is a wide range of courses available which allows all students to succeed. Pure mathematics together with either mechanics or statistics can be taken as well as statistics A-level. All of these can be taken as mathematics or further mathematics A-levels as well as the GCSE and enrichment courses. However, the large numbers in some Year 12 classes mean that the learning needs of a wide variety of students are not being met sufficiently well. There is a need to make greater use of new technology within sixth form mathematics teaching.

### **Chemistry**

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

#### Strengths

- Good relationships create a good working atmosphere.
- The overall quality of teaching is good.
- Students show very good attitudes and interest towards the subject.
- Students are kept informed of how well they are doing and what they have to do to improve.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge is used effectively to guide students' progress.
- A good range of challenging questioning techniques is used.
- Teachers have high expectations.

#### Areas for improvement

- The wider use of ICT as a learning strategy,
- Establishment of effective monitoring strategies to recognise and share good practice,
- Strategic planning to raise standards even higher.

133. Year 12 students study three units including one on experimental skills that are examined at AS-level. Year 13 students study a similar series of three units that are examined at A-level. Evidence of the quality of provision was gained from lesson observations, a scrutiny of students' work, interviews and discussions with relevant students, discussion with teachers, an interview with the head of department and an analysis of the subject documentation.

### *Standards and achievement*

134. Attainment in GCE A-level has been in line with national averages over recent years. Results for 2002 were the best ever and above the provisional national average. Standards observed in lessons and in students' notebooks are generally in line with national averages. These standards have been maintained since the last inspection in 1996. Some individual achievements are above national averages. Male and female students do equally well.
135. An analysis of written work shows a clear progression in the standards achieved from the first year to the second year of the A-level course. This represents a good "value-added" effect. Students in Year 12, for example, demonstrate a sound understanding of the cause of experimental errors and are able to calculate the relative impact on practical results. In Year 13 lessons students are able to apply practical criteria to synthesising compounds in order to determine the most efficient reaction in terms of product yield. They are able to ascertain the correct names of systematic structures and display appropriate regard for health and safety in practical skills. Most students are able to explain clearly the basic nature of amines. In a practical session demonstrating coupling reactions with amines and phenols, the more able were able to work at a good pace in order to produce distinctive reaction products.

#### *Quality of education*

136. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. Teachers set high expectations and their lessons are well planned, containing a good balance of theory, demonstration and practical work. Teachers' good subject knowledge is used to guide students, particularly through the effective use of challenging questions which probe understanding. A wide range of teaching strategies is used which generates students' interest and enjoyment. The management of students is generally good and is exemplified by mutual respect. Lessons are taught at a good pace and benefit from the use of interim timelines for sequential activities. Relationships with students are good and this creates a good working atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers give freely of their free time to help individual students who request support. Students are informed of their personal targets at the beginning of the course and these are reviewed at the end of each module.
137. Learning is good. Students respond well to the opportunities to work individually or in pairs. They have a very good attitude to the subject and work well in groups. Students are confident to ask and answer questions. Effective learning is promoted through weekly homework assignments and regular dialogue with teachers both in lessons and in private study time. Students are given helpful progress cards each term that include their current levels of performance against target levels. Teachers support under-performing students well by giving guidance on what they have to do to improve and by differentiated support in practical sessions.

#### *Leadership and management*

138. Leadership and management of the department are good. The timelines for the schemes of work in AS-level and A-level courses are shared with the students. Strategies to move



under-performing students on are used in both years. Resources in the subject are sufficient in quality and quantity and the support given by the technicians to the teachers continues to be at a highly efficient level. Since the previous inspection better use of performance data and strategies for independent learning have been applied to support students' progress more effectively. More consistency of approach across the department is beginning to support teaching.

139. More work needs to be done in further raising the quality of teaching by creating opportunities for teachers to share their own good practice within the department and with other staff. Students do use ICT in data logging, in probes for pH values and for producing notes and data. However, planned opportunities for using ICT, particularly with increased specification machines, are insufficient. The work of the department is hindered by outdated laboratory facilities. The department has a structured plan for further developments, but the plan does not directly tackle how standards could be raised further by building on existing areas of good practice.

## **Biology**

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

### Strengths

- Teachers have a good subject knowledge which is used in skilful and challenging questioning.
- The overall quality of the teaching and learning is good. Some is very good.
- Students are developing into confident learners.
- Classrooms have good learning atmospheres.
- Strategies for developing the role of students as independent learners are good.
- Students have very good attitudes towards the subject.

### Areas for improvement

- Further development of ICT as a learning tool.
- Opportunities for teachers to share good practice.
- Strategic planning in the department's improvement plan to provide a framework for developments over the next three years.

