

INSPECTION REPORT

**GRAVESEND GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR
GIRLS**

Gravesend

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118787

Headteacher: Mrs Nicole Chapman

Reporting inspector: Mr Brian Rowe
1695

Dates of inspection: 24th - 27th March 2003

Inspection number: 249856

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

© Crown copyright 2003

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (selective)

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18 years

Gender of pupils: Female

School address: Pelham Road
Gravesend
Kent

Postcode: DA11 0JE

Telephone number: 01474 352896

Fax number: 01474 331195

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs Val Green

Date of previous inspection: April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
1695	Brian Rowe	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? How high are standards? How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What sort of school is it?
10173	Catherine Hinds	Lay inspector		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development. How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
1085	John Laver	Team inspector	English	
	Peter Bratton	Team inspector	Mathematics	
12331	Vera Grigg	Team inspector	Biology	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
12110	Roger Bailless	Team inspector	French Spanish	
32166	Nasim Butt	Team inspector	Chemistry Physics	
17349	Paula Askew	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
10895	David Wasp	Team inspector	History Psychology	
18888	Jan Boulton	Team inspector	Physical education Sociology	
32209	Jane Burnett	Team inspector	Geography	

The inspection contractor was:

TWA Inspections Ltd
102 Bath Road
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire. GL53 7JX

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London. WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
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	14
WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	18
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	19
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	20
PART D: THE SIXTH FORM	26
RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS	26
STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	26
TEACHING AND LEARNING	27
CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS	29
THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS	30
THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM	31
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	34

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Gravesend Grammar School for Girls is for pupils aged 11 - 18 years. It is situated on two sites, about five minutes walk apart, in Gravesend, Kent. The pupils and sixth-form students come from a wide catchment area that includes the town of Gravesend. The school is at full capacity and is always oversubscribed. Most children live in areas that have a high level of economic and social disadvantage. Pupils come from a wide range of social environments, but most come from supportive and favourable home backgrounds. There are currently 973 pupils on roll, of which 221 attend the sixth form. The school has similar numbers on roll compared to an average-sized secondary school, but the sixth form is larger than average. 122 pupils are from minority ethnic groups, a higher proportion than most other schools, but all pupils are fluent in the English language. The most predominant group is from an Indian heritage. About 3 per cent of pupils receive free school meals and this proportion is close to the average for grammar schools, but very much lower than found in most secondary schools. Pupils' attainment on entry is very high when compared to the national average. Less than 1 per cent of the pupils have been placed on the special educational needs register, of whom only two have been assessed to have a high level of learning difficulty. These proportions are very low when compared to other secondary schools. No pupil has a statement for special educational needs.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Gravesend Grammar School for Girls is a very good school, with several outstanding features, that provides its pupils and sixth-form students with a high quality of education. It has considerable strengths and only very few areas where improvement is needed. Pupils start with very high levels of attainment and the school does very well for them so that by the end of Year 11 they achieve standards that are above average compared with other grammar schools. The sixth form is cost effective and students achieve standards that are well above the national average. Very effective teaching and excellent relationships ensure pupils and sixth-form students make very good progress. The school is led very effectively by the governors, headteacher and senior staff and gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Very effective and well-organised teaching, combined with very good use of assessment information, ensures that pupils and sixth-form students achieve very good results in their tests and examinations.
- Determined and positive leadership by the headteacher, senior staff and governors has ensured very good progress since the last inspection and standards of work have significantly improved.
- The school has created a climate where pupils and sixth-form students develop excellent attitudes, a pride in their school, learn to take initiative and mature into confident young adults.

What could be improved

- The overall quality of accommodation.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April 1997 and has accomplished very good improvement since that time. It has improved upon the high standards reported then and successfully addressed all of the recommendations identified in the last inspection, with the exception of providing daily worship and teaching sufficient religious education in the sixth form. The school has also made improvements in many other important areas. These include: improving teaching and learning, strengthening review and management arrangements and using assessment information to set pupils' targets. The school has gained prestigious School Achievement and Sportsmark awards. It is also working towards specialist Science College, Investors in People, Artsmark and Investors in Careers status. Improvements have been made to the accommodation, although many areas of the school need substantial further improvement. Arrangements for performance management have been put in place and are well integrated into the school's strategy for further improvement.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14- and 16-year-olds and sixth-form students at the end of Year 13, based on average point scores in national tests, GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
Key Stage 3 tests	A*	A*	A*	B
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	B
	1999	2000	2001	
A-levels/AS-levels	n/a	A	*	

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

* National comparison data for AS/A Level results in 2002 are not yet available

Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 have been improving at a faster rate than results nationally in recent years. In 2002, as in previous years, results in English, mathematics and science were very high¹ compared to the national average. The good progress that pupils make between the tests they take at age 11 and their success in tests at age 14 indicates they perform well above average in comparison to other grammar schools. GCSE results are also very high. The 2002 GCSE 5+ A*-C grades gained in relation to the results achieved by the same girls in their end of Year 9 National Curriculum tests were above average. When the total 2002 points score for GCSE is analysed the attainment achieved by pupils is above average when compared to other grammar schools. The number of A* grades has been close to the grammar school average in most subjects, but well above in English, art, design and technology and physical education. An analysis of the cumulative A*/A/B grades reveals that some of the foundation² subjects are below grammar school average. This is not the case for English where the girls achieve a high proportion of top grades. In the last few years, the GCSE results have improved at a faster rate than nationally. The very high results achieved are the outcome of very good teaching, which holds the interest of most pupils and encourages them to adopt excellent attitudes to study. The school met its targets in the past two years and has set itself challenging, but achievable, targets for the next year. The work of pupils currently in Years 9 -11 is very high and students are achieving well, indicating that the good pattern of results will be maintained in the coming year. Pupils' numeracy and literacy standards are very high, with pupils applying these skills well in other subjects. Results in the sixth form were well above average in 2001 and significantly better in 2002. This represents very good overall progress by sixth-form students. Students currently in the sixth form are achieving well as a consequence of very good teaching and the very positive attitudes of students. The very few pupils with special educational needs in school make good progress due to the effective support they receive. The very few pupils, who speak English as an additional language, similarly make good progress. The school is likely to maintain the examination performance of recent years in the coming year.

¹ In the top 5 per cent of all state maintained schools.

² Art and design, design and technology, history, geography, ICT, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, music and physical education.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and work hard. They are highly motivated and this has a positive impact upon their progress. They are proud of their school and enjoy taking part in a wide range of opportunities available.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is excellent during lessons and at other times. Pupils are courteous to each other, to staff and to visitors. The number of exclusions is very low compared to other schools.
Personal development and relationships	This school has established a purposeful working environment within which pupils mature into confident and articulate young people. They relish responsibility and are keen to engage in discussion and share their ideas. Relationships are excellent. Pupils and virtually all of their teachers address each other with the respect and consideration they deserve.
Attendance	Very good. While similar to other grammar schools, it is very high compared to the national average. Unauthorised absences are exceptionally rare.

Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, working successfully both independently and in groups. This prepares them well for sixth-form study, where they display mature attitudes to work.

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.

Overall, the quality of teaching is very good throughout the school, with a considerable amount of teaching that is excellent, and has improved since the last inspection. There are, however, still aspects of teaching that can be improved. The teaching of English, mathematics and science is very good, as it is in most other subjects, and is the main reason why pupils are making good progress and achieving well. No unsatisfactory teaching and learning were observed during the inspection. Teaching is very effective because teachers have high levels of subject expertise and are enthusiastic about their subject. In most subjects, teachers' expectations are very high and this ensures pupils and students are challenged to achieve well. Teachers know their pupils well and most prepare stimulating and challenging lessons. Pupils and sixth-form students are, consequently, enthusiastic and work hard. In those lessons where teaching was less than very good, teachers spoke for too long, did not prepare work to ensure all girls were active participants in their own learning or failed to match the individual needs of pupils. These instances were indicative of teachers not using a sufficiently wide range of teaching strategies. Teaching in the sixth form is also very good. As a result, students develop very good study habits, which stand them in good stead for moving on to higher education. Teachers provide pupils and sixth-form students with individual support when necessary and make very good use of assessment information to set targets and ensure that all of the pupils and students maintain a good rate of progress. The arrangements for evaluating the quality of teachers' work are very good and this ensures consistency within and between departments. Improving teaching and learning is a focus of school development and an advanced skills teacher has been appointed to enhance teaching throughout all subjects. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress due to effective support. The very few pupils for whom English is an additional language make similarly good progress in lessons as teachers are aware of their needs. The promotion of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills in all subjects is developing well. Virtually all pupils and sixth-form students use computers confidently. Homework is used well to consolidate and develop learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good, well matched to the needs of the pupils and sixth form. The school has a good range of modern foreign languages and extra-curricular activities, but vocational options are limited. All statutory requirements are met.
Provision for pupils	There are very few pupils with special educational needs and they are provided

with special educational needs	with good support by staff. There are effective systems to monitor their progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The pupils for whom English is not their first language are given good support and they achieve very well. Their progress is monitored carefully, but the school recognises there is scope to strengthen the support even further.
Provision for pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This is very good overall. The social and moral development of pupils is excellent and has a positive effect on their learning successfully together. Pupils have many opportunities to show initiative and undertake a high level of responsibility. Pupils are very involved with the whole school community.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils are very well cared for and child-protection procedures are very good. Assessment procedures and the use of target setting are well established and have a significant impact on raising standards across the school.

