

INSPECTION REPORT

NORTON HILL SCHOOL

Midsomer Norton, N E Somerset

LEA area: Bath and N E Somerset

Unique reference number: 109301

Headteacher: Mr P Beaven

Reporting inspector: Mr John Rowley
18648

Dates of inspection: 31 March – 4 April 2003

Inspection number: 249844

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Terry Fussell
Date of previous inspection:	April 1997

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11072	Shirley Elomari	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and persona development. How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
15127	Bill Goodall	Team inspector	Art and design	How well is the school led and managed?
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REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	8 - 15
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	16 - 23
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	23
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	24 - 30
PART D: THE SIXTH FORM	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	31 - 33
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?	33 - 34
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?	34 - 35
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?	35 - 36
Assessment	
Advice, support and guidance	

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?	37
--	-----------

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	37 - 38
--	----------------

Leadership and management
Resources

PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	39 - 64
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Norton Hill is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school with most of the 11-16 pupils and sixth form students coming from the small community of Norton Radstock and the surrounding villages. The school serves pupils from widely different backgrounds, their circumstances being broadly average although the proportion eligible for free school meals (5%) is below the national average. It has 1294 pupils and students on roll which means that it is larger than most secondary schools with sixth forms. Numbers have risen from 1130 at the time of the last inspection and the school is oversubscribed. There are slightly more boys than girls with the biggest difference in Year 7 where there are 38 more boys. Less than 1% of the school population come from minority ethnic backgrounds and only three pupils speak English as an additional language. About one in ten of the pupils between 11 and 16 have been identified as having special educational needs (mainly moderate learning difficulties, emotional and behavioural difficulties and dyslexia) and 24 have formal statements of need, which is a smaller proportion than in most schools. The standard of attainment on entry into Year 7 is slightly better than that found nationally.

The school has had specialist status for technology since September 1999. It received the School Achievement Award for Excellence from the Department for Education and Skills in 2001, 2002 and 2003. It has also been awarded Sportsmark from Sport England; an International School Award from the British Council; and gained both the Healthy Schools Award and Investors in People status in July 2002.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Norton Hill is an excellent school with a very good sixth form. It provides a very high quality of education as a result of very good, and sometimes inspirational, teaching. This is set within a broad and imaginative curriculum that caters very well for learners' different needs. Parents are very satisfied with the school. Nearly all learners have very positive attitudes to their work and the progress that they make at each stage of their education is greater than that found in most schools. The continued improvement and the success of the school are a reflection of the outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher, very ably supported by highly effective senior and middle managers and a very strong governing body. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils' and students' achievement is very good.
- Teaching is very good and sometimes inspirational.
- The school has been highly successful in creating an ethos for learning. Relationships between all sections of the school community are excellent.
- The school has an imaginative curriculum that meets the needs of all learners at each stage of their education and development.
- Leadership and management of the school are excellent. There is a sustained focus on achievement for all. There are very effective strategies for continuous improvement.

What could be improved

- No significant areas for improvement were identified by the inspection. The school has a clear agenda for continuous development.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April 1997 and improvement since then has been very good. Many important strengths were identified at that time. These have been either maintained or improved upon. Leadership and management are now outstanding. There has been a substantial improvement in the quality of teaching. Curriculum provision has continued to be a major strength and has been successfully developed to meet the changing needs of learners. Results in all external tests and examinations have improved and at a faster rate than that found nationally.

Nearly all the key issues identified in the last report have been fully addressed. Teaching and curriculum provision are much improved. Pupils with special educational needs are very well provided for. Assessment and reporting have become strengths of the school. Where needed, policies have been updated and fully implemented. Monitoring and evaluation are well established. The school has made substantial progress in improving accommodation, whilst recognising that issues remain. However, the school is still not providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			Similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	C	C	C	

Key

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

Statutory test results at the end of Year 9 have been well above the national average in English, mathematics and science in recent years. In 2002, results were well above the national average in science, above the national average in mathematics and in line with the national average in English. Taken together, the 2002 results represented improvement by pupils from the start of Year 7 that was greater than that found in most schools. However, the overall 2002 results were not quite as good as in previous years and, unusually, were not better than those in similar schools (i.e. those with a similar proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals). This relative dip was largely due to a poor set of test results at the higher grades in English. A careful study of work during the inspection shows that these results are not a reflection of current standards in English. These are well above standards typically seen, as they are also in mathematics and science.

GCSE results have been well above average in recent years. GCSE examination results in 2002 were exceptionally good with 99% of pupils gaining five or more GCSEs and 75% gaining five or more higher grade passes. The school exceeded its target by 11% for pupils gaining five or more

A*-C grades. From their starting points at the beginning of Year 10, pupils' progress is in the top 5% of schools nationally. Results were also in the top 5% when compared to similar schools. The rate of improvement in pupils' average point score at GCSE over the last five years has been above the national trend. The difference between the performance of boys and girls was less than that found nationally, as boys did particularly well.

Student achievement is very good in Years 12 and 13. This judgement is further explained in the sixth form summary annex to this report. The A-level results in 2002 were particularly impressive with 96% of those entering both AS and A-level examinations gaining pass grades. Achievement on vocational courses is also good. As with the rest of the school, students' progress from their different starting points is significantly better than in most schools, although this is more marked for female students than for males.

PUPILS' AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Pupils and students are keen to come to school and are positively involved in a wide range of activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Pupils and students are courteous and trustworthy. The incidence of exclusions is very low.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. There are many examples of pupils and students taking responsibility and their respect for each other is very impressive.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance levels are well above average and very good for all age groups. Unauthorised absence is low.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Across the school, about nine out of every ten lessons observed during the inspection were judged to be good or better, six out of ten were very good and two in ten were excellent. In GCSE classes, the proportion of very good teaching rose to about eight lessons in ten, with no lesson being judged to be less than good. The amount of good and better teaching is greater than that found in most schools. Teaching in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science in Years 7-11 is very good. In addition, the key skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) are well taught across all subjects.

Teachers have excellent specialist knowledge and communicate it in enthusiastic and engaging ways. They plan their lessons well, making the learning objectives very clear in ways that ensure pace, high expectations and good use of prior knowledge and understanding. Different teaching approaches

meet the needs of all learners, including the gifted and talented and those with special educational needs, very well. Teachers' explanation and focused questioning effectively builds up learners' understanding. Well-planned and challenging homework ensures that the learning in lessons is extended and consolidated. All these features, and excellent relationships in classrooms, promote high quality learning where pupils and students are highly motivated and work hard.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Excellent. All requirements are met in an imaginative way so that pupils and students can follow courses that meet their needs. A very good programme of educational visits and extra-curricular activities extends the curriculum.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Pupils' individual needs are identified quickly and their education plans are used effectively by teachers and support staff.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Appropriate support is given to pupils for whom English is an additional language.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. Pupils and students are given many opportunities to develop their self-knowledge, take responsibility and become active citizens. The school has a strong moral code. The school has actively sought to promote understanding of the diversity and richness of other cultures, as well as encouraging learners to appreciate their own cultural traditions.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. Pastoral care is an important foundation of the school. Teaching and non-teaching staff make every effort to know and care for individual pupils and students. In this respect, the headteacher and senior staff lead by example.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. There is a shared vision, a sense of purpose and very high aspirations for the school. Strategic thinking and planning are excellent and the management of school improvement programmes is highly effective. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Excellent. The governors bring a wide range of skills and expertise to the school. They are well informed, and are 'critical friends' who challenge and support the headteacher and other staff.

Aspect (contd)	Comment
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent. The ongoing review and self-evaluation are features of the school that ensures that no one rests on their laurels.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. The school is very successful in attracting extra funding and uses it very well to support learning. The principles of 'best value' are understood and applied to all aspects of the work of the school.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like the school and make good progress • Behaviour is good and their children are being helped to become more mature and responsible. • Teaching is good and their children are expected to work hard. • The school works closely with parents, they are well informed and they feel that they can approach the school with questions and problems. • The school is well led and managed. • The school provides an interesting range of extra-curricular activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no issues about which more than 20% of parents who responded had any concerns. The only issue where more than 10% of parents had concerns was homework. These were equally balanced between those who thought their children had too much homework and those who thought they had too little.

Three hundred and seventy four parents returned the inspectors' questionnaire which is a larger proportion than in most schools. The inspection team strongly supports parents' positive views of the school. Whilst effective overall, there are some variations in the amount and frequency of homework set and the school is continuing to strive for greater consistency in this area.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 217 students in the sixth form which means that it is larger than most school sixth forms. Of these students, 97 are male and 120 are female. The number of students in the sixth form has grown in recent years. The great majority of the students who enter the sixth form come from Year 11 in the school. The overall standard of attainment of those students who enter Year 12 is above the national average for all pupils at the end of Year 11. However the students demonstrate a broad range of prior attainment. There are no students with English as an additional language. The school offers a broad programme of AS-level, A-level and vocational courses, partly as a result of collaborative arrangement with Somervale School and Norton Radstock College. The school also offers an extensive enrichment programme, which includes personal and social education, skills development, information and communication technology (ICT), sport and community service. A wide range of extra-curricular sporting, musical, dramatic and social activities are available. The great majority of sixth formers follow courses leading to AS-level and A-level qualifications although a growing number follow vocational courses, usually in combination with AS-levels and A-levels. The school generally requires 5/6 GCSE passes at A*-C for Advanced courses and a number of passes at A*-G for Intermediate courses for entry to the sixth form, but there is some flexibility for individual cases. A good record of conduct and commitment to the school is also required. Less than one student in twenty drops out before the end of their chosen programme of study and this usually happens in Year 12. The proportion of students who continue their studies after the sixth form is well above the national average (59% to higher education and 13% to further education).

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Norton Hill School has a very effective sixth form that gives very good value for money. There have been a lot of improvements since the time of the last inspection. The leadership and management are now excellent. Teaching and learning are very good. The sixth form has grown in size and is now providing for a broader range of students. Examination performance has continued to improve at a faster rate than that found nationally. Students' achievement is good as they make more progress from the start of Year 12 than in most schools. The wide provision available, particularly through the collaborative arrangements with other centres, ensures that the needs of all pupils are met.

Strengths

- Excellent leadership and management.
- Very good teaching, with teachers showing excellent knowledge and understanding and an infectious enthusiasm.
- Very good added value from the start of Year 12, particularly for female students.
- Very good attitudes by students to their learning.
- Excellent personal development and relationships which raise the quality of learning.
- Outstanding advice, support and guidance for individual students.
- A broad and imaginative curriculum which provides for different needs.
- Very effective collaboration with Somervale School and Norton Radstock College.

What could be improved

- No significant issues for improvement were identified by the inspection. The school has a clear agenda for continuous development.

Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Teaching is of a high quality and the leadership and management of the department are very good.
Biology	Good. Teaching is good, the subject is well led and relationships between teachers and students are very good.
Chemistry	Good. Teaching is good, the subject is well led and relationships between teachers and students are very good.
Physics	Good. Teaching and subject management are good. Excellent relationships underpin effective learning.
Business Education	Very good. Achievement is very good in relation to prior attainment. Teaching is very good. The department is well led.
Information and communication technology	Very good. Teaching is good and attitudes to learning are very good. The leadership and management of the subject are very good.
Travel and Tourism	Very good. Attitudes and achievement are very good as a result of very good, and often, excellent teaching. Leadership and management across the consortium are very good.
Health and Social Care	Good. Leadership and management are very good and the consortium arrangements are very effective.
Art and design	Very good. Standards are high and students have very positive attitudes to the subject. Teaching and subject management are very good.
History	Very good. Standards are high as a result of student attitudes, very good teaching and very good subject leadership.
Psychology	Excellent. Psychology is an exceptionally popular subject with an excellent record of examination success as a result of the very good teaching of the head of department.
English	Good. Achievement is good in both English language and English literature. Teaching is good and leadership and management are strong.
Modern foreign languages	Very good. Standards are above average as a result of very good teaching. The subject is very well led.

Other work seen in the sixth form reflected the strengths noted in the subjects focused on during the inspection.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Excellent. Staff know students very well and monitor their progress closely. Guidance and support for both academic and social development are of a very high standard.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Excellent. The headteacher and the leadership team provide clear direction to the work of the sixth form. Responsibilities are clear. The director of the sixth form is highly effective in all his work.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The wide choice of courses, coupled with the very good information and advice they receive, that allows them to follow a programme suited to their career aspirations. The way they are helped to settle into the sixth form and to manage their time through the development of very good study skills, including independent learning. The very good teaching they receive which, together with the willingness of teachers to help them, ensures that they make good progress. The wide range of information and the advice and guidance that enables them to make informed choices about the next stage of their lives. The wide range of opportunities they have to make a contribution to the life of the school and the wider community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The limited access to computers for use during private study periods. The range of social opportunities provided.