140. Year 12 students study three compulsory modules including an individual investigation at AS-level. Year 13 students study three further modules and an individual investigation that is examined at A-level. Evidence was gained from lesson observations, a scrutiny of students' work, interviews and discussions with relevant students, discussions with teachers, an interview with the head of department and an analysis of the subject documentation.

### *Standards and achievement*

141. Attainment in GCE A-level has been in line with national averages over recent years. A-level point scores for 2001 (the best ever) were well above the national average. Standards observed in lessons and in students' notebooks during this inspection indicate that students are on track towards achieving comparable results in 2003 to those achieved in the last two years. These standards have been maintained since the last inspection in 1996. Some individual achievements are above national averages. Overall, students make good progress from the start of Year 12 to the end of Year 13. This produces a good "value-added" effect. Male and female students do equally well.
142. There is clear progression in the standards of oral and written work through the two years of the course. In both Year 12 and Year 13 students are able to work effectively as small groups in class, presenting different aspects about an enquiry which then build into a shared commentary. Many students in Year 12 were able to describe accurately the movement of water through a plant using the concept of concentration gradients. In Year 13 students engaged in an interactive debate on the applications of hormones preparatory to a broad and engaging discussion on the ethical considerations of hormone use.

#### *Quality of education*

143. Overall, the quality of teaching is good with some very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge which is used in skilful and challenging questioning strategies to guide students and sustain their progress. Relationships between teachers and students are very good and this creates a good learning climate in the classroom. A wide range of teaching strategies is used which generates high levels of students' interest and enjoyment of the lessons. The management of students is generally good and is exemplified by mutual respect in which students are confident to ask and answer questions. Lessons are organised well, conducted at a good pace and planned for teachers to give adequate time to each student. These strengths are enjoyed by both teachers and students.
144. The quality of learning is good. Students are developing into confident learners and work well together. They know and support the routines and strategies employed for effective learning and participate willingly. They respond well to the opportunities to work individually or in pairs. Students are able to plan practical assignments effectively to gain the necessary statistical outcomes and make secure comparisons. They respect health and safety issues through the demonstration of reliable practical knowledge and operational skills. Most students are able to make appropriate choices in the selection of apparatus and resources.

#### *Leadership and management*

145. Leadership and management of the department are good. Teachers and students are well organised and have a clear timeline of activities to meet the requirements of the AS-level and the A-level course. Laboratory resources are sufficient in quality and quantity and are made readily available through the very good support of the laboratory technicians. However, some of the laboratories have outdated services. Since the last inspection, the quality of

teaching has been raised and assessment data is now used more effectively to recognise underachievement and to profile students' learning. The department works more coherently and there is more consistency of approach.

146. Self-evaluation strategies to recognise and disseminate the good classroom practice across the subject have yet to be developed. Opportunities for the use of information communication technology (ICT) to enhance learning are insufficient. Strategies to further improve the quality of provision and raise standards, by building on existing successes, are not clearly identified and stated in the department's improvement plan.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING.**

The focus was on design and technology. The course in textiles was sampled.

### **Design and technology**

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

#### Strengths

- A-level results in 2001 were in the top 5% nationally.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good.
- Teachers have good specialist knowledge.
- Students have positive attitudes and good levels of independence.

#### Areas for improvement

- Resources and facilities for ICT, particularly for computer-aided design, require development.
- The curriculum time provided for textiles courses is insufficient.
- The accommodation available for sixth form design activities and storage of work.

#### *Standards and achievement*

147. The GCE A-Level examination results in 2001 for the three male and two female students were excellent in comparison to results nationally both for the higher grades and in terms of the overall pass rate. Students achieved very well in relation to their earlier GCSE results. A-level results in 2002 though less impressive represent satisfactory achievement in relation to students' prior attainment. In the 2002 AS-level examination, the majority of students, both male and female, who studied design achieved results at least in line with expectations based on their GCSE attainment. The 13 female students who studied the new textiles course outside normal curriculum time achieved satisfactorily in relation to their GCSE performance.
148. Standards of work for the current Year 13 students are high in relation to course expectations. Students have in most cases well-developed design skills and demonstrate

understanding of a range of materials and processes. They can apply these and their research skills to the analysis of a range of products and the development of their own work. Only a minority of students make use of computers to develop and present their work and none have developed skills in the use of computer-aided design software because there are no facilities for this. In Year 13 four students are continuing to study textiles to A-level in their own time during and after school. The standards are lower than might be expected for this stage in the course but they are making satisfactory progress in view of the lack of taught time available.