The vast majority of parents have positive views about the school. They receive good information about school life and how their children are doing.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good overall. The headteacher provides determined and positive leadership, which is focused on helping the school achieve its aims. She is supported very well by senior staff and others with management responsibility.
How well the governors fulfill their responsibilities	The governors are well informed about school issues. They understand their responsibility and contribute well to the school's development. They do not fully meet statutory requirements for providing a daily act of collective worship or teaching religious education in the sixth form.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Monitoring by the headteacher and the senior staff has improved since the last inspection. The steps to evaluate the impact of teaching on standards ensure consistent good quality throughout the school.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes very good use of its resources. It correctly applies the principles of achieving best value to all major purchases and services.

The school has very well qualified staff to teach the curriculum effectively and to meet the needs of pupils and sixth-form students. Overall, learning resources are good. Although the accommodation has improved since the last inspection there are still many areas that are not adequate to meet the needs of pupils and staff and these restrict future developments.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The school sent out 973 questionnaires of which 489 (50.3 per cent) were returned. About 45 parents attended a meeting prior to the inspection to express their views about the school. In addition, 33 parents wrote to the inspectors to express their views.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school. • Pupils and sixth-form students make good progress. • Pupils' behaviour is very good. • The teaching is very good. • The school has high expectations of the pupils and students. • Leadership and management of the school are good. • They feel comfortable in approaching the school with problems. • The school helps children to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework. • Providing more information about their children's progress. • The school working more closely with parents.

The inspection team fully endorses the positive views expressed by parents. They do not agree with the views concerning homework and the information provided about children's progress. Homework is

managed well, although pupils do have heavy work-loads, as expected, before examinations. The school works hard to keep parents informed and feeling welcome.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM GRAVESEND GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this average-sized grammar school has 221 students. The size of the sixth form is consistently much larger than average when compared to other secondary schools. Numbers have fluctuated slightly each year and increased since the last inspection. The sixth form offers a wide range of AS and A2 courses and provision has been enhanced since the previous inspection by the successful introduction of additional courses. It does not offer any vocational courses. Around 85 per cent of pupils from the main school continue their education in the sixth form and a small number enter it from other schools. Entry to the sixth form is open to students, who gain five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C for whom there are appropriate courses and, who are committed to further study. Over 80 per cent of students usually enter higher education on completion of their sixth-form studies.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a very good sixth form, which is cost effective and provides very good value for money. The overall standards achieved have been well above national figures because teaching is very good and students have extremely positive attitudes to their work. The range of courses offered meets the differing interests and aptitudes of all students. Very good provision is made for students' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teachers are committed to their students and care for them very well. Students are prepared well for the next stage of their education.

Strengths

- Standards are improving and are very high when compared to the national average owing to very effective teaching and the very good use made of assessment information.
- Students' ability to learn independently, their self-reliance and self-motivation.
- Supportive teachers, who foster very positive relationships with students. This is reflected in students' excellent attitudes and contributes towards their high attainment.
- Extensive opportunities are provided for students' personal development in their daily life and work in the sixth form and through their involvement with the main school and wider community.

What could be improved

- Ensure all students receive a full range of careers advice.
- More use of computers to widen the range of teaching methods and enhance students' learning.
- Providing more religious education for all students to meet statutory requirements.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

English	Very good. There are high standards in the AS and A2 examinations in both language and literature courses. Students learn very well in response to very good teaching. Leadership and management of this thriving department are extremely effective in giving English a high and successful profile in school.
Mathematics	Very good. Examination results for 2002 show a considerable improvement on those of previous years that were in line with the national average. The high quality of teaching combined with the very positive attitudes of students leads to high standards.
Physics	Very good. Students are very positive about the subject and achieve very good examination results at AS and A2 levels owing to very good teaching. Leadership and management of the department are very good.
Biology	Very good. Examination results are very high and have improved over the last three years. Teaching and learning are very good, which is reflected in the very good progress made by the students, who are highly motivated.
Chemistry	Very good. Examination results are well above average. Very good teaching and learning ensure students make very good progress. Leadership is good and there are very good arrangements in the department to evaluate the quality of the work and to assess the progress of students.
Information and communication technology	Very good. Examination results are well above the national average and they improved in 2002. Teaching is very good and students develop independent learning skills. Teachers support students very well and this ensures they develop very positive attitudes.
Sociology	Good. Examination results have fluctuated in recent years, but the number of students attaining the higher grades has been close to the national average. All students passed the examination in the previous two years. Present students are attaining above average standards owing to good teaching and the enthusiasm of students.
History	Very good. The most recent examination results showed a marked improvement and standards are very high. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and students' attitudes are excellent. Leadership and management are very good and students are fully encouraged to become independent learners.
Geography	Very good. The very good teaching and support for students ensures very high standards at AS and A2 level. In recent years, the majority of students have gained high grades with all passing the examinations. The very good relationships promote good achievement by students of all ability.
Psychology	Very good. Results in recent years have been above average. Results are high in both AS and A2 courses due to the very good teaching. Students enjoy their lessons and the subject is led and managed with considerable efficiency and enthusiasm.
French	Very good. Standards are well above national averages, particularly in speaking and listening skills. Teaching is high quality and this ensures that students' attitudes towards learning are very good.
Spanish	Very good. Examination results are well above average. The quality of teaching is excellent, resulting in very well motivated students. Numbers taking the subject have been low, but recently have been increasing.
Physical education	Excellent. Examination results are consistently very high compared to the national average. Students achieve standards that are higher than would be indicated by their prior attainment and respond with enthusiasm to the teachers' meticulous planning and interesting and varied teaching. Leadership of the subject is excellent.

In other subjects, work was sampled during the inspection week. Usually one lesson in each subject was observed and, overall, the quality of teaching and learning was very good. The provision in **religious education** is very good. Recent results at A Level have been above average. At present, there is one group of students in Year 12 and standards of work are high. The quality of teaching and learning was very good and students displayed very positive attitudes towards the subject. The provision in **design and technology** is very good. There are no previous examination results as this is the first year of entry. The

work of the students at A level is above average. Students show a real enthusiasm that is reflected by them all carrying on their study into Year 13. The provision in **business studies** is good. Results are above average. The teaching is good and this promotes good progress being made by the students. The provision in **German** is very good. Results at A Level for the last three years have been well above average. Students are motivated and build well on their attainment at GCSE. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use German extensively in class. The provision in **classical civilization** is good. A Level results were above average in 2001. Most students make good progress in understanding Greek plays and their historical context. Lessons are well planned to include a range of different activities. The provision in **government and politics** is very good. Teaching and learning are very effective and results have improved steadily over the past three years. In 2001, results were well above average with a 100 per cent pass rate. The teaching style and relationships with the students provide a challenging and exciting environment in which students develop very good independent study skills. The provision in **art and design** is excellent. The excellent teaching results in very high standards at AS and A Level with the majority of students achieving a grade A at A Level and with a 100 per cent pass rate. Students achieve well, given their prior attainment. The teacher provides an exciting and stimulating environment in which students are encouraged to develop their own individual styles of presentation. The provision in **theatre studies** is very good. The students demonstrate a high level of skill and enthusiasm as they prepare and act out a scripted assignment for their A level assessment. The provision in **human biology** is good. Although results in human biology have been relatively lower than many other subjects and declining, students achieve well and gain their predicted grades. Standards seen during the inspection were high at A2 level and students were achieving well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Staff know sixth-form students very well and ensure that they give them very good guidance with both their academic studies and their personal development. Staff mark work carefully and give very clear guidance to help students improve further. They keep students regularly informed about their progress and quickly identify any change in their attitude, demeanour or performance. They encourage students to evaluate their own work and set challenging targets for improvement. The school gives very good guidance to students about university options, but is not as effective about the advice it gives to those, who may choose other career paths. Students achieve high standards in key skills and the strands of communication and information and communication technology have been offered as optional courses.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. There has been a strong focus on raising standards through monitoring the quality of teaching and tracking students' progress. Equal emphasis has been on students' personal development. There is a clear sense of direction and determination to raise standards further. The Key Stage 5 co-ordinator and the heads of Year 12 and 13 work well together to provide a very good level of care for students' personal well-being. The clear aims and values of the sixth form include a rigorous approach to monitoring students' progress and an excellent focus on enrichment activities. Recently, there has been a special emphasis on monitoring and evaluating teaching in the sixth form. The Key Stage 5 co-ordinator is a member of the school's senior management team and the development of the sixth form is very well supported by collaborative monitoring and evaluation. The sixth form is cost effective and the principles of best value are applied well.