The positive views by students were supported by the findings of the inspection. Inspectors agree that sixth form access to ICT is not as good as in the rest of the school and this has been recognised as an area for development.

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

Pupils' and students' achievement is very good.

- 1 Achievement (the accomplishments of pupils and students in relation to what might reasonably be expected of them) is very good. At all stages of their education, learners make more progress than in most schools. This is demonstrated through the school's record in tests and examinations. It can also be seen in the work of pupils and students and in the learning that takes place in lessons.
- 2 Test results at the end of Year 9 have been well above the national average in English, mathematics and science in recent years. This has represented very good progress from the pupils' starting points when they entered the school. Whilst still above average, the 2002 results were not quite as good as in previous years. This can be explained by the absence during the test week of a small number of pupils and one set of poor test results at the higher grades in English. A careful study of work during the inspection showed that this anomaly is not a reflection of the current standards of those pupils who are now in Year 10, which are well above standards typically seen. Even with the slight dip in 2002, pupils still made more progress across Key Stage 3 than the national average and their progress was greater than that in schools with pupils with similar starting points.
- 3 GCSE results have been well above average in recent years and GCSE examination results in 2002 were exceptionally good with 75% gaining five or more higher grade passes and 99% gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C. This represents outstanding achievement. The added value (the amount of progress that pupils made from their Year 9 test results to their GCSE results) places the school in the top 5% of school's nationally. GCSE results are also in the top 5% when compared to schools in similar circumstances.
- 4 A-level results have been in line with the national average in recent years, but comparisons need to be treated with caution as the school accepts a broader range of students on to advanced course than in many schools. Achievement is very good as the school adds value to what students might be expected to achieve from their different starting points. A comparison of the average points scores of students who took A-level examinations in 2002 with their average points scores in GCSE examinations shows that they made above-average progress in the sixth form. On average, students gained half a grade more at A-level than students with their GCSE grades did nationally. This good value-added is also shown in advanced and intermediate vocational courses.
- 5 Across the school, there is very good achievement by all groups of pupils and students. Those with special educational needs, the gifted and talented, looked after children and the very few from minority ethnic backgrounds or with English as an additional language all do very well. For example, in 2002, all of the pupils on the special educational need register gained five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-G. Their average progress from Key Stage

3 was greater than that for all pupils nationally, and nearly one third obtained five or more passes at A*-C.

- 6 During the inspection week, pupils' and students' work was carefully analysed and lessons were observed. This information supported the conclusion that students are doing very well. Learning was good or better in nine out of ten lessons observed, and very good or better in more than half. The great majority of pupils and students are working at or near their capacity and are challenged by the work presented to them. Tasks require effort and concentration. An example of this was in an excellently taught Year 11 science lesson where students were revising the electromagnetic spectrum in the final stages of their examination preparation. Pupils completed a circuit of experiments, collected their findings and presented them to the class. All of this was completed at a very quick pace with pupils co-operating, reading from textbooks, listening to advice and asking questions to overcome any difficulties. These pupils were gaining much higher levels of understanding than would normally be seen. This was a result of their excellent attitudes, hard work and the outstanding teaching they were given.
- 7 Pupils' and students' very good achievement results from many factors, including the very good teaching, the ethos for learning, the pastoral care, and the strength of the curriculum. These are all described in the points that follow. One of the characteristics of the school is the way in which all these positive elements of the school 'join up'. This is a result of the leadership's sustained focus on pupils' and students' achievement, and on constant evaluation leading to ideas for how to do things better.

Teaching is very good and sometimes inspirational.

- 8 There has been a big improvement in the quality of teaching since the time of the last inspection. In April 1997, teaching was satisfactory or better in almost 90% of lessons seen and good or better in 50% of lessons seen. In this inspection, teaching was satisfactory or better in 99% of lessons seen; good or better in 92% of lessons seen; very good or better in 38% of lessons seen and excellent in 18% of lessons seen. These proportions are significantly better than those found in most schools and much better than those found in 1997.
- 9 There is a clear connection between the very good teaching seen across the school and the very good learning and achievement. This was particularly evident in GCSE classes where all of the teaching seen was good or better and 72% was very good or better. Teachers prepare pupils for public examinations very well and this is a central reason why the school's GCSE performance is amongst the top 5% of similar schools in the country. An example of this was in a Year 11 mathematics lesson where a class of pupils who, given their earlier attainments, might not have been expected to achieve higher grade pass were on track to gain C grades as a result of very effective teaching. An immaculately planned lesson started with very clear, shared lesson objectives. Excellent interaction between the teacher and the pupils quickly identified and tackled any misconceptions and developed pupils' thinking. Mathematical language was used very precisely and a range of oral, visual and practical approaches ensured that the different learning styles in the room were very well provided

for. A final plenary session was particularly effective in getting pupils to sum up the main points of the lesson and consolidate their learning.

- 10 There is also a clear connection between the very good teaching and pupils' and students' excellent attitudes, behaviour and relationships. At the end of one Year 9 religious education lesson, pupils commented that they had really enjoyed the lesson because they had to think and work hard and really wanted to achieve the objectives. The teacher had started the lesson by setting the homework, showing how this related to religious education attainment targets and explaining how the lesson would prepare them to tackle this problem. Carefully planned steps and an excellent range of resources, including pictures, photographs, video clips and computer based materials were used to develop understanding. Praise, encouragement and challenge forced all pupils to be involved.
- 11 Through careful appointments and timetabling, the school has ensured that learners are taught by specialists with excellent subject knowledge. In many classes, teachers' enjoyment of their subject is very evident and their enthusiasm rubs off on the pupils and students who are highly motivated and work hard.
- 12 Teachers' planning is very effective. The excellent use of data on pupils' prior performance means that teachers start with high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Excellent use of ongoing assessment and a very clear understanding of what pupils and students need to know and understand for the next stage of their learning leads to carefully structured and purposeful teaching. For example, in one Year 9 French class that aimed at reinforcing work on the past tense, the teacher started with a clear understanding of what pupils already knew. Work was set which integrated a series of tightly structured speaking, listening, reading and writing tasks which stretched the pupils' ability. Explanation, instruction, demonstration and praise were all given in the target language in a way that required intense concentration to keep up. Pupils responded by showing such concentration. By the end of the lesson, existing understanding had been reinforced and considerable new learning had taken place.
- 13 Teachers have a good repertoire of teaching styles that nearly always meet the needs of all learners, including the gifted and talented and those with special educational needs. When appropriate, good, and often very good, explanation and demonstration by the teacher leads to focused and productive enquiry. Questioning effectively builds up learners' understanding. Homework ensures that the learning in lessons is extended and consolidated. Where provided, support staff are very effective in supporting teaching. All of these features were present in two contrasting English lessons in Year 9 where pupils of very different ability were both provided with excellent preparation for their statutory tests. In one class of low attaining pupils, excellent relationships created an atmosphere where pupils were not afraid 'to have a go'. Difficult learning objectives related to dramatic irony in *Macbeth* were successfully tackled. The teacher showed great skill in making the concepts accessible and then used drama techniques and short burst activities to develop an excellent understanding. The learning support assistant provided unobtrusive, but timely support. In the other Year 9 class, with a different teacher, precise exposition demonstrated how to skim, scan and

retrieve information. This was followed by very good questioning (with humour used to good effect), a writing activity and a plenary where ideas were summed up.

- 14 The improvement in the teaching in the school is a reflection of the priority that the school gives to it. It is central to the school's development plan, and each subject has a teaching and learning co-ordinator. There is constant reflection on what makes good teaching and an openness to consider different approaches. There are impressive systems for professional development which mean that teachers have come to a better understanding of the ways in which students learn. Teachers' professional development is clearly linked to performance management and needs identified in the school's and faculties' development plans. School in-service training days have been very effective in building a shared understanding of good teaching. This is reinforced through the monitoring undertaken by senior and middle managers and governors. The school has actively sought to bring in new blood. Newly appointed staff have brought energy and ideas from other schools and training institutions.

The school has been highly successful in creating an ethos for learning. Relationships between all sections of the school community are excellent.

- 15 The school actively promotes pride in learning and achievement. They have been successful in creating a critical mass of pupils and students who are associated with hard work and success, so that it is the norm for others to aspire to. Sixth formers and older pupils provide very good role models and help younger pupils settle in to this ethos of the school.
- 16 Throughout the inspection week, the atmosphere in the school was relaxed and friendly, but at the same time very purposeful. There is a very strong sense of shared values with an assumption that pupils will want to learn and achieve.
- 17 The headteacher sets the tone with powerful assemblies where achievement is celebrated; regular interaction with pupils where the successes in all aspects of school life are praised; and presentations to parents about how they can support their children. Teaching and non-teaching staff reinforce this through their use of praise and support. One of the key features of the school has been that it has successfully woven together all strands of its work, academic and pastoral, so that pupils and students are enabled to achieve their best in all areas of school life. The school has excellent pastoral systems, which go well beyond care and welfare. Learning is at the core of the school and all staff are very supportive of any pupil or student who is experiencing difficulty.
- 18 Behaviour is nearly always excellent. The school is well disciplined and pupils have a very clear understating of what is, and is not, acceptable. However, the generally excellent behaviour is a reflection of an acceptance of personal responsibility rather than any kind of external pressure. This is particularly evident outside lessons where minimal supervision is needed. Before school and between lessons, movement is self-controlled and considerate. Pupils and students are trusted and therefore they are allowed free access to the school at breaks and lunchtime, with only a few rooms where there are health and safety considerations being locked. This respect and trust are not misplaced. The school is a very pleasant place to walk around at all times. Lunchtime in the dining areas is very civilized.

- 19 Pupils' and students' respect for each other and for members of the teaching and non-teaching staff is very impressive. In lessons, all age groups listen attentively to each other and when wrong answers or different opinions are given, they are nearly always constructive. An example of this was in a very effective lesson on political systems as part of the school's programme for personal and social education. Through a series of activities, the teacher developed an understanding of leadership. This involved paired, group and whole class discussions where different ideas were presented and challenged. Throughout the lesson, different viewpoints were treated with interest and respect.
- 20 One of the reasons for the excellent relationships within the school is the way in which pupils and students are actively involved in decision-making and feel part of a collaborative enterprise. One example of this has been the house system, which has proved to be very effective in encouraging a sense of responsibility and community. The House and School Councils, made up of elected representatives, are greatly valued and seen as bodies that can make a genuine difference. Similarly, senior students in the sixth form are seen as an important voice for the sixth form with real impact.

The school has an imaginative curriculum that meets the needs of all learners at each stage of their education and development.

- 21 The range and breadth of curricular provision was singled out as a major strength of the school at the time of the last inspection. This has been built on with further development to ensure that the curriculum matches the interests, aptitudes and needs of all pupils. It is an important framework which allows the very good teaching and learning seen to take place.
- 22 Across the school, all statutory requirements for the curriculum are met. The National Curriculum is generally provided through timetabled subjects, but some requirements, such as those for citizenship, ICT and some elements of religious education are met in creative ways. For example, the new subject of citizenship is taught through identified units in personal and social education and in different subjects, and through whole-school activities such as a re-cycling project. Another example is the way that ICT is taught across the curriculum. In some schools, this approach can sometimes leads to a dilution of ICT content, aspects being missed or inadequate assessment. This is not the case at Norton Hill. Careful planning and staff commitment mean that standards in ICT are very good and all requirements are met. A varied programme of personal, social and health education is well co-ordinated across the school and makes a very good contribution to the personal development of pupils and students.
- 23 Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. The school has very good systems for identifying needs. Staff are fully aware of how the curriculum needs to be adapted for individuals and they are well supported in, and out, of class. There is very good provision for study support for pupils of all abilities. Whilst recognising provision for the gifted and talented as an area for further development across Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form, the school has made important strides in this area. For example, Year 7 were involved for one 'Fuel Injection' week with workshops run by external specialists in

mathematics, languages, sciences and the humanities. Further provision for the more able in the sixth form is planned through the introduction of an AS-level in critical thinking. Across the school, banding, setting and grouping are used well to ensure that individual needs are met. This is not done in a way that creates elitist or 'sink groups', but with genuine attention to providing equality of opportunity.