149. Standards in Year 12 for AS-level design are above average for this stage in the course. Students make good progress and have a good understanding of product analysis methodology and are building on their knowledge of materials and processes from GCSE. Students studying textiles at the early stages of making a skirt were developing their knowledge and understanding of a range of seaming techniques. The teacher had a good understanding of the gaps in their knowledge from GCSE and provided a clear and concise demonstration with examples that enabled all to make good progress. Standards in the textiles are below typical course expectations, but students are achieving at satisfactory levels in relation to their standards at GCSE.

#### *Quality of education*

150. The overall quality of teaching is good. As a consequence, students make good progress. They are given clear information about the criteria by which their work is to be judged. In product design in particular, the regularity of marking and deadlines for work, together with clear guidance from teachers, ensure very good progress with coursework. Teachers have very good specialist knowledge and use this well in the planning of lessons. Teachers are familiar with new course requirements and standards, and this enables them to give accurate advice to students on what and how to improve their work. For example in a Year 13 lesson the teacher gave a short review of the previous lesson to consolidate the learning and then gave individual advice and support as students continued with their analysis and drawing work. Students have very positive attitudes and feel well supported which helps their learning. Most develop very good levels of confidence and independence in their work. They manage their time well and cope well with the lack of a dedicated design area.

#### *Leadership and management*

151. The leadership and management of design and technology are strong. There is a clear focus on sustaining high standards. To this end, examination performance is carefully analysed and targets set for students in relation to their past achievement; and students' progress is regularly monitored. The department has a flexible entry policy and is responsive to students' needs. The after-school textiles lessons are a good example of this, though there is some inequality between the curriculum time for each AS-level course. The implications of the national "Curriculum 2000" with respect to the use of information and communication technology have not yet been incorporated into departmental plans. This is reflected in the lack of equipment and resources for computer-aided design and manufacture across the department. Since the time of the previous inspection there have been no major

improvements to accommodation. Together with increased student numbers, this results in sixth formers having to work in cramped workshop areas that have to double as design areas and are not equipped for A-level design work.

## **BUSINESS**

The focus was on the A-level and AS-level courses in business studies, but accounts was also sampled. AS-level accounts resumed in 2001. The provisional results for 2002 indicate that students made good progress when their GCSE grades are taken into consideration. One Year 13 lesson was observed. Teaching was good, students were clear about the learning objectives of the lesson, they were working at a good pace and supported by effective feedback about their progress from the teacher. Attainment was broadly in line with typical expectations for the course.

### **Business studies**

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

#### Strengths

- Standards are well above the national average at A-level. Students are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results. Standards are above the national average at AS-level.
- Students are very enthusiastic, interested in their subject and its relevance to everyday life.
- Teaching and learning are good overall, with very good teacher expertise and knowledge about the capability of students.
- There is a shared commitment to improvement.
- The course uses many interesting case studies drawn from business and the community.

#### Areas for improvement

- The progress of AS-level students is not analysed to ascertain why some students with the same average GCSE point score make good progress while others make more limited progress.
- Clearer information to students about the progress they are making towards the course requirements.
- Teaching strategies do not fully equip students to think and learn for themselves.
- Students have insufficient access to computers within the department.
- The range of self-evaluation strategies used in planning improvements is limited.

152. Year 12 students study a three module course that is examined at AS-level. Year 13 students study two further modules, undertake a business project or thematic enquiry and are examined at A-level. Four lessons and an extracurricular activity were sampled, in addition to the scrutiny of students' work, interviews with representative students and the head of department.

### *Standards of achievement*

153. There are currently over 20 students following AS and A-level. The range of ability on entry is wide. Retention rates are good. In 2001, students' A-level point scores were very high in relation to the national average. A very high proportion of students obtained grades A and B and all students obtained at least a pass grade. The provisional results for 2002 indicate that the high standards have been maintained with all students gaining at least a pass, although the number of students attaining grades A and B were fewer. Results in the AS-level examination in 2001 were well above the national average with all but one student gaining at least a pass grade. The provisional results for 2002 indicate a similar number of students gaining A to B grades and a larger number of students gaining E grades. The percentage gaining a pass grade remained the same. Male and female students generally do equally well. Standards have improved since the time of the previous inspection.
154. The observation of students in lessons and an analysis of their work confirm that the standards achieved on the A-level and AS-level courses are above the national average. In lessons, Year 13 students were able to confidently talk about the factors that enable a group or team to work effectively within different contexts and organisations. In Year 12, students could analyse well the advantages and disadvantages of multi-national companies, touching upon the impact within developing countries together with the ethical issues which may arise. Again, male and female students do equally well.
155. There is good progression in the standards achieved from the first to the second year of the A-level course. Many students across the ability range make good progress although there is a significant minority of students who have similar GCSE grades, but who made variable progress in Year 12, especially average ability and lower attaining students. Students are generally achieving well over the two years of the A-level course. The current Year 12 students have made a good start to the AS-level course. When studying the nature of business they are able to identify the constraints together with the short and long-term objectives, which might apply and are able to appreciate the different viewpoints of consumers, shareholders and employees. Similarly, Year 13 students have made a good start and are using a good range of assessment objectives, although in lessons observed, average and lower attaining students found difficulty assessing information and using criteria to distinguish, for example, formal and informal communication. ICT skills were less well developed within all courses. This is mainly because of a lack of access to sufficient resources.