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"> • Choice suits talents and aspirations. • Printed information clear and helpful. • School helped me to settle well. • Well taught and challenged. • Teachers are accessible for help. • Enjoy sixth form and recommend it. • Work is thoroughly assessed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helpful and constructive advice. • Well informed about progress. • Well advised about future options. • Support and help if personal problems. • Range of activities and enrichments. • Treated as a responsible young adult. • School responds to views of sixth form.

As part of the inspection process, students were asked to complete a questionnaire. In addition, several groups met inspectors to discuss their views on the subjects they are studying and on the sixth form in general. Although a number of concerns were expressed on the questionnaire, students spoken to did not recognise these views as being widespread. Students' overall views of the sixth form are very positive. They are enjoying this phase of their education and virtually all would recommend this sixth form to others. Students recognize that they are very well taught. Everyone is pleased with the readiness of teachers to give advice when it is needed; views towards many subjects are exceptionally good. Inspectors agree with these areas of strength. Many students, who completed the questionnaire, expressed misgivings about the advice provided about which courses to take in the sixth form, along with guidance on possible careers after school or after university. While students admit that help and advice are available for the selection of universities and courses, inspectors agree that those students not headed for university would benefit from more structured advice about specific alternatives. Students rightly praise the help available for their academic studies, but some of the students comment that they are reluctant to seek advice for personal problems. Some students expressed misgivings about the way the school responds to the views of the sixth form and comment that the school does not always treat them as responsible young adults. However, inspectors observed that most staff encourage students to be fully independent and self-sufficient. Occasionally, staff dominate the activities and this dissuades students from total commitment and involvement. Inspectors do not agree with the concerns of some students about the range of activities and enrichments. Students can participate in many different activities at school locally and internationally.

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

Very effective and well-organised teaching, combined with very good use of assessment information, ensures that pupils and sixth-form students achieve very good results in their tests and examinations.

1. Pupils enter school at the age of 11 with levels of attainment that are very high for their age. They make very good progress and their attainment is extended during Years 7 to 9 so that by the age of 14 a very high proportion of pupils achieve the highest levels 7–8³ in the National Curriculum tests. During the last three years, pupils' attainment in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science has been very high⁴ compared with the national average by the end of Year 9. Results when compared to similar schools⁵ are above average. The good progress that pupils make between the tests they take at age 11 and their success in tests at age 14 indicates they perform well above average in comparison to other grammar schools. The most recent group to take the tests at age 14 were amongst the top 50 maintained schools nationally for adding value to their attainment. During the last three years, the school improved its performance at a better rate than national trends of improvement. Also, during this period, standards in English have been higher than mathematics and science.
2. Pupils' overall attainment by the age of 16 is very high compared to the national average. The most recent 2002 results were a slight decline on the previous year. However, over the last four years, the GCSE results have been above the national trend of improvement. The 2002 GCSE 5+ A*-C grades gained in relation to the results achieved by the same girls in their end of Year 9 National Curriculum tests were above average, indicating the school is adding value to pupils' attainment. When the total 2002 points score for GCSE is analysed the attainment achieved by pupils is above average when compared to other grammar schools. Pupils make very good progress overall and many achieve outstanding examination results. The very few pupils with special educational needs also make good progress due to the additional support they are given. Pupils, who speak English as an additional language, make similarly good progress. Many subjects gained credible GCSE examination success, but the 2002 results have been especially noteworthy in English (literature and language), mathematics, art, design and technology and physical education. In 2002, the proportion of the higher A*/A GCSE grades achieved by students was close to grammar school averages, but well above in English, art, design and technology and physical education. An analysis of the cumulative A*/A/B grades reveals that some of the foundation⁶ subjects are below the grammar school average, though this is not the case for English, mathematics and science. The very high results achieved are the outcome of very good teaching, which holds the interest of most pupils and encourages them to adopt positive attitudes to study. The school met its GCSE targets in the past two years and has set itself challenging, but achievable targets for the next year. A very high proportion (over 85 per cent) of pupils stay on at school to join the sixth form. As sixth-form students they achieve results that are very high compared to the national average.⁷

³ Level 7 is two National Curriculum levels above the average for students at this age.

⁴ Very high indicates attainment within the top ~~five~~⁵ per cent of all state maintained schools.

⁵ Schools with a selective intake of pupils.

⁶ Art and design, design and technology, history, geography, ~~ICT~~^{information and communication technology}, modern ~~foreign~~ languages, music and physical education.

⁷ A summary of A level results can be found in paragraphs 19 - 22.

3. By the time students leave school most have made very good progress and achieved examination success that allows them to gain entry to university. In addition, the school promotes their personal development and ensures they have the relevant study skills to succeed in their higher education courses. There are many reasons why the school is successful in raising standards. Much is centred on the effective and well-organised teaching, the very good use made of assessment information and the high level of commitment shown to the pupils and sixth-form students. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good throughout the school and has improved since the previous inspection. There were no unsatisfactory lessons observed during the inspection and very good teaching was evident in all departments. Teachers have a high level of subject expertise and commitment to their subject. They present challenging and frequently stimulating work for the pupils and sixth-form students. In most lessons, planning is detailed and teachers involve all students to take the initiative and develop a deeper understanding of the topic being studied. In these lessons, work is well matched to the individual needs of the pupils, especially those, who struggle with a new concept or those, who find the work easy.
4. Within this context of very good teaching there are still aspects that can be improved. At times, teachers allow the girls to be too passive by not planning activities to ensure their full involvement or by directing questions that demand a response from targeted individuals. Some teachers talk for too long or excessively use note-taking as a method of sharing information. Some lessons do not benefit from a plenary session to recap on what has been learnt, consolidate understanding and prepare for the next session. Several subjects do not make sufficient use of information and communication technology as a tool for learning. These instances are indicative of teachers not using a sufficiently wide range of teaching strategies to involve the students fully in their own learning. Consequently, the interest of all pupils is not capitalised upon for them to take initiative and develop their own ideas. Most teachers provide pupils with individual support when necessary and make good use of systematic assessment to ensure a good rate of progress is maintained, both in lessons and throughout the units of work. Many teachers make very good use of assessment information to set targets for individual pupils and sixth-form students.
5. The planned promotion of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills across all subjects is not always evident in lessons, although students use these skills confidently in their work. Teachers help them develop study skills and prepare them well to gain success in public tests and examinations. They effectively build on the pupils' positive attitudes to the school to develop an enjoyment of learning. Consequently, there is a culture in which pupils and students embrace learning positively. Pupils' learning and achievement are very strongly promoted through the teachers' high level of subject expertise and enthusiasm for the subject. Most teachers have very high expectations and set the pupils suitable challenges. The excellent relationships between the pupils and teachers in the classroom create a positive learning environment where pupils learn effectively and with enjoyment.

Determined and positive leadership by the headteacher, senior staff and governors has ensured very good progress since the last inspection and standards of work have significantly improved.

6. Determined and positive leadership by the headteacher, senior staff and governors has ensured very good improvements in the school and improved upon the high standards reported at the last inspection. They have successfully addressed most of the recommendations identified in the last inspection, with the exception of providing daily worship and religious education for all sixth-form students. The school has also made improvements in many other important areas. These include considerably improving

the quality of teaching and learning, strengthening the review and monitoring arrangements and using assessment information to set pupils' targets. The school has gained prestigious School Achievement and Sportsmark awards. It is also working towards specialist Science College, Investors in People and Investors in Careers status. Improvements have been made to the accommodation, although many areas of the school need substantial further improvement. As a mark of the school's success, over 85 per cent of the pupils continue into the sixth form, of whom regularly 80 per cent follow a higher education course at university. For many students, they are the first generation in the family to follow higher education courses. The school continues to provide an extensive range of activities outside the curriculum and this promotes the pupils' personal development so they become mature and confident young adults. The headteacher has been in post for about two years and had brought a fresh outward looking approach to school development.