- 24 In Years 10 and 11 a carefully constructed option programme means that all pupils are able to make positive choices. There is a large 'core' programme of English, mathematics, science, design and technology, ICT, history or geography, a modern language, personal and social education, religious education and physical education with two further optional subjects. For some pupils, learning is consolidated through a skills programme in place of a modern language and one of the options. This programme, which includes literacy, numeracy, ICT, teamwork, study support and work-related learning, is very effective. In collaboration with Norton Radstock College, the school is also offering the new applied GCSEs in health and social care, and manufacturing.
- 25 The sixth form curriculum is described in the sixth form summary annex to this report. As with the rest of the school, it has been carefully thought through with an impressive range of options to meet different needs.
- 26 Many opportunities are provided for students to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness. Spiritual provision can be seen in many aspects of the school's life. One example, which was referred to by different staff and pupils at the time of the inspection, was the way in which the school marked Holocaust Memorial Day in January. Remaining displays and the *PowerPoint* presentation from the day showed how this difficult subject had been handled very sensitively and had had a very strong impact. The school's moral and social code is described elsewhere in this report, it infuses the curriculum. The school has recognized the particular issues of the culturally homogenous community of Norton Radstock and has actively sought to develop understanding of the wider world and life in a multicultural society. There are a very good range of enrichment, extra-curricular and cultural activities, including sport, music, drama, outdoor pursuits, visits and exchanges. The breadth of the curriculum has been recognised through the award of the International School Award, Sportsmark and the Healthy Schools Award.
- 27 The school's curriculum is under constant review. There has been a recognition that the school's success at GCSE has broadened the intake to the sixth form, encouraging larger numbers to continue with their studies and therefore the need for an ever widening provision. The school is also looking to exploit some of the possibilities that are becoming available for more flexible use of time in Key Stage 3 and for different paces of learning in Years 10 and 11.

Leadership and management of the school are excellent. There is a sustained focus on achievement for all and very effective strategies for continuous improvement.

- 28 The leadership and management of the school are excellent. This is an improvement on the already very good situation reported at the time of the previous inspection. The headteacher has a clear vision for the continued improvement of the school and the raising of standards for all its pupils and students. This is supported by the governors, all those with leadership and management responsibility, and by the staff of the school. There is a sustained focus on achievement for all and this is the main agenda item for all meetings. The headteacher has the full support of parents who are extremely positive about his leadership. In discussion, staff, governors, parents and pupils all attribute the major improvements in the school to the headteacher. The openness of the decision making process, expert knowledge, and the close attention to detail are features of this very successful leadership style. With other senior staff, the headteacher leads by example. His door is always open, he ‘walks the school’ on a regular basis and is known to all the staff and pupils who find him approachable and interested in all aspects of their school.
- 29 The headteacher is very ably supported by the leadership group of senior staff. They bring a wide range of complementary expertise to the running of the school, and are able to challenge and debate issues. They have the capacity to become closely involved with new initiatives and follow them through to their conclusion. The school is willing to try out new ideas. ‘Nothing is not up for review’, is often quoted. Day-to-day management of the school is excellent; responsibilities are clear and are carried out calmly and efficiently.
- 30 The governing body is highly effective and particularly well led by a very experienced chairman. Governors bring a wide range of skills and have an excellent knowledge of the school’s strengths and weaknesses. They are able to challenge decisions, knowing the right questions to ask through their personal experience and their training for the job. They are ambitious for the school, sharing the vision and the drive to move the school forward. Governors and senior managers are individually linked to particular subjects, and are kept well informed of standards and progress. The governors are clear that they only want to appoint the best people that share the values of the school, and take a great deal of time and effort in selecting and training them to be effective teachers.
- 31 The school evaluates its performance regularly and very effectively. Information about the pupils’ attainment and progress is gathered, analysed and acted upon in great detail and to great effect. There is a culture of questioning performance at all levels. Heads of faculty accept responsibility for their areas and are, in turn, held to account by the leadership team. Most importantly, data analysis is used as a starting point to plan for improvement. Academic targets are set on the basis of the teachers’ extensive knowledge of each pupil, how well they are progressing, and what they are capable of. Performance data is also used to raise expectations. Assumptions about what individuals and groups can achieve are challenged, and teaching and learning are consequently pitched at a higher level. The use of target minimum grades with pupils and students is well established and is supported through mentoring and tutorial programmes.
- 32 The monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching are very good, which is a big improvement since the previous inspection report. There is an established system with heads of faculty having the first responsibility for standards within their areas. They are held

to account through a cycle of meetings with the leadership team who are also involved in lesson observation and work analysis. Whilst supportive, the school has shown that it can act rigorously when underperformance is identified. There is a strong commitment to teachers' professional development and to initial teacher training. The teachers are monitored and supported effectively through a well-structured programme, which is closely linked to performance management.

- 33 All the teachers, even those new to the school, feel that they can contribute ideas that will be taken seriously and followed up if they are appropriate. All staff are involved in the formulation of the school development plan with teaching and learning as the central aim, which is then refined and developed through discussion and debate. It is brief, focused and relevant. A very positive ethos for learning has been established, both for the pupils and teachers, and all staff contribute to this.
- 34 The school makes excellent use of the resources available to it from its limited base budget, and makes every effort to augment this by bringing in extra revenue from national initiatives as well as support from local industry and the community. These have been very successful in improving the accommodation, although some areas are still quite dilapidated. The resources for ICT have been improved radically, although the demands for the use of ICT are very high, increasing, and proving difficult to meet.
- 35 Financial management is very strong. The chair and vice chair of the finance committee have a firm oversight of the budget. Very good value for money is achieved and the school's finances are quite healthy. There is a clear rationale for the present surplus which is being held for future building programmes. The governors monitor the planned expenditure very carefully. Educational priorities as identified in the school's development plan are supported through the financial planning, and the principles of best value are applied in detail to all aspects of the school, including curriculum review and timetabling. A lot of premises services have now been taken in-house as a result of reviews to improve quality.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- 36 No major weaknesses requiring improvement were identified by the inspection. The school has a clear agenda for continuous development to build upon its present numerous strengths.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	47
	Sixth form	54
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		58

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

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

Number	11	19	13	3	1	0	0
Percentage	23	40	28	6	2	0	0

Sixth form

Number	7	19	24	4	0	0	0
Percentage	13	35	44	7	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 as each lesson represents more than two percentage points and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1077	217
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	54	-

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	24	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	109	1

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	3

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	10
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	18

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.1
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	114	97	211

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	79	86	91
	Girls	85	81	87
	Total	164	167	178
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (73)	79 (76)	84 (75)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19 (45)	57 (58)	52 (47)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	82	100	90
	Girls	86	85	85
	Total	168	185	175
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (76)	89 (85)	82 (68)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	35 (31)	70 (63)	44 (51)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	90	108	198

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard Specified	Boys	64	90	90
	Girls	84	107	108
	Total	148	197	198
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard Specified	School	75 (60)	99 (99)	100(100)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	53.9 (46.9)
	National	39.8 (39)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or Units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	11	91
	National		81

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	32	44	76
	Average point score per candidate	202.7	258.9	234.8
National	Average point score per candidate	n/a	n/a	n/a

		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	30	44	74	2	0	2
	Average point score per candidate	211.9	258.9	239.4	60	0	60
National	Average point score per candidate	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

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

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

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1272	22	1
1	0	0
4	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
2	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
5	0	0
0	0	0
8	0	0

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

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	77.75
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	556

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.3
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	25
Key Stage 4	21.6

Financial information

Financial year	2002-2003
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	£
Total income	4,072,706
Total expenditure	3,861,165
Expenditure per pupil	2,984
Balance brought forward from previous year	248,432
Balance carried forward to next year	211,541

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	24.31
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	25.28

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
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.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1294

Number of questionnaires returned

374

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	57	7	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	41	56	2	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	60	2	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	62	17	2	1
The teaching is good.	33	61	1	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	53	7	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54	41	2	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	38	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	28	61	8	1	2
The school is well led and managed.	50	44	1	0	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	39	54	4	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	48	47	2	0	3

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

- 37 The attainment of Year 13 students in A-level examinations has improved consistently since the previous inspection and at a much faster rate than that found nationally. At that time of the last inspection, the average point score was 13.4. Using the same method of calculation for comparison (a new method was introduced in 2002), the average point score in 2002 would be 17.6, an improvement of 4.2. This is three times the rate of improvement in the average point score nationally of 1.4 over the same period. This excellent improvement is even more impressive as the school's sixth form is significantly larger than at the time of the last inspection and less selective, accepting students with a broader range of ability. Nearly all of these students complete their chosen programme of study and are counted in the final performance tables. Less than one student in twenty drops out and this usually happens in Year 12.
- 38 In recent years, A-level results have been broadly in line with the national average and significantly better than those for mixed comprehensive schools. The headline national and school results for 2002 were published during the inspection week, but detailed subject data was not available. Direct comparisons with previous years need to be treated with caution, but a careful analysis shows a substantial jump in the school's overall A-level performance in 2002. Using the new method of calculation, the school's average points score in 2002 of 231.8 was close to the national average for all types of schools of 254.5. Similarly, the school's average point score per entry was 72.1 which was close to the national average of 76. Indications are that results were above average in art and design, chemistry, English literature, mathematics and psychology. Results were average in computer science and English language and below average in biology. In other subjects, the entries were too small for any reliable comparison to be made.
- 39 The school adds value to what students might be expected to achieve from their different starting points. A comparison of the average points scores of students who took A-level examinations in 2002 with their average points scores in GCSE examinations shows that they made above-average progress in the sixth form. On average, students gained half a grade more at A-level than students with comparable GCSE grades did nationally. Good 'value added' from GCSE to A-level was most notable in business studies, English language and psychology. Value added was not as good in biology, chemistry and physics.
- 40 There is a significant gap between the performance of male and female students at A-level with female students obtaining higher grades. This gap is greater than that found nationally. Using the old method of calculation, average point score of female students was 2.3 higher than male students compared to a national difference of 0.8 in 2001. In 2002, this difference rose to 4.5. Different starting points cannot explain the difference between male and female students as their average GCSE points score were similar. The difference can be partly explained by differences in the overall added value in the sixth form. When all

subjects are combined, the progress of male students is broadly in line with that found nationally, whilst female students make substantially more progress than might be expected. The reasons for this are complex. In individual courses, male and female students generally make similar progress, but option choices mean that there are many more females in the subjects that add the greatest value leading to the difference in overall outcomes.

- 41 The most recent results in the Year 12 units that go to make up the new AS-level examinations show that the school's average point score is above average with particularly good results in art and design, business studies, design and technology, English language, psychology and sociology. However, available data has to be treated with caution and it is difficult to draw firm conclusions. National and local data is incomplete and does not include retakes, the significant numbers of students who took units again to improve their grades, or the students who did not take units until Year 13. The information that is available shows that by the end of Year 12, students are making good progress from their starting points in September. The value added of those students following one year intermediate vocational courses was also good from the start of Year 12.
- 42 Students' work seen during the inspection week confirms the picture of standards in both Year 12 and Year 13 being at least in line with the national average and often above. It also shows that students are generally making good progress and that achievement from their different starting points is very good. Coursework is usually of a high quality and based on independent thought and research. The school develops key skills through the tutorial and skills programme and within subjects. Key skills are not externally assessed and accredited, but within subjects the skills of communication, application of number and ICT are well developed, so that there are no barriers to students' achievement. Wider key skills (working with others, problem solving and improving your own learning) are accredited through the ASDAN (Award Scheme for the Development and Accreditation Network) Universities Award. All students successfully take a course and a test leading to the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).
- 43 The proportion of students who continue their studies after the sixth form is well above the national average. The most recent information available shows that 59% of students continue to higher education and a further 13% to further education.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

- 44 Sixth-form students' attitudes towards the school are very good. During the inspection, no lessons were observed where sixth form attitudes and behaviour were less than good and in most lessons they were very good. Students enjoy coming to school and speak of it with considerable pride. Students' attitude to their work is very good. During their time in the sixth form, students develop excellent self-motivation. They are committed to their studies and, particularly in Year 13, have developed sensible patterns of hard work that help to ensure their success.
- 45 Relationships between sixth formers, as well as with younger pupils, their teachers and other adults, are excellent. The sixth form is a friendly, supportive and harmonious community.