### *Quality of education*

156. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject, which ensures that students are up-to-date as well as encouraging thoughtful discussion in lessons. Good timekeeping during lessons enables students to work at a brisk pace. Business case studies and course work linked to a local business organisation extends students' understanding and application of learning to solve problems. Opportunities for students to think and learn for themselves were not always maximised. In one lesson, a very useful video recording about privatisation was used, but

students had insufficient guidance about what to look for during the playing of the video and there was little time to draw together the learning after the video extract.

157. Students concentrated well during lessons and contributed enthusiastically to whole-class discussion. Study skills are developed well, both in lessons and in private study time. Year 13 students are currently devising the research brief for their business project. They are making good progress identifying the nature of the problem, how it can be solved and the context. Marking of work is undertaken regularly. However, students have insufficient understanding of the marking criteria for the course, and are unclear about what needs to be done next to improve. The exception to this is the guidance given for the business project where the marking scheme for the module is provided, thus enabling students to know what is expected and how to structure successfully the report of about 4000 words. Opportunities to develop ICT skills are underdeveloped. Students are very enthusiastic, interested in business studies and its relevance to everyday life. Their sustained efforts in lessons and private study contribute greatly to good levels of attainment.

#### *Leadership and management*

158. The overall quality of leadership and management of the business studies department is good. The work of the department reflects well the aims and priorities of the school. There is a very clear commitment to improvement matched with teachers' very good subject expertise. The provision of extra-curricular activities, such as the Young Enterprise programme, supports the application of individual and group learning. Although teachers analyse examination results in detail, the findings of this analysis are not used sufficiently to adjust future teaching and learning approaches. The lack of provision of teaching aids and equipment, including ICT, is inhibiting the development of the subject.

#### **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

159. This Level 3 Advanced Certificate in Vocational Education (AVCE) was introduced in September 2002 as a way of extending the vocational curriculum and meeting the need for a level 3 course in ICT. One lesson was seen. Teaching was sound and students' independent work was supported well. Their attitude to the work was excellent. Students have access to a well-equipped specialist room for their lessons, but this provision is often unavailable for independent learning at other times of the taught week because it is fully booked for other lessons.

#### **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

160. Standards in physical education at A-level were well above average in 2001. One lesson was sampled. Teaching was excellent and enabled students to make very good progress in their understanding of attribution theory.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

161. Standards in GNVQ health and social care are above the national average. Several students proceed from the one year course to health related courses in further education. One Year 12 lesson of health and social care was seen. This was a good lesson in which the techniques used involved the students in learning actively about psychological, physical and emotional development.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus subject was art and design. Also sampled were music and drama.

One Year 12 AS-level music lesson was observed. The teaching of the study text was satisfactory, knowledgeable and encouraging. Students made satisfactory progress in their understanding of musical terminology and score analysis, despite a lack of confidence in asking and answering questions.

One Year 12 AS-level drama lesson was observed, in which the teaching was very good and students achieved a high level of concentration and strong collaborative group work making good progress in both skill development and exploration of the study text.

### Art and design

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

#### Strengths

- Overall management of the department.
- Relationships between staff, and between staff and students.
- Support for students through strategies for monitoring and assessing their work.
- Research and presentation of project work.
- Displays of art throughout the school.

#### Areas for improvement

- Group interaction on practical and contextual issues.
- Studio accommodation.
- Time allocation for practical work.
- The use of ICT to extend learning.
- Gallery visits to inform study.

162. Students at AS and A-level are taught in three different studios by qualified art teachers for an appropriate amount of time, but inappropriately divided between single and double periods.



163. Four full lessons were observed, with time given for discussion with the head of department, group discussion with twelve students, an appraisal of displays, resources and accommodation, and a work scrutiny.