7. The school has a clear set of aims and is progressively moving towards meeting them. The headteacher, senior staff and governors have had much success in encouraging the contribution of members of the school community towards ensuring that every girl is supported well. The headteacher and governors ensure that the aims form the basis for planning for further improvement. The strategic development plan is a comprehensive and useful working document, which sets out a programme of action over a three-year period to move more closely to meeting the school's aims. Staff and governors are involved in drawing up this plan and governors' financial planning is guided by the priorities within the school's annual improvement plan. All departments are also required to draw up their own plans, linked to the overall plan, and this coherence is a strong factor in helping the school move forward. The senior staff, including the academic and pastoral leaders, are clear about what they want to achieve for the pupils and sixth-form students.
8. The school's aims are already being achieved. Particularly well developed are the aims to:
 - enable each student to realise her full academic potential;
 - encourage students to develop confidence in their own abilities;
 - acquire skills and competencies for a fulfilling life without regard to traditional stereotyping;
 - stimulate curiosity and imagination, stretch and challenge intellect, encourage independent thought and develop responsibility for their own learning.

There are many opportunities created in school to bring these aims to fruition. Equally well developed are the aims to:

- provide a wide-ranging, well-balanced curriculum;
- promote students' awareness of spiritual and moral values;
- ensure high-quality staff work in a fulfilling environment;
- provide a safe and pleasant environment.

As a result, relationships and pupils' attitudes are excellent and pupils achieve very well.

9. Over the last few years there have been successful changes in many aspects of the school's management. For example, the line-management structure has been improved to strengthen the arrangements to review and monitor the quality of teaching and curriculum development. This has resulted in greater clarity and focus for aspects of the work of pastoral and academic managers.
10. The headteacher and senior staff successfully highlight the need to ensure that there is equality of access and opportunity for every pupil and sixth-form student to succeed, whatever their academic ability and social need. The pastoral staff are especially

effective and, as a result, the school is a fully inclusive community where the contribution of all is valued and where the needs of each individual are recognised and attended to. Teachers ensure that the highest level of performance is achieved in examinations and that the pupils with more complex learning and social needs are given adequate support. The school has developed effective strategies for self-review and looked critically at its own teaching, curriculum and use of resources. The success in educating all groups of students is based on their individual needs being well known and successfully communicated to staff. All students, including those, who join the school other than in Year 7 and those from minority ethnic groups, are fully included in all aspects of the life and work of the school.

The school has created a climate where pupils develop very positive attitudes, a pride in their school, learn to take initiative and mature into confident young adults.

11. Pupils and sixth-form students thoroughly enjoy their work and leisure time at school. They want to learn at Gravesend Grammar School for Girls. They achieve an impressive balance between enjoying the lessons and having fun, the need to observe the school's outstandingly consistent and clear code of conduct and the expectations to provide high-quality work. Students realise they are very well taught and, therefore, approach lessons confidently, knowing that teachers will expect them to work hard throughout the session. In a Year 7 English lesson, for instance, pupils experimented very enthusiastically with the Scottish dialect when reading a poem in pairs. Students often express disappointment when lessons end: a group of Year 11 artists pleaded to remain in at lunchtime to complete their work and even asked to stay after school.
12. All pupils and students talk engagingly about the school and how it keeps them very busy, encouraging them to become responsible young citizens. The students' personal development is very good. This is because the school carefully nurtures each student's individual personality. Staff know the students very well. They analyse students' previous performance and predict their future outcomes in tests and examinations. Staff encourage students to participate in a wide variety of activities, which will support this predicted performance. Teachers work hard in lessons encouraging pupils and students to commit to, and involve themselves in, debate and discussion in group and paired work and in individual and home work. This means that pupils and students increasingly learn to manage their own work. This is a characteristic of many subjects.
13. Students thoroughly enjoy their lessons, but also relish all the other activities that the school organises. Photographs around the school exemplify this aspect of school life. The school caters for many talents and interests and inevitably the extensive range of sports, creative, charitable and social events whet the appetite of even the most reluctant students. 'The best day of my life' is how one girl described a climbing activity on one of the photographs on display in the school. Students also happily organise their own activities outside lessons. Form-life is important to all the girls. They plan their own assemblies, distributing parts to classmates with real management aplomb. Every form has about eight different responsibility posts that girls embrace eagerly. They raise huge amounts annually for charity, an acknowledgement of their excellent moral understanding and concern for others.
14. Gravesend Grammar School students ensure that everyone is included in school life. They take very high levels of responsibility for others, relating exceptionally well with all students and adults. They care very tenderly for any classmates, who are sick or injured or in need of support. They understand when others have challenges because of their individual situations and make no fuss about the implications of these situations. All pupils ascertain that bullying rarely occurs and the school manages any

situations exceptionally quickly and effectively. This means that the whole community remains extra-ordinarily harmonious, dignified and all embracing.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The overall quality of accommodation.

15. At the time of the last inspection, the school existed on three separate sites and the quality and use of the accommodation was highlighted as an area of concern. Since then, the school has made considerable improvements and has incorporated all students on to two sites, about five minutes walk apart. Of particular note, the sixth-form students are now located in the main building and make a very positive contribution to school life throughout all year groups. There has been a new block built that houses mathematics, art and modern foreign languages and this provides a stimulating and positive learning environment. The condition of the school buildings has been improved and is cared for very well by both the premises team and students alike. Overall, the accommodation for the current number of sixth-form students and the range of curriculum subjects is just satisfactory.⁸ However, when considering the school in its entirety the accommodation is inadequate.
16. There are a number of aspects about the accommodation that create difficulties and have an adverse impact on the effectiveness of learning and provision of suitable facilities for pupils and staff. There are serious inadequacies in the provision for science as a consequence of the dispersion of teaching laboratories in three different areas around the school's site. The quality of accommodation for physics is especially poor and in urgent need of improvement. At times, the technicians are required to move equipment and chemicals around the site and this is not acceptable practice as time and resources are not used efficiently. The changing areas for physical education are far too small and cramped for the number of girls changing into sports clothing. There is a lack of suited accommodation for humanity subjects. This inhibits developments for resource-based learning in the subjects and for departmental administration and organisation. As a consequence of inadequate facilities elsewhere in the school, the small library has to be used to hold assemblies for sixth-form students on two sessions each week. The girls have inadequate seating on these occasions and the space is not conducive for acts of worship and students' participation.
17. The overall provision for administrative accommodation within the school is inadequate. Many teaching and non-teaching staff are required to work in cramped spaces where both storage facilities and confidential discussions are severely restricted. There is a lack of suitable accommodation for professional interviews and meetings with students and visitors. The medical room is situated outside the main building in an unsuitable location between two music rooms. The school has ambitious plans to acquire new buildings, partly through acquiring specialist science college status. In reality, major investment in new accommodation is needed to provide the school with facilities, which will allow for future curriculum development and further opportunities for the students.

⁸ Refer to paragraph 49.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

The school has a detailed and ambitious improvement plan that identifies the main priorities for development, set in a realistic time-scale in which to achieve them. The inspectors fully endorse the improvement plan, but particularly highlight the following issues.

18. In order to improve further the standards of education, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

Main school

- 1 Improve the overall quality of accommodation by**:
 - Working with the local education authority and other external agencies to secure funding.

Sixth form

- 2 Ensure all students receive a fuller range of careers advice**.
- 3 Make greater use of computers to widen the range of teaching methods and enhance students' learning**.
- 4 Provide more religious education for all students to meet statutory requirements.