Students enjoy the many opportunities that they have to discuss controversial issues, but their views are balanced. They are mature and thoughtful individuals who demonstrate very high levels of respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others.

- 46 Students in Year 12 are expected to undertake community service on a regular basis and they take this responsibility seriously. In Year 13, the senior student team organises a wide range of activities, both within the sixth form and for the wider school community. They provide younger pupils with very good role models. Some students volunteer to train as counsellors for the 'Teen Support Group' and through this provide confidential support to pupils who are experiencing problems of any kind. This work has been nationally recognised and the school were finalists in the National Crimebeat Awards in 2001. A notable feature of sixth form life is the wide range of activities that help others. Some of these are direct, such as the annual Christmas party organised for residents of local care homes for the elderly, while others, for example, the immensely successful Charities Week, principally involve activities within the school community. During the inspection, members of the sixth form organised a very professional presentation where the impressive sum of money raised was donated to representatives of the four chosen charities.
- 47 Attendance in the sixth form is very good. The school sets a minimum level of attendance for its students at 90% and achieves in excess of this target. Students habitually arrive promptly to lessons.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 48 Teaching and learning in the sixth form are very good overall. During the inspection, teaching in 92% of the 54 lessons was judged to be good or better and 48% was very good or better, and there was no unsatisfactory teaching. These proportions are better than those found in most schools. A characteristic of the teaching was the consistency across subjects. Very good or excellent teaching was seen in all the subject areas that were the focus for inspection.
- 49 An important foundation for the very good teaching in the sixth form is excellent subject knowledge. Teachers are able to draw on an extensive body of information to illustrate specific points; they make reference to the most recent research and employ a good range of up-to-date source material. Where appropriate, teacher exposition is used well. In the best lessons, the teacher's evident enjoyment of their subject enthused the students. In addition to their content knowledge, teachers have an excellent understanding of the specific requirement of the examination courses. Consequently, they are able to plan in detail, set clear objectives and explain to students what they need to do to succeed. An example of all these elements was in a Year 13 art and design lesson. The teacher explained carefully and with great authority where the students were with their examination marks and exactly what they had to do to improve. Sketchbooks, original paintings and prints were used to demonstrate processes and outcomes. Impressive use was made of a digital camera and ICT applications to create and manipulate images

- 50 Lessons are generally conducted at a brisk pace, which keeps students attentive and motivated. Teachers' expectations of what is possible are very good. All lessons are characterised by very good relationships. These relationships give students the confidence to participate in discussion, try out new ideas and learn from each other. Questioning is used well to consolidate understanding, think through problems and lead students to the next step in their learning.
- 51 Across subjects, teachers pay good attention to developing students' skills in communication and application of number. Good use is made of opportunities to reinforce key skills. The literacy and numeracy demands of subject content are well considered. Independent research tasks and coursework demands extend their literacy skills.
- 52 Students follow up their lessons with a considerable amount of independent study as they are taught how to research and make good use of study time. In general, students plan their work very well. They show very good skills of independent learning. Students make very good use of the library and other learning resources during their study time, although the number of computers available for private study use is limited. Preparation for lessons is also generally good. There were good examples during the inspection week of where students had researched and then presented their finding to the class, including the very good use of a wide range of ICT.
- 53 Whilst never less than satisfactory, the style of teaching in a few lessons is rather narrow. In these few lessons, a combination of teacher explanation, demonstration and closed questioning restricts the range of learning styles that students can employ and does not encourage independent thinking. Consequently, some learning opportunities are not taken.

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

- 54 The school offers an impressive range of options in the sixth form. At the time of the inspection, 27 different courses leading to AS and A-level qualifications were available. In addition, seven courses leading to the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) and one course leading to an intermediate qualification in ICT were offered. An important factor in this very good provision is the collaborative arrangement with Somervale School and Norton Radstock College. The teaching of nine courses is shared with other institutions and students move between three sites as required.
- 55 The great majority of sixth form students follow AS and A-level courses, but an increasing number combine these with vocational courses and a relatively small number follow a purely vocational route. Within some subject areas, there is the flexibility to take different courses and some subject options are available at more than one time in the week. This flexibility, combined with the breadth of the curriculum, means that the school is well placed to meet different needs and is able to provide successfully for a wide range of abilities and aptitudes. Consequently, progression to employment and further and higher education is very good.

- 56 The most popular subject in the sixth form is psychology, which at the time of the inspection was being followed by more than half of all sixth form students, a remarkably high proportion. Other particularly popular subjects in recent years at AS and A-level are English language, English literature, business studies and history.
- 57 Through the tutorial programme, the school makes provision for study skills and the core skills of communication and application of number. Wider key skills (working with others, problem solving and improving your own learning) are accredited through the ASDAN (Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network) Universities Award and all students successfully take a course and a test leading to the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). Private study time is well structured with students being given increasing freedom to organize themselves as they mature and demonstrate commitment to their studies. The requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met, but religious education is well covered within the school's programmes.
- 58 The provision for students' personal development is very good. Many opportunities are provided for students to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and the success of this can be seen in students' excellent attitudes and values. Whilst rarely explicit and not always planned for, spirituality is evident in the way in which much teaching encourages a search for deeper meaning and through the celebration of others' achievements. The school has a strong moral and social code. Active citizenship and personal development are fostered through the tutorial programme and wider activities, such as a mock trial and participation in the Youth Parliament. In addition, there are a very good range of enrichment, extra-curricular and cultural activities, including sport, music, drama, outdoor pursuits, visits and exchanges. Social events culminate in the Leavers' ball.
- 59 The school has recognised that the school's success at GCSE has broadened the intake to the sixth form and encouraged larger numbers to continue with their studies. Therefore an ever wider range of courses and provision are being actively considered.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

- 60 There are very good procedures for assessment in the sixth form. Subject teachers' assessments of each student's performance are accurate and communicated to the student verbally and in writing. Teachers have an extensive knowledge of their subjects, and of examination specifications and requirements. They use this knowledge alongside detailed assessment of students' work to build a picture of each student's actual and potential performance. This information is shared with students, so that they are clear about the criteria against which they will be assessed and what they need to do to improve. As a result, students are able to make the best use of their time and learn well.
- 61 The school makes good use of collated performance data to monitor students' progress. It is analysed by the director of sixth form and tutors to generate targets for students' grades and to calculate individual students' 'value added' improvement. The effective analysis of

data means that individual difficulties are picked up quickly and the appropriate support provided.

Advice, support and guidance

- 62 The school provides an outstanding quality of care for its students. Despite the fact that the sixth form is larger than average, it retains a family atmosphere and students are very well known to the staff. There is a very strong and well led tutorial team and an impressive programme of one-to-one tutoring. The increase in the numbers of pupils staying on into the sixth form, the very good levels of attendance and the commitment students show, both to their studies and to school activities, are clear indicators of the high opinion students, and their parents, have of the sixth form provision.
- 63 The sixth form prospectus provides a clear and very informative guide to the range of courses and facilities on offer and to the school's high expectations of its students. Year 11 pupils are very well advised about the courses provided (at the school, through the consortium arrangements and elsewhere) and receive sensitive guidance as to the best options for them.
- 64 The quality of care is evident in the thoughtful way students are eased in to the different demands of sixth form study, which helps to ensure that they develop successfully the skills of managing their time and work load. Students entering the sixth form know that they will be chased if their standards of work, effort or attendance slip below the expected high standards. They appreciate this, understanding that their teachers are committed to helping them achieve their best. One example of this care for the future success of students is shown by the system of earning home study in Year 12: teachers ensure that students have developed very good study management skills before permitting them to work off site.
- 65 Excellent careers advice is provided in a variety of ways. Students are encouraged to access a wide range of information about careers and further and higher education, using the Internet as well as the excellent resources in the school library. Specialist careers advice is available on request. Students attend conferences and open days, and have the opportunity to find out about modern apprentice schemes. The links, and subsequent programmes and visits, established with higher education are particularly impressive, and are an important contribution in raising students' aspirations beyond local education and employment. Parents are invited to a careers day and the school holds meetings for parents at which advice is given on the financial and other implications of undertaking university courses.
- 66 The systems in place to monitor attendance are excellent. A particular strength is the way that the attendance of students at the other institutions within the consortium is communicated to the school, so that staff know about any unexplained absences on the day they occur.

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

- 67 Parents and students hold the school in very high regard. Throughout the students' time in the sixth form, teachers build on the very good relationships they have already established with parents and students, nearly all of whom join the sixth form from Year 11 in the school. The information provided for parents, including the written reports, is of a consistently very high quality. This enables parents to support students at home and to help them make informed choices about their future.
- 68 There is a culture of respect and partnership between staff and students. Students feel valued and that their views are given careful consideration. They speak highly of the 'open-door' approach of all staff and, with very few exceptions, are of the opinion that they have no regrets about their choice of sixth form education.

HOW WELL IS THE SIXTH FORM LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

- 69 Both the leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. Whilst the director of the sixth form has the central role, leadership and management are shared by senior and middle managers and are characterised by very effective teamwork and clear responsibilities. Staff and governors have a clear vision for an inclusive sixth form providing opportunities for all. The stated aim is to allow 'students to develop their own style and individuality, to take responsibility for the organization of their studies and to make effective use of their time within the strong framework of the sixth form'. This aim is reflected in the breadth of the curriculum, the wide range of students accepted on to sixth form courses, the extensive programme of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities and the quality of pastoral care. The values of the whole school are also very evident in the work of the sixth form. There is a positive climate of guidance and support. The students are able to mature and take advantage of the wide range of opportunities open to them. There are excellent relationships, both amongst students and between teachers and students.
- 70 Subject management is generally very good. The inspection did not include a detailed study of the leadership and management of individual subjects up to 16 and not all subjects were inspected in the sixth form, so it is not possible to provide a complete description of middle management. However, all of the available evidence supports a conclusion that subject leaders are clear about their responsibility for pupil and student achievement and lead and manage strong teams effectively.
- 71 The sixth form provision has improved since the last inspection, and the collaborative arrangements with Somervale School and Norton Radstock College have been very successfully developed. These arrangements have widened the range of courses being offered, and have resulted in increased participation from the students in the area. A leadership group has been set up to oversee the joint provision, which they manage very

- well. Particularly impressive features are the very effective arrangements for academic and pastoral monitoring which ensure a consistency of provision, care and standards.
- 72 The director of sixth form, directly and through a strong team of tutors, closely monitors the students' personal development as well as their work and progress. Students are advised very clearly about their choice of vocational or academic courses, and are regularly checked to see how well they are progressing.
- 73 The leadership team monitors examination performance, teaching and learning in the sixth form closely as part of their ongoing programme for school improvement. The outcomes of this monitoring are used to identify strength and weaknesses and to act upon them. For example, significant curriculum change has been introduced in some areas where students were underperforming.
- 74 Governors bring valuable management expertise, and are knowledgeable about the strengths and areas for development of the sixth form. There is a governors' group which also monitors the collaborative arrangements with the college and the other school in the area. The school's development planning implicitly includes the sixth form in its priority of improving teaching and learning.

Resources

- 75 The sixth form is successful and cost-effective. It offers very good value for money. There are some variations from year to year, reflecting strategic plans, but generally the cost of the sixth form is broadly in line with that part of the school's income that comes from it. Financial resources are deployed well to support teaching, learning and the raising of standards. In some cases, subjects with very small entries have been allowed to continue reflecting the school's commitment to meeting individual needs, but these expensive courses are reviewed on a regular basis. The consortium arrangements have increased efficiency through shared teaching and provision in some cases. The principles of best value have been used well and are clearly understood.
- 76 The school has been very successful in gaining extra sources of income which have been used very well to enhance sixth form provision. Specialist accommodation for the sixth form is generally satisfactory, but the provision of computers for private study is unsatisfactory. The library is used extensively, enabling students to work independently outside lessons. Staffing is very good with well-qualified teachers being carefully deployed. Performance management and staff development make important contributions to the quality of sixth form management and teaching.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. National data for 2002 was not available at the time of this inspection.

GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Chemistry	7	85.7	n/a	14.3	n/a	54.3	n/a
Biology	22	86.4	n/a	4.5	n/a	48.2	n/a
Physics	14	92.9	n/a	21.4	n/a	70	n/a
Environmental science	3	66.7	n/a	0	n/a	46.7	n/a
Design and technology	3	66.7	n/a	33.3	n/a	66.7	n/a
Graphics	11	90.9	n/a	45.5	n/a	78.2	n/a
Business Studies	34	97.1	n/a	32.4	n/a	74.7	n/a
ICT	13	92.3	n/a	7.7	n/a	64.6	n/a
Physical education	7	100	n/a	57.1	n/a	88.6	n/a
Art	13	100	n/a	46.2	n/a	87.7	n/a
Music	2	100	n/a	50	n/a	100	n/a
Music Technology	2	100	n/a	0	n/a	80	n/a
Performing Arts	2	100	n/a	0	n/a	40	n/a
Media Studies	11	100	n/a	0	n/a	61.8	n/a
Geography	25	96	n/a	36	n/a	78.4	n/a
History	24	100	n/a	29.2	n/a	76.7	n/a
Religious Studies	1	100	n/a	0	n/a	80	n/a
Government and politics	1	100	n/a	100	n/a	100	n/a
Sociology	9	100	n/a	44.4	n/a	84.4	n/a
Psychology	76	97.4	n/a	43.4	n/a	81.1	n/a
English language	37	100	n/a	51.4	n/a	87.6	n/a
English literature	29	96.6	n/a	24.1	n/a	73.8	n/a
French	10	100	n/a	30	n/a	72	n/a

German	10	80	n/a	30	n/a	66	n/a
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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
Mathematics	11	82	n/a	45	n/a	78.2	n/a
Chemistry	10	90	n/a	50	n/a	80	n/a
Biology	9	89	n/a	33	n/a	64.4	n/a
Physics	6	100	n/a	33	n/a	73.3	n/a
Graphics	6	100	n/a	33	n/a	70	n/a
Business Studies	12	100	n/a	67	n/a	95	n/a
Business VCE	2	100	n/a	0	n/a	40	n/a
ICT	10	90	n/a	0	n/a	58	n/a
ICT VCE	4	50	n/a	0	n/a	20	n/a
Physical education	3	100	n/a	0	n/a	60	n/a
Leisure and Recreation VCE	4	100	n/a	0	n/a	70	n/a
Travel and Tourism VCE	6	100	n/a	17	n/a	73.3	n/a
Health and Social Care	2	100	n/a	0	n/a	80	n/a
Art	10	100	n/a	70	n/a	90	n/a
Art and Design VCE	3	100	n/a	0	n/a	80	n/a
Music	3	67	n/a	33	n/a	60	n/a
Music Technology	4	100	n/a	0	n/a	60	n/a
Performing Arts	3	100	n/a	0	n/a	60	n/a
Media Studies	5	100	n/a	40	n/a	96	n/a
Geography	9	100	n/a	0	n/a	68.9	n/a
History	8	100	n/a	50	n/a	90	n/a
Religious studies	3	100	n/a	0	n/a	73.3	n/a
Psychology	27	96	n/a	59	n/a	88.1	n/a
English language	15	100	n/a	13	n/a	69.3	n/a
English literature	19	95	n/a	26	n/a	77.9	n/a
French	6	100	n/a	50	n/a	80	n/a
German	6	100	n/a	50	n/a	93.3	n/a

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
GNVQ ICT Intermediate	8	63	n/a	0	n/a	0	n/a

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus of the inspection was on mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- The AS and A-level courses are arranged in a way that provides for the needs of a wide range of students.
- The teaching is of high quality.
- There are very good systems for monitoring students' attainment and making sure they know how they are progressing.
- Students have been able to move onto a wide range of higher education courses using their mathematics qualifications, including some at the highest level.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers need more opportunity to share teaching methods.
- Teaching styles need to become more interactive and make more use of ICT.

- 77 The school offers AS and A-level courses using modules in pure mathematics, statistics, mechanics and decision maths. Pupils of high ability are entered for the Advanced Extension Award. The various options are tailored so that entry can be made to either AS-level mathematics or AS-level applied mathematics. In this way the school is able to offer courses for pupils of borderline AS-level ability as well as courses appropriate for pupils of high ability. There is also a programme of enrichment. This is through a programme of lectures. Some of these are delivered by teachers at the school, and some by university lecturers. The programme is available also to neighbouring schools.
- 78 During this inspection, five lessons were observed. In addition samples of student's work and detailed data about their performance were examined. A discussion took place with the head of department and also with a group of students.

- 79 Forming an accurate picture from data as to the performance of pupils is difficult as the 2002 national data is still provisional, and mathematics A-level has changed radically since 2001. In 2001 results were in line with the national averages, but a significantly greater proportion of the school's students took the A-level than was the case nationally. The new AS-level that was first assessed in 2001 was relatively much more difficult than before. This harder standard affected the more borderline students seriously, and in 2001 almost half the students entered did not reach the pass grades of this part of the course. Following this, a much reduced cohort took the subject to A-level. Indications are that in 2002 their results at A-level were a bit less than, but not far from, national averages. The school is adapting to this changed situation by entering some students for applied mathematics at AS-level, which will be more suitable for those who find the normal mathematics option too hard. The scrutiny of pupils' work shows that currently students are making good progress through the course, compared to their prior attainment. Students following the mechanics option for example have good algebraic skills and are able to solve multi-step problems such as multiple inelastic particle collisions. There is no significant difference between the progress of males and females. In 2002, ten students went on to study numerate degrees, including mathematics, at university, and some of these at the highest level. Standards have improved since the last inspection.
- 80 Teaching is of high quality. Some is excellent. The subject knowledge of all the teachers is very good. In the best lessons, teachers plan carefully and use precise language and insist on high standards of accuracy from the students. The teaching is also highly interactive and builds on students' ideas and understanding. In an excellent lesson on the chain rule for differentiation students were encouraged to take a lead in developing a method for the exponential function. The teacher was able to show how this would develop, and also show the more conventional, standard method. The students were then rapidly challenged to use the technique to find the characteristics of a particular function. There is some good use of ICT, for example to explore trigonometric functions and the gradients of the logarithmic and exponential functions, but it is under used and so some learning opportunities are missed. Mathematics classrooms in general lack either computer projected display or OHP graphical calculators, and this makes it hard for teachers to use ICT on an everyday basis. Many classrooms are however equipped with video players, and these, for example, enabled an effective demonstration of the conservation of momentum with snooker balls. Students respond to the teaching with an enthusiasm for the subject. They work hard and are pleased with their achievement in what they know is a difficult but rewarding subject. While the very best teaching follows a very interactive style, in other classes the use of open questions is limited, and this reduces the level of active thinking by the students.
- 81 Students are tested at regular intervals. These results are collated in the department. Students are made aware of their predicted grade, their target grade and their current progress. Reports to parents make this information clear also. In addition students receive good feedback from their teachers on a day-to-day basis from the marking of their homework. These processes are very effective in enabling students to know how they are progressing, and in informing their teachers as to how they can help them to improve.

- 82 The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department monitors teaching and students' progress. He is aware of the strengths and areas for development of the department. Good use is made of opportunities for professional development to widen the capacity of teachers.

CHEMISTRY

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- The subject is well led.
- Very good relationships exist between students and teachers.
- There are good links with industry.

Areas for improvement

- To continue to develop resources and approaches to support effective learning at AS-level, particularly for those students starting the course with lower grades from GCSE.

- 83 Chemistry is taken at A and AS-levels. Both courses follow the Salters' chemistry course, which was introduced in 2000. The specification is organised into 13 teaching units, with six in the AS course and seven in the A-level course. The Salters approach is to emphasise the ways chemistry is applied and the work that chemists do. The specification allows key concepts to be introduced gradually and to be revisited in later units. During the inspection, two Year 12 and two Year 13 lessons were observed, course notes were sampled and members of staff and students interviewed.
- 84 Results at A-level in 2002 showed a significant improvement over those of 2001, and were above the national average. The percentage gaining grades A and B was considerably above average and, in general, students have done as well in chemistry as they have in their other subjects. The 'value added' measure comparing students' average GCSE performance with their A-level results shows that most students are making the expected progress. Attainment of female students is significantly higher than that of males, but their GCSE average grades are generally higher on entry to the course.
- 85 Results in the new AS-level examination in 2001 were in line with the national figures. As with A-level, verified AS-level subject results and national comparisons for 2002 were not available at the time of the inspection, so a degree of caution must be observed when analysing the school's results. An initial analysis of the 2002 results shows that the results have dropped and are below the 2001 national figures; although subsequent module retakes have almost closed the gap.
- 86 Standards of work seen during the inspection were above the national average for students at those stages of their courses. Students have a good level of knowledge and understanding of underlying chemical concepts and skills, and also of the industrial links and the wider use of chemistry in society as a whole. For example, Year 12 students are able to

demonstrate effective practical skills through the extraction of aspirin from wintergreen. In Year 13, students are able to identify the key reactions in the production of penicillin through the use of molecular models. All work sampled contained good examples of the effective use of ICT.

- 87 The quality of teaching is good. In lessons seen, it was never less than good, and some observed was very good. Students achieve as well as they do in lessons because of effective teaching which is underpinned by the use of a range of activities clearly focused on their learning. Notes are well presented and organised, reflecting the quality of advice on study skills given by teachers and by that contained in the Salters course materials. Teachers are well qualified, have very good subject knowledge, and have attended appropriate training to support the teaching of the Salters course. Lessons are characterised by good pace and challenge, and the effective use of a range of approaches and strategies appropriate to the subject matter. Lessons have clear objectives, and students have a good knowledge of what is required of them and what standards they should be working at. The flexibility within the Salters course allows teachers to revisit difficult topics to consolidate students' learning. Both the latter points are seen as key strengths by students taking the subject, and these help to underpin high levels of interest and motivation in the subject. Relationships are very good and conducive to effective teaching and learning. The quality of both ongoing and formal assessment is good.
- 88 The leadership and management of the subject are good. The department has seen considerable changes in personnel in recent years, and the leadership of chemistry within the school has been shared between two new, but increasingly experienced members of staff. Under their guidance, considerable progress has been made in embedding the Salters course and a new scheme of work has been introduced to support the published course materials. An effective assessment system has been put in place, and students' progress is particularly closely monitored during the first few units after starting the AS-level course. Industry links have been established, including access to the expertise and apparatus of a nearby electrographic firm. A revision course is offered at Easter. The result of these initiatives is that standards of teaching and learning are continuing to improve, as are levels of attainment at A-level. The numbers opting for AS-level chemistry have also increased (21 currently in Year 12), including some with relatively low grades from their GCSE examinations. A key challenge to the department will be the continued production of differentiated resources and approaches to support effective learning for all students, particularly those with lower starting points.

BIOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- The subject is well led.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good.

Areas for improvement

- To continue to develop strategies for improving achievement of those of lower prior attainment, especially at AS-level.
- To consider strategies to support transition from GCSE to A-level.

- 89 Biology and human biology courses are taken at A and AS-levels. Although the biology and human biology courses are run in separate sets in Year 12 and Year 13, they have a high degree of common content. Modules 1, 2 and 3 are common at AS-level, with the main difference being found in module 2 where work on plant biology is substituted by that relating to humans. An assessed coursework element is found in module 3. A further three modules are taken at A-level, with modules 4, 5 and 6 being common; the latter module consisting of the synoptic exam and additional assessed coursework. In human biology the plant work found in module 5 is again replaced by material more relevant to the course.
- 90 During the inspection, one Year 12 and two Year 13 lessons were observed, course notes were sampled and members of staff and students interviewed. Due to the nature of overlap between the biology and human biology specifications, the results from both courses are combined together for the following analysis.
- 91 The pass rate at A-level was in line with the national figure in 2002, and above it in 2001. In 2002 the percentage gaining higher grades A and B was slightly above average. Value-added analysis shows that those with high prior attainment achieved well in 2002, whilst those with lower prior attainment performed less well than expected. The performance of female students is significantly higher than that of males, although females also start the subject with a much higher average GCSE grade. The results from females are broadly in line with those achieved in their other subjects, whilst male students achieve slightly less well. As far more females take biology than males, these comparisons must be taken with a considerable degree of caution due to the small cohort size.
- 92 Many more students take the subject at AS-level than at A-level. In 2001, AS-level results were well below the national figures, and almost half the students recorded unclassified grades. As with A-level, verified AS-level subject results and national comparisons for 2002 were not available at the time of inspection. However, an initial analysis of the 2002 results based on 22 candidates, shows that whilst results have improved slightly they are still below the 2001 national averages. No unclassified results were recorded, although the majority of students gained either grades D or E. Subsequent module retakes have improved the results slightly.
- 93 Standards of work seen during the inspection were above the national average for students at those stages of their courses. Students have a good level of knowledge and understanding of underlying biological concepts and principles. In Year 13 for example,

students were able to identify links between photosynthesis and topics found in other modules of the course; an essential skill for success in the synoptic paper. In Year 12, students were able to use a range of apparatus, including pooters, could construct pyramids of numbers and biomass and explain the principles underlying them. Notes are well presented and organised, and all the work sampled contained good examples of effective ICT use.