#### *Standards of attainment*

164. Standards overall are high. In the last three years students at A-level have continued to achieve results above the national averages. The numbers opting to study art and design post-16 are rising. Males and females perform equally well, with no differences noted in levels of attainment. AS-level students achieve a wide range of grades, mostly in the A to C band, again with a fairly even split between the performances of males and females. Students make good progress from GCSE to A-level. There is a good “value added” effect.
165. In the lessons observed, standards were at least in line with those typically found at this stage of the courses, with many students performing at a higher level.
166. In Year 12, students build upon previously learned skills in Year 11. They experiment with a range of surface textures to develop their work, including collagraph printing, acknowledging the work of Max Ernst. They work boldly, and show good compositional and observational drawing skills in their work. In Year 13, students build upon previous knowledge and skills, and show good research and presentational skills in their written work. They investigate the work of a wide range of artists from different historical periods, prior to making individual choices for extension study. The practical activities indicate a wide range of influences from contemporary and historical sources, and make links to the theoretical studies. Students in both years speak with confidence about their work, and show a mature understanding of some complex issues to be found in the work of land artists and war artists, for example. They have a clear idea about their own successes and shortcomings, valuing the guidance and targets set through teachers’ constant monitoring of their work.

#### *Quality of education*

167. The quality of teaching is good. Lessons are suitably resourced for practical activities and the students are well organised to manage the tasks. However, staff and students are frustrated by the single 50 minute periods, which are difficult to manage for both the practical and theoretical aspects of the course. Lessons have clear short and long term objectives, and include good practical demonstrations, for example of relief techniques and collagraph printing, to show the students how to approach their own work. High standards of work are expected throughout each unit of study at all times. Meeting deadlines and the pace of working are stressed very firmly. Relationships between staff and students are good and create a positive learning atmosphere. Teachers work hard on a one-to-one basis to ensure that students understand how they are performing, using formal assessment criteria as a guide. There is only limited opportunity provided to promote discussions and questions to develop group dynamics and allow students to assimilate ideas and knowledge with their peers. There is only limited opportunity for students to have first hand experience of seeing

original works of art, for example through visits to galleries and exhibitions, to inform their project selection and development.

### *Leadership and management*

168. The art department is well led. Assessment procedures are well managed and used to inform students of their progress or otherwise. The studio environments are visually stimulating through the display of a wide range of vigorous work by students, and other visual reference materials from the natural and made world. The curriculum meets the needs of the examination syllabus. The art and design teachers engage in a variety of professional development opportunities to enhance their own knowledge and skills. Whilst resources are adequate for most practical activities within the studios, books are limited in range and quality, especially for non-Western and contemporary arts, and limit the reference base for the students. Facilities for ICT within the art department are very poor, and although most students are able to use either their own or other facilities provided in the school for historical research, teachers are unable to demonstrate the creative aspects of computer generated imagery.
169. There is no specialist studio provision for post-16 students, so free time is spent in a fairly unpleasant area at the back of the big studio when other groups of students are working. Two of the present studios are very small for large groups of students to move around except when working on a small scale. The large hangar-like studio has bad acoustics, notable when addressing the whole group, and very poor quality furnishings.

## **HUMANITIES**

The focus subjects were geography and sociology. Also sampled were history and psychology.

Standards in history were above average in the A-level and AS-level work seen. One Year 13 lesson was sampled. Teaching was good and used the teacher's expertise as an AS-level examiner very effectively in guiding students to a good understanding of the origins of the cold war through paired work, class discussion and independent study. Their response was excellent. No national comparisons are available for the first set of results at AS-level in 2002.

A Year 12 psychology lesson was sampled. The teaching and learning were good. Objectives were clear and built on previous work on attachment/deprivation theory. Explanations were clear, enhanced by the teacher's very good knowledge and understanding, well paced and effectively supplemented by directed questions and answers which led students to a good understanding of the learning objectives. Students conscientiously highlighted and annotated duplicated information. Relationships were very good and students were confident about sharing personal reminiscences and asking for clarification when they did not understand.

## Geography

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

### Strengths

- Standards of attainment at A-level were average in 2001 and have improved in 2002.
- Students are enthusiastic, positive, committed and enjoy geography.
- Teachers' knowledge and understanding support good acquisition of knowledge and understanding, and sustain students' interest and concentration.
- Monitoring and intervention by the head of department have secured improved results for students.
- Fieldwork and visits enrich geography and provide good case studies and experiences for young people.

### Areas for improvement

- Standards at AS-level show considerable variation between modules and with too many U grades at the first attempt.
- Higher-order reasoning skills are not sufficiently well developed.
- Teachers' methods do not involve enough participation and involvement from the students themselves.
- Teaching and examination results are well monitored but detailed analysis of performance in the subject needs to be improved in order that sustained improvement can take place.
- ICT and other key skills are not systematically developed.

170. Year 12 students study a three-module course that is examined at AS-level. Year 13 students study two further modules and undertake a "personal geographical enquiry" and are examined at A-level. Two lessons were sampled, in addition to scrutiny of departmental documentation, students' work and interviews with students.