** These issues have already been identified as part of the school's development planning,

OTHER ISSUES WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED BY THE SCHOOL

Governors may consider including the following less important issues in their action plan:

- Continuing to develop links with local business and industry.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	22
	Sixth form	56
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		55

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	2	14	5	1	0	0	0
Percentage	9	64	23	4	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	12	31	12	1	0	0	0
Percentage	22	55	21	2	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	752	221
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	23	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	8	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	49

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	12
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	21

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.6
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	0	154	154

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	153	153	153
	Total	153	153	153
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	99 (99)	99 (99)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	99 (99)	99 (99)	98 (91)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	153	153	153
	Total	153	153	153
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	99 (99)	99 (99)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	96 (92)	99 (100)	93 (99)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	N/a	140	140

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	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	139	140	140
	Total	139	140	140
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	99 (98)	100 (100)	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	65.4 (66.5)
	National	39.8 (39.0)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	N/a	116	116

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All
School	0	22.1	22.1
National	18.9 (16.9)	17.6 (17.7)	18.3 (17.4)

* National comparison data for AS/A Level results in 2002 are not yet available. Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
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
825	1	0
1	0	0
17	0	0
2	0	0
2	0	0
3	0	0
9	0	0
83	0	0
3	0	0
2	0	0
3	0	0
2	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
7	0	0
4	0	0
9	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)	58.01
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.8

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	237

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.2
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	24.2
Key Stage 4	23.1
Sixth form	14.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001 - 2002
----------------	-------------

	£
Total income	2,906,753
Total expenditure	2,862,926
Expenditure per pupil	3,007
Balance brought forward from previous year	188,886
Balance carried forward to next year	232,713

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	10.9
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	13.9
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
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 50.3%

Number of questionnaires sent out

973

Number of questionnaires returned

489

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	55	7	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	50	46	3	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	43	53	2	2	0
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21	56	16	5	2
The teaching is good.	37	56	3	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	54	16	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	38	50	8	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	74	25	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	17	59	18	3	3
The school is well led and managed.	34	57	3	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	53	3	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	27	51	8	3	11

Other issues raised by parents

Bus schedules do not give sufficient time for pupils to use their lockers and, as a result, their bags are very heavy to and from school.

The many positives for providing a broad education must not be lost in the striving to raise academic standards.

Lunchtime activities seem to have ceased since Christmas.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

19. Study in the sixth form is open to all students, who achieve five or more GCSE A*-C grades and a B grade to study at A2, or, who are considered to be able to complete the courses successfully. As a result, the overall ability of students on entry to the sixth form is well above average. Results in 2001 GCE A and AS level examinations were well above average. Overall, results in 2002⁹ were significantly higher and continue the upward trend of success in post-16 examinations. A high proportion (85 per cent) of students, who attended the main school, stay on to undertake post-16 courses. Nearly 80 per cent of students enter higher education at the completion of the sixth form. There is some variation in results from subject to subject and from year to year¹⁰. In 2002, examination results are expected to be well above average in most subjects. Overall, students achieve very well in their courses and gain very creditable results.
20. The school seeks to ensure that students of all abilities do well in the examinations and courses they study. There is very little drop-out from courses during either Year 12, when students are following courses to AS level, or in Year 13 when following A2 level courses. The most able students are helped to achieve the highest grades and, in 2002, 54 per cent of students gained A or B grades. This is above the level predicted from previous tests and GCSE examinations and demonstrates that the school adds good value to students' attainment. In most subjects, all students completing courses are successful in gaining at least a pass grade, confirming the successful completion of the course by the vast majority of students. The school has only very few students for whom English is an additional language in the sixth form. The needs of these students are well known to staff, who modify tasks to ensure that these students achieve well in examinations. Currently, no students in the sixth form have special educational needs.
21. The inspection focused on work in 13 subjects. The overall standard of work being produced by students currently in the sixth form is consistently well above average. Students are achieving well and making very good progress in most subjects because sixth-form teaching is very good and review and monitoring procedures are effective. In most subjects, teachers encourage students to develop skills of independent study and this is helping them to achieve well.
22. All sixth-form students have good language skills, which they demonstrate both orally and in their written work. Similarly, their mathematical skills are sufficiently well developed to support their work in other subjects. Many students have very good computer skills and use information and communication technology (ICT) well, both in lessons and in private study.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

23. The previous inspection report praised the positive attitudes of students in the sixth form. These have improved considerably since then and are now excellent. Driven by a strong work ethic, attitudes to learning are exceptionally good. Initiative and persistence are strong features of learning, supplemented by good study habits to ensure progress and achievement. Students are keen to do well and relish the many

⁹ At the time of preparing this report, national comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not available.

¹⁰ Care needs to be exercised when comparing results of individual subjects with national data because, in many subjects, the numbers taking the subject are too small to make comparisons reliable.

lessons where they are very well taught. In an excellent Year 13 history lesson, for instance, students were really geared up from the very beginning of the lesson, eagerly anticipating the pleasure of total commitment to learning about writing essays on World War One. Working hard both independently and in groups comes naturally to sixth-form students. An exceptionally high level of interest characterises most lessons. Students immerse themselves in their studies and, therefore, produce stimulating and adventurous work.

24. At the time of the previous inspection, the sixth-form site was detached from the main school and sixth formers were distant from main school activities. The school has successfully rectified this situation and the sixth-form students now play a leading role in the life of the school. Students willingly embrace the impressive range of leadership opportunities and this involvement significantly enhances the curriculum for younger students. Many sixth-form girls organise and lead sports events and competitions, help other pupils in lessons across all subjects of the curriculum, organise their own affairs such as the Summer Ball and lead various clubs and teams. They are thoroughly involved in the life of the main school supporting younger students by acting as form officials and charity or green officials. During the inspection week, sixth-form students taking community leadership awards organised inter-form hockey and netball matches for Year 7 students. These young students keenly prepared for the arrival of the leaders by warming up independently. They then listened carefully to their instructions and played in the matches with genuine vigour, determination and enjoyment. Students also organise a sports festival for three local primary schools in the summer term.
25. Relationships throughout the sixth form are excellent. The school ensures that students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. This has a particularly positive impact on their learning and personal development. Outstandingly high levels of mutual support and trust exist. These mean that sometimes potentially embarrassing subjects can be discussed easily and freely; students and teacher explored potentially difficult subjects in one Year 12 general studies lesson in complete empathy. This community often has fun together. Year 12 psychologists roared with laughter as they mimed message relays from the brain to different parts of the body to show the effects of stress. This sixth-form community also welcomes and embraces differences of ability, culture, opinion and experience. Students confidently share their experiences of life in other cultures with no hint of reticence.
26. Attendance is very good in the sixth form and students are punctual to lessons, coping well with moving between the split site. The school monitors attendance carefully and there are effective strategies in place, which keeps standards high.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

27. The quality of teaching and learning is very good throughout both years of the sixth form. During the inspection, 56 lessons were observed and the quality of teaching was good in 21 per cent of lessons, very good in 55 per cent, excellent in 21 per cent and satisfactory in 3 (one lesson) per cent. The quality of teaching is now a strength in the sixth form and has contributed to the success in examination courses at a much higher level than the national average. In addition, the very good teaching has a positive impact on the academic support and guidance given to students, encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning and prepares them well for the next stage of their education. This represents a very good improvement since the previous inspection. However, a few of the same concerns raised then still remain. For example, there were concerns with a number of lessons where teachers did not ensure the involvement of all students, who were too passive, or where the teachers'

questioning did not target specific students to make a response. Also, in some lessons, teachers spoke for too long and there was not a wide enough range of teaching strategies to ensure the highest level of performance was always achieved. Although these aspects have improved there is still room for further development and the school has recognised this in its current development plan and proposed strategies to raise standards even more.

28. Teaching in the sixth form is very good in virtually all subjects. This high level of consistency highlights the emphasis the school has placed on improving teaching and the positive outcomes of the review and monitoring programme. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subjects they teach, enabling them to present work that is stimulating and challenging for their students. In turn, students work hard and show considerable enthusiasm in lessons. In many subjects, students take considerable responsibility for their studies, undertaking research, investigations and experiments with maturity and confidence. Many teachers support these activities skilfully, providing guidance when needed and carefully monitoring progress. This approach to learning is successful, both in helping students gain a good understanding of the topics being studied and in developing study habits, which will serve them well when they enter higher education.
29. Teachers have high expectations of their students and develop excellent relationships that ensure students are motivated and keen to do very well. In most lessons, students are encouraged to make significant contributions to discussion and debate and this helps refine and develop both their thinking and language skills. Teachers encourage students to make good use of a wide range of resources, including the Internet, for research. In some subjects, students are encouraged to use the power of computer software to analyse and present information in sophisticated ways, but this is not sufficiently widespread across all subjects.
30. A positive feature of the work of teachers is the use of assessment of students' work. Assessment is used to set students' targets so they are more likely to achieve the highest grades possible in their examination courses. Assessments are often detailed and many teachers use this information to provide students with clear indications of what they need to do to improve their work even further. The school also has accurate records for those students for whom English is an additional language and this ensures they are fully included in lessons and make good progress. The school acknowledges that this is an area where it should implement further refinement to the current good practice.
31. Teachers of sixth-form students are aware of the need to support them in the development and application of their language and mathematical skills and take this responsibility seriously. This enables all students to develop good levels of confidence in using language and applying their numerical, graphical and data-handling skills in a wide range of contexts. Similarly, in Year 12, students follow a course in communication and information and communication technology (ICT) and students develop these skills successfully. The school has a successful strategy to teach students the key skills of communication, numeracy and ICT in the sixth form.