- 94 The successful introduction of the new A-level and AS-level specifications has resulted in a large increase in students opting for biology/human biology, particularly at AS-level. A number of these students are taking the subject as a fourth AS-level and will subsequently drop it at the end of Year 12. A number are taking it as the only science amongst their Year 12 options. Also an increasing number are opting for the subject having gained grades CC from the foundation tier at GCSE. The department has put in place a range of strategies to cope with the increasing numbers of students and the widening ability range. These include the development of schemes of work for different abilities which will eventually cover all modules; the use of revision materials for less able students prior to starting the course; additional monitoring of students after commencing the course; and provision for weekly and Easter revision courses. An initial evaluation is that these approaches are having a positive effect on the levels of attainment achieved. The department also recognises that there is a considerable gap between the level of difficulty at GCSE and at AS-level. In particular, students of all abilities find module one taxing, and strategies to support better transition should be considered further.
- 95 The quality of teaching is good overall, and some observed was very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, are well qualified and approach teaching with considerable enthusiasm. Lessons are characterised by good pace and challenge, and a range of strategies are used to support teaching and learning across the ability range. Lesson objectives are clearly identified, and management of students and resources is good. The quality of both ongoing and formal assessment is good. The relationship between students and teachers is very good, and students approach learning with considerable interest and commitment.
- 96 The leadership and management of the subject are good. In recent years there has been a large turnover of staff, and the current department has a high proportion of teachers who joined the school as newly qualified teachers (NQTs) in the last two to three years. Their induction has been very successful and they are making a valuable contribution to the development of the subject.

PHYSICS

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

Strengths

- Excellent relationships underpin effective learning.
- Teaching and subject management are good.
- Assessment and monitoring ensure that students effectively address areas for improvement.

- Good use is made of ICT and other resources.

Areas for improvement

- Increasing the range of teaching and learning styles.
- Maintaining the pace of learning in some lessons.
- Making the subject more attractive to female students.

- 97 Physics is studied to AS-level in Year 12 and to A-level by those students who continue to study the subject in Year 13. The numbers of students studying A-level physics has steadily increased over the last three years. The number of students studying the subject to AS-level has increased from eight in 2001 to 14 in the current academic year. It is expected that 18 will start the course in September 2003. During this period the entry has been predominantly of male students and, although the very low proportion of female students is consistent with national average, the department is seeking to improve the balance in recruitment and reduce the variability in the attainment of male and female students. In 2002 the department adopted Salters' physics and this provides examples of applications of principles in contexts of interest to all students. Students receive guidance from their teachers in Year 11 relating to embarking on the A-level course. This helps to ensure that students' aptitudes and interests are matched to the challenges of the course and that they both enjoy their learning and succeed in assessments. The department is looking to improve further the quality of marketing and guidance provided to all Year 11 pupils and to raise their awareness of career options which are enhanced through the study of physics to AS and A-level. In the last three years some students have continued on from their A-level studies to read physics and physics-related degrees ranging from astrophysics and engineering to robotics and computer science.
- 98 Teaching was observed at both AS and A-level. Students' coursework was evaluated and discussions were held with staff and students. Students' views on teaching and their learning were also obtained from a recent survey conducted by the department. Examination results from recent years and an analysis of the progress of students studying AS-level and A-level physics were also evaluated.
- 99 A-level results have improved over the last three years from an average point score of 1.8 in 2000, to 2.7 in 2002. The numbers taking the subject are too small to allow a reliable national comparison. All A-level candidates achieved at least the minimum pass grade in 2002. The full range of appropriate prior attainment is represented in the groups of students which start the course and this was reflected in the full range of grades achieved by students at AS-level in 2001 and 2002. The majority of students make progress at a rate which is comparable with the national average. The department is developing strategies to ensure that all candidates achieve at least the minimum pass grade at AS-level. The majority of students who retake AS module tests improve their grade.
- 100 Standards seen in lessons during the inspection were in line with those found nationally at AS-level and slightly above at A-level for students at those stages of their courses. Coursework is of a consistently high quality and overall attainment is above the national average. This is because:

- the provision of a wide range of imaginative and interesting project topics enables students to choose two which are personally motivating;
 - very effective technical support ensures that students use apparatus and materials which are well matched to tasks; and
 - focused formative assessment indicates clearly what students need to do to improve their initial findings and reports.
- 101 Additionally, students' assessed visit reports benefit from a visit to a local theatre which provides both inspiration and a wealth of interesting contexts in which physics principles are applied.
- 102 The relationship between students and teachers is excellent and ensures that students tackle work with confidence and respond positively to the high expectations of teachers. Demonstrations seize students' attention and, coupled with focused questioning, promote high order thinking. For example, a detailed computer image of a human foetus was used to prompt discussion which developed students' understanding of the behaviour of ultrasound waves as they travel through media of different densities. Hypotheses arising from a class discussion exploring the correction of defects in vision were empirically tested by using lenses to focus light into a flask of fluorescent liquid. This vividly modelled imaging processes in the human eye. ICT was used effectively to determine the Doppler frequency shift of sound from a buzzer swirling around in the laboratory, and hence the speed of sound in air was calculated with impressive accuracy. Teachers' fascination with topics and enthusiasm for the subject motivates students and helps to make the learning memorable. Many opportunities are provided for students to work collaboratively and to learn from one another. A wide range of imaginative learning opportunities effectively supports students' assessed coursework. This is motivating and boosts overall attainment. Technical provision ensures that students have the apparatus needed to successfully tackle investigations. Teachers further support students' visit to the Colston Theatre by providing structured texts which indicate how a wide range of topics can be explored during the visit. Text books are of high quality and provide an abundance of interesting examples of how principles are applied in practice. These help students to understand underlying abstract concepts.
- 103 Teaching benefits from a coherent team approach and good subject leadership. Strategic decisions are based on sound analyses of performance information. Assessment and monitoring are strengths of the department and they bolster students' progress. Regular feedback is provided to students from thoroughly marked homeworks, end of topic test results, and formatively assessed coursework. This enables individuals to efficiently address weaknesses in their understanding and skills. Standards in coursework, for example, are boosted through students drafting and redrafting reports in the light of constructive and diagnostic comments by their teacher. Teachers' guidance ensures that the majority of students who resit module tests improve their grades. Resources to support revision are comprehensive, carefully organised and effectively support students' preparation for the final A-level examination. High attaining students achieve highly on past paper questions partly because they are proactive in seeking out information and devise successful approaches to problem solving.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on business studies.

BUSINESS STUDIES

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

Strengths

- Achievement at AS-level and A-level is very good in relation to prior attainment.
- The quality of teaching and support for individual students is very good.
- Students' attitudes and the quality of relationships are good.
- Students' understanding of their own progress and the requirements of examinations are well developed.
- There is effective use of a range of teaching resources.

Areas for Improvement

- The provision of a more suitable learning environment for some groups.

- 104 The subject is taught at AS-level and A-level and at AVCE. AS-level units include marketing and finance, managing people and external influences on business. Additional units to make up the A-level qualification include production, a coursework task and an overarching module bringing together all elements of business studies. During the period of inspection all AS-level and A-level teaching groups were observed, discussions took place with students and teaching staff and students work was scrutinised. A very small number of students are completing the final year of their advanced vocational business studies course but they were not observed in the course of the inspection.
- 105 Recent results at both AS-level and A-level are higher than the national average in business studies. Levels of attainment are even more significant when viewed against the students' starting points. On average, advanced level students achieve over a grade higher than students in the rest of the country. Some students achieve even more than this and on average boys achieve as well as girls. As a measure of improvement based on students' overall performance in GCSE, 'value added' has increased over the past three years. The popularity of this option reflects the success which students experience.
- 106 These high standards of attainment were mirrored in the quality of work seen during the inspection. Students are confident in their use of business concepts and their application to the real world; they take pride in using and applying the correct business terminology.

- 107 All the teaching seen during the period of inspection was very good and some of it was outstanding. Teachers have very good command of their subject. The range of teaching strategies and resources they use enable students to stay engaged and on task for sustained periods and to use and apply key concepts appropriately and in a range of contexts. The range of teaching styles also allows support for individual students, opportunity for independent learning and for group tasks. In such an atmosphere, students learn well, and relationships and attitudes to learning are mature. Considerable emphasis is placed upon correct terminology and upon the assessment criteria used in examinations. Hence, verbal feedback in class and written comments on work keep students constantly aware of what they need to do to achieve success. Students fully understand and appreciate this focus.
- 108 The department is well led. Students' attitudes to the subject mirror the commitment and skills of the department. The course is well matched to students' needs. However, formal documentation reflecting departmental planning and policy is at an early stage of development. All students have an up-to-date and suitable text book as well as access to case study material and internet and ICT resources. Students enjoy the opportunity to extend their learning by participation in the real world of business such as *Proshare*, a national competition based on the Stock Exchange. The dedicated business studies area is well suited to the needs of smaller groups but much teaching takes place in ageing mobile classrooms which do not provide a suitable environment to model business practice.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

- 109 The focus of the inspection was on information communication technology (ICT) at AS-level, A-level and AVCE. The school also offers Intermediate GNVQ in ICT in Year 12 and all sixth form students are expected to complete the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). No lessons in these subjects were sampled during the inspection week.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **very good**.

Strengths

- Specialist staff have very good subject knowledge and provide high levels of individual support and guidance.
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good.
- The use of assessment in coursework and procedures to monitor students' targets are good.

Areas for improvement

- Further extending the range of contexts students use to develop their ICT understanding.

- 110 The school offers ICT at AS-level, A-level and AVCE to Years 12 and 13.

- 111 Overall ICT Results are broadly in line with national averages, but detailed comparisons are difficult as there has been a change of emphasis recently away from Computer Science towards ICT. Results achieved cover the full spectrum and compare well with results obtained by students in their other subjects. Students make good progress from their different starting points. There is a steady increase in the number of students choosing ICT as an examination subject in the sixth form. The majority of students are male, but there is no significant difference in attainment by gender. Students with particular needs are well supported during lessons and achieve results appropriate to their ability.
- 112 The quality of students' work seen in lessons and in their folders is at least average and is often high in comparison to that seen nationally. Students are confident and show understanding of many complex activities including creation of macros, lookup tables and programming routines in visual basic. More able students make informed choices regarding software used for the project work and can explain why the choice was made. Students are able to talk about their work in the context of their learning but are less sure when extended to other real life issues.
- 113 Overall teaching is good. Students benefit from enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff. Good relationships and support tailored to individual needs create an effective climate for teaching and learning. Good use of class and individual questions checks students' understanding and ability to recall information. In one Year 13 lesson the use of aides memoires such as 'SMART planning', followed by discussion to identify the advantages/disadvantages of centralised/de-centralised control systems, enabled students to check their knowledge and understanding. As a result of good teaching and relationships, students' attitudes are good. They work independently during lessons but are good at helping each other when necessary. This is further facilitated by small group size, typically seven to eight students. Students value the opportunity to continue their work at home or elsewhere using the internet
- 114 The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The recently appointed director of ICT has made a number of changes that have had a positive impact on standards. All staff have clear roles and responsibilities and work well as a team. There is programme for monitoring teaching and learning linked to performance management. ICT is included in the school improvement plan and there are a number of planned developments. At the time of the inspection, the range of contexts used to develop ICT understanding seen in lessons and in students' folders was limited, and was similar in all courses. However, the school is working hard to develop contacts with outside organisations to widen students' experience, including a web design company and a supermarket chain.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus of the inspection was on travel and tourism.