### *Standards and achievement*

171. There are currently nearly thirty students studying geography at AS and A-level. Results in the A-level examination are in line with national averages. In the last three years, point scores have been in line but provisional results in 2002 show that the average points score has improved and all students gained at least a pass grade for the second year running. The number of students achieving the higher grades A and B is below national averages and it is this area that is the cause of performance in geography being below school averages. Both male and female students achieve to similar standards. These standards have been maintained since the last inspection.

172. AS-level standards show considerable variation between modules when students are examined. Well-timed interventions made by the head of department have resulted in AS-level results being improved significantly through retakes. There are too many U-grades in

some modules at the first attempt, which means too much energy is spent on catching-up rather than extending students' understanding. This means that overall progress is satisfactory, but that there is room for improvement.

173. Observation and discussions in lessons confirm that standards on the A-level course are average. For example, students can describe coastal patterns and processes using appropriate advanced level subject vocabulary and deduce evidence from topographical maps. Their knowledge of places was also typical, being able to describe locations and environments correctly and with appropriate subject vocabulary. Their written annotations on maps of coastal features were accurate and descriptive but were lacking in explanations. Essays on coastal geomorphology were accurate in their explanations of theories and processes but more able students were not extended to evaluate the effectiveness of theories in different places. Lower ability students lacked detail in their descriptions of real places. Work in their folders suggested acquisition of knowledge and understanding in line with what is usually found but there was insufficient expectation of students in order to develop higher order thinking skills such as application or evaluation. It is these processes that enable students to reach higher grades. Evidence of work from another module suggested higher standards had been achieved through an essay on the legacy of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, ten years ago, as a topical application of their geographical learning. Students were able to draw on evidence from the Internet, newspapers and television coverage of the recent Johannesburg Earth Summit and evaluate the actions made by different countries, formulate opinions based on evidence and synthesise aspects of geography learned in other modules.
174. There is steady progress made between AS and A-level, with students acquiring more knowledge and understanding of places, geographical theories, patterns and processes. Progress would improve if more challenges and participation were incorporated into the work undertaken, involving criticism, evaluation and application of theories to different places studied. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on the theory of population proposed by Thomas Malthus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, students quickly gained knowledge and understanding of theories of population from a very good video and explanation by the teacher. They would have gained more if they were asked to evaluate the arguments or evidence supporting or opposing the theory.

### *Quality of education*

175. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, as at the time of the previous inspection. Teachers' subject knowledge is good, leading to students' acquisition of knowledge and understanding, interest and concentration. Good resources, including videos, maps, brochures, textbooks, websites and newspaper articles, are used to add variety in lessons. Much is made of topicality and students are clear about the relevance and purpose of their geographical learning. The attainment and progress of students are only satisfactory rather than good because of the level of intellectual demands made of them in lessons and in the limited variety of methods deployed. This is evident in questions, which in the lessons seen were largely factual with some deduction and reasoning, but requiring little analysis, evaluation, application or synthesis. They largely required short answers and so

there was insufficient time given to students formulating extended, reasoned answers. In a Year 13 lesson on the world heritage coast of Dorset, students were using a range of maps and information, working independently to build a case study of coastal change. The teacher's methods meant that students could use key vocabulary, deduce geological features from an Ordnance Survey map. However the teaching insufficiently focused the students on the quality of their responses and so they were not supported in reaching higher standards of analysis.

176. Marking and day-to-day assessment are inconsistent. There are some very good examples. In a module on sustainable development with Year 13 for example, feedback to students was constructive, specific and in a language they understood. This led to good self-knowledge of their learning and the demands of the examination. Students from Year 13 could describe clearly how they might improve their essays by increasing evidence and factual information rather than opinions. Where feedback is less clear, students struggle to articulate what makes a good response. For example in discussions in a Year 13 lesson, students were struggling to describe what makes a good annotation for a map.

#### *Leadership and management*

177. Leadership and management are satisfactory with some very good features. The head of department has secured clear educational direction for the department as a whole, through thorough documentation, policies and procedures. This has impacted greatly in standards at GCSE, but is only just beginning to impact at AS and A-level. The clear direction has secured positive attitudes to learning by students. Monitoring of examination results is rigorous and her interventions, for example over re-taking AS-level unit examinations, have secured better results for students who are very appreciative of these efforts. Development plans show the commitment and capacity to improve. More emphasis is needed on considering and analysing students' subject-specific strengths and areas for improvement. Resources are very well managed and organised. There are good fieldwork opportunities throughout the course. Medium-term planning of the curriculum is inconsistent and largely focused on developing students' knowledge and understanding. There is insufficient clarity in planning for the development of geographical skills, key skills of ICT, communication and application of number as well as examination confidence. This is evident in insufficient opportunities for students to manipulate data with spreadsheets and develop visual presentations using *PowerPoint* and other applications of ICT in geography.