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

32. Curriculum provision in the sixth form is very good. The school offers a wide range of subjects. Students take 25 A Level subjects and general studies. In Year 12, students have the opportunity to take key skills in communication, also information and communication technology (ICT), and the Community Sports Leader Award. Only a few students change their options early in Year 12 and most continue with three A Level subjects. At present, 33 Year 13 students take four subjects, which may include general studies. There are opportunities for students to take an additional AS level in Year 13 to complement the A2 levels studied. The school aims at diversity for students within the provision of academic studies. This reflects the ability and interest of the students. However, through very good liaison with neighbouring schools, vocational courses and other A Level courses, such as media studies, are offered. Students from other schools join the sixth form to study across the range of subjects. These numbers have varied from four to eight, with a projected 10 students for entry in 2003.
33. In Year 12 in 2002, 85 per cent of students elected to remain at the school and the majority of those, who left continued their education elsewhere. The school recommends that students enter Year 12 with five GCSEs at A* to C grades and the minimum of a B in the subject that they choose to study. However, no pupil is debarred from taking an AS course, even if a B grade is not achieved. The offer of retakes in GCSEs is not applicable as all pupils, who enter the sixth form, gain A* to C in mathematics and English. The key skills course is very successful, with a high number completing their portfolios in communication, although very few complete these in ICT. A very good and detailed programme of personal, social and health education, also a general lecture, complements students' academic studies. These include study and presentation skills, discussions and debates. Although the school does not fully meet the National Curriculum requirements for religious education, students experience conferences in the subject and some areas are covered in general studies. The school also does not meet the requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship, but has greatly improved the quality of assemblies since the last inspection.
34. Students benefit from a very wide range of opportunities that are offered as extra-curricular activities. These include activities in music, sport and drama and also specific support sessions within subjects they are studying. Students have the opportunity to enter the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. They are very successful in this activity, with three gold awards gained in 2002, four gold and one silver now being processed and over 20 qualified for the bronze award. Within the sixth form, 42 'Senior Officials' take responsibility for a wide area of activities within the school and the local community. Students' involvement includes the school community, the community around the school and the world-wide community through ventures such as 'World Challenge'. This has taken students to Venezuela and this year to Borneo. The Community Sports Leader Award is a practical qualification that allows students to train and provide voluntary assistance, thereby, increasing their own knowledge and confidence. The school also provides students with the opportunity to gain a first-aid qualification. Gifted and talented students are challenged through their subjects by the opportunity to take the Advanced Extension Award and to take part in subject Olympiads. This provision has a remarkable breadth and assists students to become well-rounded young adults.
35. Overall, provision for students' personal development is very good and this has a positive impact on students' learning. Students have many opportunities to show initiative and undertake a high level of responsibility. Students are very involved with

the school and wider community. Assemblies each week provide students with the opportunity to consider and reflect on a range of moral and social issues.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Advice, support and guidance

36. Gravesend Grammar School for Girls takes very good care of its sixth-form students. As with younger students, staff ensure that they provide very good support, maintaining care for the individual as a priority at all times. School staff and governors monitor all health and safety procedures, including those covering risk assessment.
37. Sixth formers are very proud of their school and the way it supports them towards high standards of achievement. Students applaud the relatively recent promotion of a more professional dress code. Sixth-form staff know their students very well. Relationships are characterised by very high levels of trust and respect, with a very high focus on individuals and their specific needs.
38. Staff monitor students' progress very carefully and quickly identify any change in performance, attitude or demeanour. The staff offer and provide a great deal of one-to-one support sessions with students to discuss their work and progress. Staff and students together create solutions and action plans, which ensure that learning continues with little interruption. Students recognise this careful tracking and comment that this facilitates their confidence in their studies and achievements.
39. The school helps them acquire this confidence by providing very good advice about how they can learn for and by themselves. Some teachers, for example, post copies of completed lessons on the Intranet so that students can check that they have understood all elements of individual lessons. Shortage of accommodation for study hinders this type of individual work because the school has little specialist area for sixth-form study. The common room is pleasant, but too small to hold the increasing number of sixth-form students. The school provides very good guidance for those students bound for university. A few students each year choose to go straight into employment or further training. Some students comment that the school does not guide these students quite so carefully towards suitable choices. Inspectors recognise the significant time and effort that staff devote to careers guidance, but agree that the school gives less attention to the needs of this group of students.

Assessment

40. Assessment procedures and the use of assessment are very good. Each department monitors students' progress carefully. Data and assessment information on students' performance is collected, analysed and used to set challenging, but realistic targets for students. Students know precisely how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve and this system allows appropriate guidance and support to be given to those students, who, for whatever reason, appear to be underachieving. The school gives a high profile to student self-assessment. Following on from good practice lower down the school, students are trained to analyse their own performance and set themselves targets. The effective use of assessment is one of the strengths of the school and is one of the factors leading to rising standards.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

41. The leadership and management of the sixth form by the key stage co-ordinator and heads of year are very good. The school's aims are fully reflected in the planning and work of the sixth form. For example, students are encouraged to become mature adults, who take their responsibility to the local and wider community seriously. The key stage co-ordinator and his team work closely to monitor students' academic and personal development. Form tutors conduct individual student interviews during the year to set subject targets and the key stage co-ordinator follows these up with individual students, who are given extra help or praise for their achievements. The headteacher also interviews each student individually to evaluate the quality of sixth-form provision and provide support for individual students. The co-ordinator is part of the senior management team and this ensures that the provision for the sixth form reflects the wider aims of the school. The development of the sixth form is highlighted in the school's 2002-03 improvement plan.
42. Overall, leadership and management of sixth-form study within many of the subject departments are very good. There is a high level of consistency between departments and school policies are implemented effectively. The procedures for the monitoring, evaluation and development of sixth-form provision are very good and clearly set out. The students are given the opportunity to evaluate the sixth form in a questionnaire that they complete before leaving the school. The key stage co-ordinator is very aware of statistical data and assessment information and uses this effectively to develop the planning of the sixth form. The sixth form is part of the school's review system and very good strategies are in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning. Students are helped to develop their personal skills and their contribution to the school community and the wider community is extensive. They have many management responsibilities as senior officials and run councils, charity collections and games teams and assist in forms and subject areas. They carry out these responsibilities with great maturity and enthusiasm and their personal development benefits considerably. The balance of funding for the sixth form is very well planned and monitored. The sixth form is cost effective and gives very good value for money.
43. The governors are aware of the strengths of the sixth form and are keen to support its development. The governors and the senior management team ensure that there is good financial management, with financial decision-making being closely linked to school improvement planning. The apparent high level of unspent funding can be readily explained by the annual accounting procedures and money earmarked for future building projects. The sixth form is cost effective and the governors ensure that the principles of value for money are applied diligently. While governors are actively involved in helping to develop and promote the sixth form, they have failed to deal with two issues raised in the report of the previous inspection. They have not fully addressed the need for all students to be able to take part in a daily act of worship and they do not provide a course in religious education for all sixth-form students.

Staffing

44. There is a very good match of suitably qualified teachers to meet the needs of the curriculum in the sixth form. The school manages to fill teaching vacancies successfully, but is finding a considerable decrease in the number of applicants for teaching posts in science, mathematics, design and technology and information and communication technology. The retention of teaching staff is good. At the time of the inspection, the only staffing problem was the long-term absence through illness. The

technical staff make significant contributions to support the teaching of science and technology whilst the administrative and clerical staff are most effective in supporting the wider functions of the school's organisation. A qualified librarian is responsible for the good organisation of the library. The premises staff make an effective contribution to the security, care, maintenance and appearance of the school.