The school also offers an AVCE in leisure and recreation. Provision in leisure and recreation is very good. Students often start this course with lower than average points at GCSE, but make good progress to achieve standards that are above expectations. Two lessons were observed in leisure and recreation, teaching in one lesson was excellent and in the other lesson it was good. Excellent

teaching included a well-structured sequence of activities and differentiated support enabling students to acquire knowledge and understanding of questionnaire design. Marking is constructive and informative and students know clearly how to improve. There is positive encouragement for students to use ICT in all lessons both for research and word processing, leading to wider knowledge and very high standards of presentation.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM

Overall, the quality of provision in Travel and Tourism is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards of achievement are very good with many students achieving beyond expectations based on their earlier work.
- The positive attitudes of students helps them to reach higher standards.
- The very good, and often excellent, teaching provides a very strong foundation to learning.
- Marking and assessment of work are excellent, and students clearly know how to improve.
- Shared management for the provision of teaching and learning across the consortium is very good.

Areas for improvement

- No significant issues for improvement were identified by the inspection. The school has a clear agenda for continuous development.

- 115 The AVCE in Travel and Tourism is taught jointly between the school and the local college of further education. The course is popular, particularly with female students.
- 116 Standards are above average, and students achieve very well, particularly given their relatively low starting points in terms of overall GCSE performance. For example, in 2002 results in examinations were above the predicted grades based on students' prior GCSE attainment.
- 117 Current students are making very good progress. In Year 12, students benefit from a range of activities designed to help them recall and consolidate their knowledge, making very good progress at the start of their revision programme. In the second year of the course, students have an excellent understanding of the course's assessment criteria and use this well to work independently. With support from their teachers in tutorials they identify how to build on their early work to reach higher standards. The majority of students in Year 13 are achieving higher levels than might be anticipated based on their prior GCSE attainment. In discussions with teachers, students are confident and clarify points to aid their understanding. All coursework is presented to high standards using ICT, and students select relevant images to enhance the text. Notebooks are neat, and students take obvious pride in all aspects of their work. Students are highly motivated and have positive attitudes. They sustain their effort in class, are attentive to their teachers, and this results in higher standards. Students say that the course is hard work, but their obvious enjoyment in lessons, and the quality of teaching on both sites by experienced specialists, help them to overcome problems.

- 118 Teaching is at least very good and often excellent, and students learn very well as a result. Lessons are well planned, with a range of timed activities, and these motivate students, especially in the revision programme. Teachers' specialisms, experience in the travel and tourism industry and enthusiasm for the subject, are used very well to provide relevant and stimulating contexts for learning. Marking and the assessment of students' performance are of high quality. The provision for individual tutorials is excellent. Teachers know the capabilities of the students, and the regular individual reviews of work ensure that each student clearly knows how to use the course's assessment criteria to improve work.
- 119 Leadership and management are very good. A particular feature is the highly effective way in which responsibility is shared across the two institutions, with regular meetings to discuss concerns and developments. Target setting for individual students is well established and highly motivating. The tracking of students' progress is excellent, showing ongoing achievement, and target points needed for specific grades. Procedures for lesson preparation and assessment are standardised, and internal verification procedures ensure that assessment are consistently applied by all teachers from both institutions. Students have their own textbook and have access to the very good resources in the college library, while resources in school are continuing to develop. ICT and the school intranet is used well by students to access all course materials, and they carry out further research on the internet in order to increase their knowledge of developments in tourism.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

The focus of the inspection was on health and social care.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Overall, the quality of provision in health and social care is **good**.

Strengths

- Overall management of the course at the college is very good.
- The results in 2002 by students were higher than expected from their earlier GCSE performance.
- There are very good procedures for the welfare of students whilst on work placements and visits.
- The tutorial system and procedures for marking and assessment promote high standards.

Areas for improvement

- Currently, a minority of students are having difficulty in adjusting to independent learning styles, resulting in lower than expected unit results and some loss of motivation.
- The lack of resources in the school library inhibits research during personal study periods.

- 120 The course is taught at the local college of further education. The three-unit AVCE course in health and social care is taught in Year 12. There are arrangements for students to

progress to another three units in Year 13, although at present there are no Year 13 students.

- 121 Standards of achievement have been very high. In 2002, results in the three-unit course (AS-level) were well above the national median. They were above expectations based on earlier GCSE performance for the students, who entered the course with average GCSE points lower than for other 6th form courses.
- 122 Standards of work seen during the inspection were variable. Students are encouraged to work independently and this has proved to be successful for the highest attaining students who are achieving above their target grades. They are reviewing their communication skills after taking part in group activities on health-related issues with younger students. They use their knowledge of the assessment criteria very well, listen to comments of their teachers during tutorial sessions, and identify what can be done to improve the standards of their work further. In contrast, a small number of students are having difficulty in adapting to the change in teaching styles and the less imposed structure they have previously experienced. These differences are reflected in students' attitudes to the course and this has a positive or negative impact on their current progress.
- 123 Insufficient teaching was seen during the inspection to make a direct judgement on its overall quality. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject, and the course's assessment criteria. Tutorial sessions are used very well to discuss with students their coursework in progress, and teachers use their strong counselling skills to negotiate new learning targets with reluctant learners. Their use of praise builds the confidence of higher-attaining students, and their clear guidance about what needs to be done promotes high achievement. Teachers have recognised the need to provide greater structure for some students who find independent learning difficult.
- 124 Leadership and management of the course are very good. The subject documentation, schemes of work, lesson plans and teaching materials are prepared to very high standards. Assessment procedures and formative review of work through the tutorial system are very good and constructive comments help most students to improve standards. There are many links with the care professions and several students are considering further training for careers within the care sector. Procedures for the welfare of students whilst on work experience and visits are very good, and the subject leader selects only those placements which allow students to learn from the best practice. Students have access to the very good resources provided by the college and have their own textbook. However, there are no health and social care texts in the school library for use during private study.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus of the inspection was on art and design. The school also offers advanced courses in music, music technology and media studies. No lessons in these subjects at advanced level were seen during the inspection week

ART AND DESIGN

Overall the provision for art and design is **very good**.

Strengths

- Examination results are consistently good.
- Students have very positive attitudes to the subject.
- The quality of the teaching is very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Making the subject more attractive to male students.

- 125 Students study for the fine art option of the AS-level and A-level examinations and a few for the AVCE single award in art and design. All courses cover a wide range of media and approaches, with the AVCE concentrating on more vocational projects. The numbers taking the subject have been quite constant at around 15 students a year,
- 126 The overall standards in art and design are high and have been rising steadily over the past three years. In 2002, 13 students took the A-level examination, all passed, and two thirds gained A or B grades. This is well above the national average. The A-level students did slightly better in their examinations in 2002 than could have been predicted on the basis of their overall GCSE results. Sixteen students took the AS-level last year, again all passed, with half gaining grades A or B. These results were also above the national average, and they achieved satisfactory grades considering their GCSE results. Eleven out of the 16 who took AS-level are studying for A-level and are progressing well. They have extended their work and raised their standards to above those typically found. Three students completed their AVCE course last year, all gaining grade C, which is in line with the national picture. There are now four students in each of Years 12 and 13 completing this course, and all are achieving standards in line with what would be expected of students at this stage.
- 127 The standards of work seen in lessons are high. The Year 13 students are now completing their personal studies and preparing the examination piece in consultation with their teachers. They are reviewing their research for the examination perceptively and are being prepared very well to develop individual approaches and responses. The completed projects from this year's A-level examination course show that the students are using their strengths in research and independent study to produce very good personal studies, many based on their own experiences. They are of high quality, well presented and most show personal involvement and a mature approach. They use ICT skills very well to present their work. The Year 13 students' research in their visual journals is very good. It shows evidence of a developing personal interest in drawing and painting, and good research and experiment in processes and materials. Much work displayed in the studios is on a large scale, using a wide range of two- and three-dimensional media, with lively colour and texture. The Year 13 students studying for the AVCE are completing interesting and stimulating work, often linked to live projects such as murals for a doctors' surgery, science laboratories or the

school drama production. Their work is of a satisfactory standard, and uses a wide variety of media.

- 128 The Year 12 students are sustaining the pace and challenge from their GCSE courses. They can talk about their intentions and the way their work has developed with confidence. They all listen attentively to the comments of the teachers and they contribute well to reviews and criticisms of work. The detailed analysis and marking of the projects, and the setting of targets, give them a clear understanding of the requirements of the examination and a perspective of the standards expected. They are developing personal approaches as they experiment and develop their own styles through their sketchbooks. The recently completed large-scale collages and paintings are adventurous and powerful, and are a good introduction to the techniques needed on the course. All the students on both the AS and A-level courses are female. The AVCE has some males on the courses. A higher proportion of males have stated an intention to take art and design next year.
- 129 Teaching seen was very good overall. Planning and preparation are very clear and well focused on the students' needs and the examination specification. The teaching methods are very good, with challenging exercises, comments and questions. This is particularly evident during the regular reviews of examination work which are aimed at increasing the students' capacity for independent study. The teachers work well together where they share groups, keeping a diary of work and progress. The use of sketchbooks has been encouraged, and students' basic skills are reinforced to ensure a firm foundation for future development. Assessment is very good and provides clear information to students about their progress towards specific grades. Progress reports are discussed with the students and regularly updated. The teachers know the strengths and weaknesses of their students very well and are able to challenge and support them very effectively. Students are responding positively. They co-operate very well, and come in to the art studios to work and continue with projects in their own time. The AVCE course is well structured. Projects are carefully developed and bring a commercial perspective to the work where possible.
- 130 The quality of leadership and management is very good. The head of art and design is also the head of the arts faculty including music and drama. Planning is well considered, and the schemes of work are relevant and regularly adapted to the students' needs. Examples of sixth form students' work are displayed in art and design studios and in the hall, including details of a recent trip to Paris. They are stimulating and challenging the younger pupils to extend their work and improve their standards. There is a very extensive range of resources and equipment, including ICT, that is used very well to raise standards. The accommodation has improved substantially since the previous inspection. There is good technical support for tasks such as preparation, kiln firing and keeping a very effective information display in the entrance.

HUMANITIES

The focus of the inspection was on history and psychology. The school also offers advanced courses in geography, politics, religious studies and sociology.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- The consistently high standards of work and of attainment.
- The levels of knowledge and understanding shown by students.
- Students' confidence in discussions, and their enjoyment of the subject.
- The very good quality of teaching. Attitudes to the subject are greatly encouraged by the positive relationships between teachers and students.
- The increasing popularity of the subject.
- The very good leadership of the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Further development of approaches and resources to support the wider ability range of students following the subject.

- 131 Year 12 students study three modules relating to British and European history from about 1850 to 1950, and they are examined to AS-level standard. Year 13 students take a further three modules in working towards a full A-level award. Four lessons were observed during the inspection, in addition to scrutiny of students' work and discussions with students and with the head and members of the department.
- 132 In 2001 and 2002, all students at AS and A-level achieved grades which were between A and E, maintaining very good levels of performance within the subject and a 100% pass rate. Results achieved by each group have been consistently above national averages, including the higher A and B grades awarded. The 'value added' from the students' average GCSE performance is at least good in most cases. This level of performance within history has been sustained during a period of increasing student numbers and a widening of the ability range of entrants to the subject.
- 133 In both Years 12 and 13, work in lessons, notes and essays show that standards being achieved by students are consistently reaching what is required at the present stages of their courses. Both male and female students display very good knowledge and understanding of the personalities, general events and issues of the themes which they are following. Attitudes are very good or excellent at all times. High levels of ability to appreciate specific issues from social, political and military perspectives are demonstrated. Secure evidence forms the basis for reasoned debate. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson working on well produced materials focusing on the relative roles played by Hitler and Stalin. All members of the group were confident in identifying, interpreting and analysing the significance of the motives and methods central to their fascist and communist regimes. The structure of the present course provides extensive opportunities to study societies and individuals, and to make informed historical judgements from primary and secondary sources.
- 134 Evaluation of students' written work shows major development and strengths in their skills of analysis and in their use and interpretation of alternative sources of evidence. There are lively and confident contributions in class discussions and debates throughout lessons. Some

students have particularly well developed abilities to critically think around and to evaluate the judgements of leading observers and historians. This was well demonstrated by Year 13 students in their consideration of the General Election of 1945 and the leadership of the Labour Party as it established the Welfare State. The enthusiasm in studying individual topics and issues contributes significantly to the effectiveness of activities and the work produced.