## Sociology

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

### Strengths

- The standard of attainment at A-level in 2001 was well above the national average.
- Students typically make better progress through their A-level and AS-level courses than in most schools and do better than in their other subjects.
- Sociology is a popular subject at both AS-level and A-level. Recruitment and retention rates are good and there is a good record of students' progression to higher education.
- Students like the subject and work hard.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good.

### Areas for improvement

- The subject can be further enriched by greater use of outside speakers and educational visits.

178. Year 12 students follow a three unit course leading to an AS-level qualification. They study units on the media and education and complete a coursework assignment. Year 13 students complete a further three units, which combine with those studied in Year 12 to form an A-level qualification. They study units on crime and politics and complete a sociological enquiry for their coursework. Occasionally, Year 13 students who have not taken the subject before, complete an additional AS-level course. During the inspection, two lessons were sampled in each of Years 12 and 13. In addition, samples of students' work and detailed data about their performance were examined. Discussions were held with staff and students.

### *Standards and achievement*

179. Results in A-level examinations are nearly always above the national average. In 2001, results were well above the national average. Results for 2002 indicate that the pattern of very good performance has been maintained. For the last two years, all students have obtained a C grade or better. In all years, students have done at least as well as in their other subjects and, generally, have done better. In some years, the number of students obtaining A and B grades has been above average, whilst in other years it has been below average, but this has been a reflection of the strength of different groups. The 'value added' from the students' average GCSE performance is nearly always very good. Grades in the majority of cases are significantly better than expectations based on typical progress from GCSE performance. There is no significant difference between the achievement of males and females.

180. Sociology was not reported on as a separate subject at the time of the last inspection and it is not possible to make a full comparison. However, the record of examination success indicates continued improvement on the high standards obtained. The subject has been a

consistently popular option in the sixth form with one of the largest entries at A-level. Over the last five years, 12 students have gone on to take sociology at university.

181. Results in the new AS-level examination in 2001 were well above the national average on all indicators. As with A-level, verified results for 2002 and national comparisons were not available at the time of the inspection, but the indication is that there has been a slight drop in the number of students obtaining the higher grades. These results need to be seen in the light of the students' starting points. Progress has been very good in both years. In 2001, all students met or exceeded their predicted grades based on GCSE performance and this is likely to be true for all but two students in 2002.
182. The quality of work seen in lessons, an analysis of the students' coursework and folders and available performance information confirms the picture from examination results that standards and achievement are above average. Students are able to draw on an impressive range of knowledge about sociological concepts and theory and apply this to fresh contexts. They have looked at a good range of case studies about different aspects of social life and can use this information to reach general conclusions. Year 12 students are at an early stage of their course and have not studied sociology before, but they are already using the language of the subject and showing a good understanding of different types of evidence. There is a clear progression to Year 13 where students understand the principles and methods of enquiry. They are able to consider the ethical issues involved in investigations and produce good quality proposals for how they can be completed. They offer their opinions and ideas with confidence and show a mature approach to other ideas.

### *Quality of education*

183. The high standards in sociology result from very good teaching. Students benefit from an experienced and knowledgeable member of staff whose teaching is informed by his work as an examiner. The use of assessment information is a particular strength. The teacher has an excellent understanding of the requirements of the subject and of the examination requirements, and of what students need to know, understand and do. Lessons have clear objectives and form part of a well thought out sequence. Students are clear about their achievement. They talk with confidence about predicted and target grades and about what they have to do to improve. Students learn very well. They have good study skills and work productively in lessons with little prompting. Very good relationships create a good climate for teaching and learning. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace with plenty of challenge and an expectation of high standards, but at the same time there is a relaxed atmosphere in which questions are welcomed and humour encouraged.

### *Leadership and management*

184. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The subject leader for sociology has been in post for some years and at the time of the inspection was the only teacher of the subject. Courses are well planned, available resources are used to best effect and there are realistic targets to take the subject forward. Documentation is sufficient for a one member department, but further guidance will be needed for another member of staff.

The curriculum has been enriched by visits to revision conferences and by speakers through the school's "Speaker Period" sessions, but it is recognised that this can be taken further through greater use of visits and visitors to provide up-to-date evidence and relevant research.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

The focus subject was English. One Year 12 French lesson was observed, of only two students, in which the teaching was very good with consistently good use of French by the teacher, and in which students made very good progress in conversational skills and vocabulary development. The inexperience of the sixth form teaching team means that planning and grade predictions require close management supervision.