45. The school's arrangements for the induction of newly qualified teachers are good. It is a member of a local consortium that is directly responsible for the initial training of teachers and is involved also in training through the graduate teacher programme. Good use is made of the time available for the in-service training of staff with priorities being identified in the school's development plan. Performance management of teaching staff has been fully implemented for the past two years and arrangements include the administrative, technical and support staff. A clear line-management structure exists in accordance with the guidelines of the policy and this feature has improved since the last inspection.
46. The school is aiming for the Investors in People award and is working hard to meet the required criteria. It is aware that a key issue that needs to be addressed is the full integration of support staff into its management systems and is progressing this development with sensitivity. Support staff are invited by the headteacher to attend all full staff meetings to ensure that they feel fully integrated into the life and work of the school. They are involved in the school's development planning and self-review procedures and regarded as equal partners in the life of the school.

Resources

47. There is a good level of educational resources in school. With the exception of sociology, resources for teaching and learning within the sixth form are good. They are very good in English, mathematics, history, psychology, French and German. The students learning modern foreign languages have good access to the Internet for the purposes of research and investigating the culture of other countries. Although in science overall resources are good there is insufficient provision of networked computers and an inadequate number of film projectors. In the school as a whole, the ratio of computers to students is close to average for secondary schools. The provision of textbooks to aid students' learning is good, but in some subjects they need to be replaced with more up-to-date versions.
48. The headteacher and staff have worked hard to minimise the disadvantages arising out of the widespread layout of the school's buildings by creating an attractive learning environment for students. Good use of display is made in corridors and classrooms to promote high standards and to create a positive learning experience. Although small, the library provides an attractive learning resource for students. It is staffed by two librarians with sixth-form students having free access for the purposes of private study and research. The stock of books is good and there are several computers available for use by students.

Accommodation

49. Overall, the accommodation for sixth-form students is satisfactory. It is very good in mathematics where several rooms are in a suited arrangement, creating a valued opportunity for collaboration between staff. This is true also of the provision for French and German. The facility for teaching theory in physical education is very good, but practical facilities, including adequate changing areas, are very limited. There are serious inadequacies, however, in science as a consequence of the dispersion of teaching laboratories in three different areas around the school's site. The quality of

accommodation for physics is especially poor and in urgent need of improvement. In humanity subjects, the rooms are not suited and lessons are frequently not close to the central resources. This inhibits developments for resource-based learning in the subjects and for efficient administration and subject organisation. As a consequence of inadequate facilities elsewhere in the school, the library has to be used to hold assemblies for sixth-form students on two sessions each week. The overall provision for administrative accommodation within the school is inadequate. The medical room is situated outside the main building in an unsuitable location between two music rooms.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England ¹¹	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	38	86.8		36.8		35.8	
Chemistry	21	95.2		47.6		41.0	
Biology	28	96.4		53.6		42.1	
Human biology	7	85.7		14.3		32.9	
Physics	10	90.0		50.0		40.0	
Design and technology	7	100.0		42.9		47.1	
Business studies	29	100.0		48.3		43.4	
Physical education	18	94.4		50.0		43.9	
Art	10	100.0		100.0		60.0	
Music	4	100.0		50.0		40.0	
Geography	20	100.0		50.0		44.5	
History	23	100.0		60.9		47.4	
English literature	30	100.0		60.0		47.0	
English language and literature	11	90.9		81.8		50.0	
French	7	85.7		85.7		48.6	
German	9	100.0		66.7		48.9	
Psychology	30	100.0		63.3		46.3	
Sociology	30	90.0		40.0		39.0	
Classical civilizations	10	100.0		20.0		34.0	
Government and politics	7	100.0		100.0		55.7	
Spanish	10	90.0		40.0		36.0	
Theatre studies	7	100.0		57.1		44.3	
General studies	108	87.0		21.3		30.4	
Home economics	8	100.0		25.0		40.0	
Information and communication technology	19	100		57.9		45.3	

¹¹ Comparative national results are not yet-available.

GCE A Level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	21	100.0		66.7		97.1	
Human biology	8	100.0		12.5		70.0	
Chemistry	16	100.0		68.8		97.5	
Biology	23	100.0		60.9		88.7	
Physics	6	100.0		66.7		90.0	
Business studies	10	100.0		60.0		96.0	
Physical education	11	100.0		72.7		101.8	
Art	9	100.0		88.9		115.6	
Geography	7	100.0		100.0		114.3	
History	17	100.0		47.1		90.6	
Religious studies	7	100.0		28.6		74.3	
English literature	29	100.0		41.4		84.1	
English language and literature	14	100.0		64.3		95.7	
French	7	100.0		71.4		91.4	
German	3	100.0		66.7		86.7	
Home economics	8	100.0		25.0		75.0	
Psychology	15	100.0		73.3		100.0	
Sociology	12	100.0		33.3		83.3	
Classical civilizations	11	100.0		36.4		89.1	
Government and politics	9	100.0		55.6		95.6	
Information and communication technology	12	100.0		66.7		93.3	
Spanish	4	100.0		50.0		90.0	
Theatre Studies	15	100.0		46.7		88.0	
General Studies	43	100.0		58.1		92.6	
Music	7	100.0		42.9		85.7	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- The overall quality of teaching in the sixth form is very good.
- The high level of knowledge of teachers, combined with their teaching skills, creates a confident learning environment for students.
- The very positive attitudes of the students, their strong commitment to learning and their genuine enjoyment of the subject are important factors in the high standards they achieve.
- The mutual support of teaching colleagues within the department creates an ethos for teaching that inspires confidence and trust.
- The A Level examinations for 2002 showed a considerable improvement on those of recent years that have been broadly in line with national averages.

Areas for improvement

- A policy of self-assessment by students to ensure that it links more effectively with established procedures, thereby ensuring that it has a more meaningful impact on students' progress.
- Creating opportunities to share good practice amongst colleagues.
- The structure of lessons, with particular emphasis upon the use of time at the end of a lesson for the purpose of review and reflection of the key teaching points.

50. There was a significant improvement in the A Level examination results in 2002. All students entered were successful in gaining pass grades, with two-thirds of them being awarded grades at the two higher levels. Overall, those entered performed relatively better in mathematics than in their other subjects. Results for the previous two years have been broadly in line with national averages, whilst at the time of the last inspection the proportion of higher grades was below average.

51. Students, who study the subject at A Level, have previously gained the higher grades in their GCSE examination. Many have been successfully prepared for the additional mathematics examination. In recent years, the results achieved by students have been in line with their prior attainment when they commenced the course, but the results for 2002 indicate a significant improvement in achievement. It is anticipated that all those, who commence the A Level course, intend pursuing it to its conclusion and this is mostly the case. No formal structure exists for preparing students uniquely for the advanced supplementary examination in the subject.

52. The standards of work seen during the inspection were very good. These high standards are achieved as a result of high-quality teaching and the excellent attitudes of students towards their work. Students are well motivated and work conscientiously. Teachers are aware of the specific needs of individual students and monitor their progress effectively. Those for whom English is an additional language make good progress and do not experience any consequential difficulties in their study of mathematics. Work produced by students is of a high standard and indicates full coverage of the syllabus. Students said that they found the induction course arranged for them particularly helpful. They would welcome the opportunity to make the

selection of their optional module at the end of their first year of study rather than prior to commencement of the course.

53. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. In all lessons, teaching is at least good with much that is very good and some excellent. Teachers' knowledge of their subject is very good and is demonstrated in their thorough preparation and presentation of lessons. This leads to effective learning by students. A good range of teaching techniques is used with one teacher making skilled use of an interactive whiteboard to enhance his teaching and stimulate the interest of students. This teacher uses the school's information and communication technology resources to good effect by making some of his lessons available to students through the Intranet facility. Another teacher extends the marking of her students' work by producing model solutions. In all lessons, students are encouraged to think about and discuss mathematical problems with their peers. This technique provides valuable opportunity for the development of students' interpersonal skills. Teachers make good use of question and answer techniques to guide students to successful learning. The work is challenging and overall the pace of lessons is appropriate to the understanding of students.
54. The most successful lessons have a clear structure that provides time at the end for review and reflection of the key teaching points. As a result, students leave the lesson feeling confident in their learning. When relevant, the teacher relates the subject to real-life situations. For example, when teaching differential equations a teacher meaningfully related the topic to the study of population growth. Much teaching is lively and energetic and this was demonstrated most effectively in a lesson that introduced students to the concept of differentiation. Here, the enthusiasm of the teacher created a climate of genuine interest and enjoyment amongst the students. The structure of lessons is good, but not all teachers make use of time at the end of a lesson to review and reflect on the key teaching points or assess just what students have learnt and this is a point for development.
55. The management and leadership of mathematics are good. Teachers are well qualified and there are sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the curriculum. They are highly supportive of each other and during the long-term absence of a member of staff have co-operated to give priority to the learning needs of students normally taught by this teacher. The experienced and knowledgeable head of faculty takes particular responsibility for the organisation of the subject in the sixth form. A priority for staff training is the development of skills for teaching A Level work in order to broaden the range of experience within the faculty. The creation of opportunities for sharing the good practice that exists within the established teaching team would support this objective. Whole-school policies for monitoring and assessment are implemented satisfactorily. Aspects of the policy for students' self-assessment have the potential for further improvement. Accommodation and resources are good and there are plans to replace some outdated textbooks.
56. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Students are confident in their studies of the subject and fully participate in discussion in lessons. Standards improved significantly in 2002 and students make good progress. Mathematics is a popular subject amongst students and their recruitment to study it at A level is good.