- 135 Students make very good progress in history. This is in part due to their own commitment, but is largely the consequence of very good teaching. The subject knowledge and commitment of teachers and their awareness of possible interpretations of a wide range of sources are at all times particularly evident. Excellent relationships and engaging humour enthuse and motivate students, raising the pace of work and the quality of learning. Language, concepts and definitions are carefully developed and effectively utilised. Questions are used skilfully and to provoke thought. They draw out background knowledge and support the development of opinions and judgements. The marking of work is very detailed and thorough, and it is very supportive of further development in the quality of responses. Teaching succeeds in bringing about a high degree of participation amongst students, with challenge and feedback at all points. Speculation about causes and consequences, and willingness to take risks with judgements, are key elements in taking learning forward.
- 136 Leadership and management in history are very good. The subject leader is a recent appointment to the school, but he has already established clear direction and ambitions in what was already a successful department. Effective teaching strategies and strong relationships continue to be central to the learning opportunities for students. There are sound policies and schemes of work, with good communications within the department and with senior managers throughout. The adoption and development of new courses are continuing to increase the popularity of the subject. Considerable attention is being paid to making the environment in which teaching takes place stimulating and attractive. Resources are well chosen and used, and there is appropriate advice and guided access on study and research opportunities utilising information and communication technology. There are very good procedures in relation to target setting and the monitoring of students' work. There is a priority commitment to meeting the needs of the wider ability range of students now taking the subject. The new teaching resources and techniques which continue to be introduced are central to the success of the subject within the school and the achievements of individual students.

PSYCHOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in psychology is **excellent**.

Strengths

- Psychology is a very popular subject, particularly with female students. Recruitment and retention rates are excellent and there is a good record of students progressing to higher education and employment.
- Attainment is well above the national average.

- Students make better progress through Year 12 and 13 than in most schools and typically do better than in their other subjects.

Strengths (contd)

- Students like the subject and work hard.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. The head of department's fascination with the subject is very evident in lessons and infects the students he teaches.

Areas for improvement

- No significant areas for improvement were identified during the inspection process.

- 137 Year 12 students follow a course which can lead to an AS-level qualification. They study units on social psychology, biopsychology, atypical behaviour, developmental psychology and cognitive psychology. The Year 12 course is assessed by written examination. Year 13 students complete further units which combine with those studied in Year 12 to form an A-level qualification. They study units on social psychology, comparative psychology, biopsychology, cognitive psychology, developmental psychology, and atypical behaviour. Year 13 students complete a coursework assignment and a further written examination. The curriculum is enriched by a residential visit to Birmingham University at the end of Year 12 and by outside speakers.
- 138 During the inspection, three lessons and examples of students' work were sampled. There was a detailed analysis of department documentation and data about examination performance and a number of discussions with the head of department.
- 139 Student achievement in psychology is excellent. In recent years, results in A-level examinations have been above the national average. In 2001 and 2002, results were well above the national average. Results in the units that go towards the new AS-level examination in 2001 and 2002 were also very good. In both Year 12 and Year 13, students have done at least as well as in their other subjects and, generally, have done better. The 'value added' from the students' average GCSE performance is nearly always very good. It is unusual for students of all abilities to be awarded grades that are below what might be predicted. In the great majority of cases students' grades are significantly better than these expectations. There is no significant difference between the achievement of males and females.
- 140 Psychology was not reported on as a separate subject at the time of the last inspection and so it is not possible to make a full comparison. However, the record of examination success and further growth in student numbers indicates continued improvement on the high standards already obtained. The subject has been a consistently popular option in the sixth form with one of the largest entries at A-level. At the time of the inspection, a remarkable 118 students were studying psychology, which is more than half of the total number of students in the sixth form. In the last three years, 12 students have gone on to take psychology courses at university and others have continued with courses or employment which make use of elements of psychology.

- 141 The quality of work seen in lessons and students' coursework and folders confirms the picture from examination results that standards and achievement are very good. Students understand concepts and theories from different psychological traditions. They have looked at a good range of research studies and show an ability to apply their knowledge and understanding to new contexts. A particular strength is their understanding of research methodology and of the ethical and empirical issues that arise from psychological research.
- 142 The very high standards in psychology are a direct result of the enormous commitment and talented teaching of the head of department. His own fascination with the subject is very evident in lessons and infects the students he teaches. Consequently, students are interested and involved. Learning is very good. Teaching is based on an extensive range of psychological studies and these are presented through different teaching methods, including role-play. All of these features were illustrated in one particularly good Year 12 lesson on obedience, based on the research studies of Milgram, Bickling and Hofling. The teacher reconstructed a research study by dividing the class and creating interview roles. This captured the students' interest and was followed up by exposition and the teacher role-playing with one student. The lesson continued with two very different examples of obedience – an interview with a soldier who took part in the 'My Lai Massacre' and a video clip from *Fawlty Towers* showing Basil's relationship with Sybil. The shift from pathos to humour was very powerful. The lesson finished with a discussion of the ethical issues surrounding psychological research. This very effective repertoire of teaching styles and resources led to very good learning.
- 143 Psychology is very well led and managed. The great majority of the teaching is undertaken by the head of department, but a carefully considered scheme of work, which ensures a clear progression throughout Year 12 and Year 13, provides guidance for others. Available resources have been used well and there is imaginative employment of a wide range of source material.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus of the inspection was on English language and literature and French. Work in German was also sampled. One A-level German lesson was observed which was very good. The lesson demonstrated particularly effective use of ICT by the teacher which enabled students to understand and then use the subjunctive in indirect speech.

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Achievement is good.
- Students have positive attitudes to learning.
- Relationships are good.
- The quality of teaching is good overall, some of it is very good. Teachers are committed and enthusiastic.

- Leadership and management are strong.

Areas for improvement

- To improve the depth and accuracy of writing.
- To promote wider reading among average and low attaining students.
- To share good practice among teachers.

- 144 The school offers AS-level and A-level courses in English language and in English literature. These are very popular courses among sixth form students. GCSE English is also offered, mainly for students who wish to improve their grades. Eight lessons were sampled during the inspection, four in English language and four in English literature. Students' work was scrutinised and discussions were held with staff and students. The faculty's documentation was also reviewed.
- 145 Achievement in English language is good. Attainment in A-level in 2001 was high. Results were well above the national averages at both higher grades A-B and grades A-E. In 2002, however, higher grade A-level results declined considerably but the pass rate remained 100 per cent as in 2001. However, the school's value added analysis for 2002 shows that this is a reflection of different starting points and most students made the expected progress from GCSE to A-level. There is no significant difference between the achievement of males and females.
- 146 Results in English literature are improving. In 2001, A-level results were well below the national averages both in relation to higher grades A-B and grades A-E. In 2002, there has been significant improvement, but it is too early to make national comparisons. Again, the value added analysis provided by the school for 2002 shows that the great majority of students made the expected progress from GCSE to A-level. There is no significant difference between males and females.
- 147 Work seen during the inspection reflected a range of attainment. In English language, high attaining students show insights, clarity and precision in writing. They analyse texts and speech using linguistic frameworks such as lexis and grammar. Average attaining students are developing their knowledge of linguistic principles, but do not always give enough examples or explain themselves in sufficient detail. The writing of low attaining students sometimes lacks coherence and contains too many simple errors.
- 148 In English literature, high attaining students write for a purpose and audience. Their work is well organised. They refer to different interpretation of texts as in the case of Tennyson's poems. In some cases, however, evaluations are less detailed and further knowledge of context is required. Average attaining students show a developing knowledge of English literature. They are able to interrogate texts but do not always refer to different interpretations or provide sufficient evidence to support their arguments. The work of low attaining students is often of a reasonable quality. At times, there are spelling and punctuation errors. Wider reading is required by these students to develop their writing.
- 149 Students of all abilities respond to the quality of teaching with energy and enthusiasm. They work at full stretch and demonstrate effort, concentration and persistence. Most students

work hard to improve their skills but a few show lesser involvement with the activities in lessons. Gifted and talented students provide in-class support to younger peers at school and at a county level act as role models on 'Apex' summer schools.

- 150 The quality of teaching English language and English literature is good, in some cases it is very good. Lessons are well prepared and have clear objectives. The pace of lessons is good. Teachers are enthusiastic and make good use of targeted questions to reinforce learning. A wide range of activities is provided to develop students' knowledge and skills. In English language, for example, texts, speech, and editorial writing are analysed to build and consolidate students' knowledge of linguistic features such as lexis, syntax, semantics, pragmatics and discourse structure. In English literature, students study features of Gothic novels such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Films and audiotapes are used to reinforce the main messages. ICT is used to good effect to enhance learning. Students are made familiar with assessment objectives both in English language and in English literature lessons.
- 151 Good teaching means students have positive attitudes to learning and relationships are good. In pairs, students make *PowerPoint* presentations to their classes and work purposefully in small groups. They develop skills of analysis and skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. There is constructive evaluation of students' work. They are given thorough and comprehensive feedback. In some cases, however, students do not know how to justify their opinions.
- 152 There is good support for learning outside timetabled lessons. Christmas and Easter revision classes are held, as are out-of-hours classes to support students. Progress is reviewed in tutorials and targets are set. Homework is set regularly to extend students' learning.
- 153 The English faculty has strong leadership and management. There is a sense of purpose and direction. A clear development plan for the faculty lays down priorities for teaching and learning. The documentation produced by the faculty is informative and of good quality. Teachers are appropriately qualified and experienced. Teaching is accommodated largely in a dedicated suite of rooms with good quality displays on creative writing, literacy and Shakespeare. The library has a good stock of resources on English language and literature including reference materials. It would be to the advantage of students if the library had more computers for use by sixth formers.

FRENCH

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average compared with those in similar schools.
- Very good teaching enables students to make very good progress.
- The department is very well led and has a clear sense of direction.
- The suite of rooms, resources and the use of display set a quality tone for learning.

Areas for improvement

- The further development of the use of ICT.
- The development of strategies for students to become more involved in their own learning.

- 154 In Year 12, students of French follow a one year course leading to an AS-level qualification. In Year 13 they then follow a further one year course leading to an A-level qualification. Groups are predominantly female. During the inspection of French, one Year 12 and two Year 13 lessons were observed. These observations, together with the scrutiny of students' work and departmental documentation, the analysis of examination results and discussion with the head of department and the head of German, provide the basis for the evidence gathered.
- 155 Although the national comparative data for 2002 have yet to be published, information based on previous years' data indicates that the A-level French results will be above the national averages for similar schools. Overall pass rates are 10% higher than the previous year's national average and there are 10% more students gaining the very highest grades of A and B. All students did at least as well as expected based on their GCSE performance and some did considerably better. Results over the last three years show an overall trend of improvement.
- 156 The standard of work of the current Year 12 and 13 French students, as seen in lessons and in their folders, confirms that standards are high. Year 12 students are already able to speak and write fluently about everyday topics such as holidays and use a number of tenses. By Year 13, however, their skills have developed, enabling them to read about and then discuss complex issues such as immigration and drugs with relative ease.
- 157 The high standards achieved by students result from very good teaching. All teaching seen was at least good, and some was very good. Lessons are always well planned, have clear objectives and move along at a brisk pace. Students in a Year 12 lesson were able to progress with confidence from the formation of the future tense to a very sophisticated usage because the lesson was very well planned. The use of authentic material, both written and on tape, challenges students to aspire to reach the very highest standards. The skilled use of an authentic article on immigration in a Year 13 lesson, for example, enabled students to extend their vocabulary most effectively. Activities are usually varied but where students do not have the opportunity to become involved in their own learning by solving problems, either collaboratively or individually, lessons are less successful. A particularly good lesson on the legalisation of soft drugs gave students the opportunity to consolidate their learning by working out a summary together from a series of jumbled sentences. Teachers show good subject knowledge and also foster positive relationships with the students which encourage humour, confidence and trust. Lessons are conducted almost exclusively in French but never to such an extent that it becomes a barrier to learning.
- 158 Students take a pride in their work and are generally eager to participate in lessons. Their folders are well organised and include notes for reference in addition to written work which they have corrected and improved in response to the teachers' guidance. Students are

beginning to use ICT to enhance their studies further, for example downloading French newspapers from the internet, but there is still scope for further development. Participation in work experience in France and contact with a native speaker in school, also enhance students' learning.

- 159 The leadership and management of the department are very good. Schemes of work are clearly defined within the requirements of the examination board and policies are well documented. Assessment is detailed and is used, together with other data on students' performance, to plan for the future and raise standards. There is a team approach to development and practice is constantly reviewed, all of which is ably led by the head of department. The suite of rooms is well equipped with tape-recorders, over-head projectors and white boards, and good use is made of display. Overall, the accommodation sets a high quality tone for every lesson.