One Year 12 German lesson was observed, of only two students, in which the teaching of a complex topic was very good with consistently good use of German by the teacher, and where students made very good conceptual and vocabulary gains, despite a lack of verbal confidence and tentative pronunciation.

### **English**

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

#### **Strengths**

- The standard of attainment at both AS and A-level in English literature is very high.
- Standards of speaking and listening in lessons are high.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Transition from AS to A-level is managed very well so students achieve their best.
- Students' understanding of how they can improve is very good.
- Students are committed and work well independently.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- ICT is not used sufficiently to enhance learning.
- Students have insufficient access to literature from other cultures.
- The range of qualifications on offer to students could be wider.
- The opportunities to use ICT to explore text types in lessons are underdeveloped.
- The insecure spelling of a minority of students receives insufficient attention.

185. In Year 12, a large number of students follow the AS-level course in English literature and a few study to improve their GCSE English grades. In Year 13, a large number of students study for A-level English literature. Three lessons were sampled, in addition to the scrutiny of students' work, completed coursework from previous years, departmental and curriculum documentation and interviews with representative students.



### *Standards and achievement*

186. This is an extremely popular subject, with over 35 students currently following the A-level course in Year 13 and a similar number following the AS-level course. At the last inspection, results up to 1995 were above average. Since 1998, students' points scores have been well above average, especially for female students who achieve very high standards and outnumber males 2:1 in all groups, in line with the national pattern. In this same period, although the pass rate is high, very few male students have achieved an A or B grade in sixth form English literature. Unconfirmed results for 2002 indicate that male students' results are improving, although their numbers are reducing to the point where statistical comparisons need to be treated cautiously.
187. The observation of students in lessons and an analysis of their work confirm these standards. Most students achieve well in relation to statistical predictions based on their GCSE grades. In lessons, the ability of many students to make presentations, debate issues and argue a point of view is of a high order. Independent research and wider reading study are of high quality, especially in Year 13.
188. There is evidence in lessons of progress in speaking and listening: students in Year 12 were able to discuss a range of extracts on the theme of World War I in a lively, fluent way with good interpersonal skills, but at a relatively superficial level. By Year 13 however, students were able to argue opposing ideas and offer alternative readings of texts on the same theme with confidence and a secure understanding.

### *Quality of education*

189. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers are all very knowledgeable about their subject and their shared planning of courses and lessons is excellent. Relationships with students are mature, and raise their self-confidence as learners and young adults. Teachers are very generous with time outside lessons to provide individual guidance and extra-curricular learning opportunities such as theatre visits, which students appreciate as contributing significantly to high achievement. Expectations set by teachers that students will achieve their highest potential are ambitious and clearly related to the requirements of the course but are also well supported by encouragement. In one well-paced and well-structured lesson with 35 students from Year 13, the head of department encouraged the class in planning their personal study to: "*Be brave. You have phenomenal intellect.*"
190. Work is marked very carefully and promptly, giving clear advice to students on how to improve in relation to the assessment objectives which are known to students. The thoroughness and accuracy of moderation procedures ensure consistency between teachers in their assessments. A significant factor in achieving good results is the department's analysis of why students find the move from AS to A-level difficult, and the adaptation of teaching to bridge the transition. The requirements of the examination boards are something of a constraint, but preparation of students for life in a complex society is being limited by

the lack of exposure to texts from other cultures. The lack of an English language examination option limits opportunities for improvement in this respect.

191. Students learn well. In lessons, they share and refine ideas willingly and make detailed and relevant notes for future reference. They understand the texts they are studying and have a grasp of the historical and social contexts in which they were written. Much of the writing by both males and females is very sophisticated, using a wide vocabulary and addressing complex and subtle ideas with originality. A minority of students have inaccurate spelling which is not being systematically addressed. Independent research and wider reading are often intellectually demanding, tackling topics such as the psychological effects of war, mutism in literature and gender perspectives on conflict. Although students use the Internet frequently for private research, and word-process their assignments, the opportunities to use ICT to explore text types in lessons are underdeveloped. Students' positive attitudes to work, their well-sustained efforts in lessons and their well-developed skills as independent learners contribute greatly to their very good levels of attainment.

#### *Leadership and management*

192. Leadership and management are very good. Since the previous inspection, there have been three heads of English. However, the current management team has been in place for 18 months and is having a beneficial influence on the culture and organisation of the department. They lead by example in terms of teaching styles and professionalism, manage systems and resources effectively, and sustain a strong commitment, shared by all the team, to further improvement of the work of the department. Documentation is clear and teachers' joint planning of schemes of work contributes to consistently high standards and expectations. Teachers use data provided by the school effectively to track the progress made by individual students and to compare groups within a year group, but further work needs to be done at a school level to analyse trends over time.