SCIENCES

The main focus of the inspection was on biology, physics and chemistry, but human biology was also sampled. The provision in human biology is good. Although results in human biology have been relatively lower than many other school subjects, students achieve well and gain their predicted grades. Standards seen during the inspection were high at A2 level and students were achieving well. One very good lesson was seen that was well planned to cover revision topics in a practical way. Questioning was very good, with the emphasis on students finding out answers for themselves. Students have positive attitudes and are determined to succeed. Students also enter the Olympiad challenge and advanced extension awards for each science subject, which indicates their very high standards.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Results in examinations are very high.
- The very good quality of teaching and learning, which leads to students making very good progress.
- Relationships, which result in students' very high levels of motivation.
- Leadership and management ensure a clear direction for the subject.
- Assessment information is used well, so that students know how to improve.

Areas for improvement

- There is insufficient use of information and communication technology (ICT) due to inadequate equipment.

56. A very large number of students take biology in the sixth form. The retention rate is very good, and the majority continue with the A2 course. Many students take courses at higher education that have an element of biology. Standards are very high and students achieve very well. Results have risen over the last three years, both in the proportions of students gaining the higher A/B grades and those gaining a pass grade. In 2002, 61 per cent of students gained A/B grades, which is very good. In 2002, two-thirds of students gained grades above those predicted. In 2002, five students took the Advanced Extension Award. One student gained a distinction and four gained merits, which demonstrates very good achievement.

57. An analysis of work and observation of lessons show that standards are very high. This is due to the very good teaching. Students have a clear understanding of all the units of study and this shows in their synoptic essays when they use knowledge gained from these units. For example, they clearly explain how cell structure relates to their function, using examples such as root hair cells and the complex kidney cells. Students explore the use of DNA technology and the issues surrounding genetic engineering with understanding. They explain ecosystems in different environments very well, such as those found on sand dunes and rocky shores. In their practical work, they are particularly good at evaluating the source of error or anomalies. For example, one student explained how error could occur in measuring and another recognised that the variables were not kept constant if measurements of woodland areas were taken at different times of the day.

58. Students have a very positive attitude to biology. Some stated that it was their favourite subject. They appreciate the different inputs from the teachers teaching the subject and enjoy the practical aspects of the study. They were highly enthusiastic

about the fieldwork, where they considered that they had learnt a tremendous amount. They work very hard, have good note-taking skills, are good independent learners and welcome the opportunity to read the optional extracts.

59. The quality of teaching is very good overall and has improved since the last inspection. All teachers have excellent subject knowledge and this, along with their enthusiasm, motivates students to achieve. Planning is thorough, so that much is covered in the lessons. Questioning is very good and makes students think. For example, students were asked about the effect of heating and cooling on DNA during genetic fingerprinting. All lessons are conducted at a brisk pace, so that much is covered. Relationships are very good, so that students are ready to question. This was seen when a student challenged the teacher over details on a graph.
60. Leadership and management are excellent. The overall planning ensures that sufficient time is allocated at the end of the course to synoptic essays and final revision. Liaison is very good between the teachers, who share teaching of the groups, which ensures that all know the students. Assessment is excellent, with clear tracking of students, action plans for those, who do not achieve the expected grades, and valuable self-assessment by students. There is a clear development plan and very good evaluation of examination results. However, ICT is insufficiently used, although power point was effectively used in one lesson. This is because many of the computers are old and numbers are insufficient to meet the needs of teachers and students.

Physics

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

Strengths

- A Level examination results are well above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is very good and inspires an enthusiastic response from the students.
- Teachers use their subject expertise to broaden and deepen students' understanding.
- Students are strongly motivated and enjoy the subject due to open friendly relationships with the teachers.

Areas for improvement

- The quality and range of learning resources, including use of ICT.
- The poor quality of accommodation inhibits a stimulating learning environment from being created.

61. The A Level results in 2002 were very good. All students gained at least a pass grade and the percentage of the higher grades A/B was well above average. Students have made very good progress and achieved well from their high levels of attainment at GCSE. This high standard at A Level has been maintained for several years.
62. The standard of work seen in lessons and evidence from discussions and analysis of student files is well above expectations. There is some variation in the work of the students, but most quickly grasp concepts and apply them to challenging problems. For example, Year 12 students are able to calibrate an 'ohmmeter' and some use it to find the resistivity of a long piece of constantan wire. Mathematical skills are strong and support the application of the physics to complex problems. For example, Year 13 students tackle synoptic questions requiring a good understanding of A2 concepts supported by a sound application of mathematical technique. Students use their

initiative to consolidate their understanding and learning of complex ideas using all available resources. They also share ideas with great maturity. The continued positive attitude of students is a major contributory factor to their overall very good learning.

63. Teaching is very good overall. It has a very positive effect on the standards achieved by students. In lessons, the students' subject knowledge is developed in a lively manner that inspires an enthusiastic response from the students resulting in very effective learning. Teachers plan their lessons well, having clear expectations of all students and identifying the knowledge, understanding and skills to be developed. Targets are shared with students and their progress throughout each unit of work is carefully mapped out. However, insufficient attention has been given to developing a wide enough range of learning resources in order to deepen knowledge and understanding of physical models and concepts for all students as there is a range of ability within the groups. ICT is not used in the laboratory with sufficient regularity to support and enhance students' learning. Despite this, students are confident and encouraged by the helpful, friendly and supportive climate that pervades. Homework is used constructively and marking is regular so that students are quite clear from feedback from their learning.
64. Leadership and management are very good. The organisation of daily routine is efficient and the physics teachers work very well together as a team. Resources are well managed. Accommodation is inadequate, with single-glazing and the fabric of the physics laboratories in a poor state of repair. This clearly detracts from creating a good atmosphere and environment for learning. Teaching is monitored through departmental reviews and analysis of examination results. Strong emphasis is given to target setting and evaluation of student achievement in relation to their previous attainment at GCSE. There has been a good improvement in the quality of teaching and level of student support since the last inspection. Increasing the quality and diversity of learning resources and effective use of ICT in lessons are areas for further improvement.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- A Level examination results are consistently well above the national average.
- The quality of teaching is very good and inspires an enthusiastic response from the students.
- Very good use of assessment data to track students' progress.
- Students are strongly motivated and enjoy the subject due to open friendly relationships with the teachers.

Areas for improvement

- The quality and range of learning resources.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning.

65. GCE A Level results in 2002 were very good. All students gained at least a pass grade and the percentage of grades A/B was well above average. Students have achieved well from their high levels of attainment at GCSE in recent years.
66. The standard of work seen in lessons and evident from discussions and analysis of student files is well above expectations. Students show that their earlier experience of chemistry is good and that concepts are well established. For example, Year 13

students have a very good understanding of nucleophilic substitution reactions and their importance in organic synthesis. They make informed inferences about the structural features of an 'unknown' organic substance as a result of carrying out standard chemical tests and interpreting mass and infrared spectra. Numerical skills are strong and support the application of the chemistry to complex problems.

67. Students in Year 12 have more variable aptitudes for chemistry, but are achieving well overall in their acquisition of basic knowledge. For example, they learn about the practical application of Le Chatelier's principle of chemical equilibrium. They make predictions and then inferences from their observations. They also consider the role of oceans in soaking up carbon dioxide. There is an emphasis on the development of investigative skills, complementing the experiment-led approach of the syllabus followed by the department. This was very much in evidence in one lesson where students extracted salicylic acid from a natural ingredient found in willow bark and then went on to isolate and purify it.
68. Teaching is very good overall. In lessons, the subject knowledge is developed in a lively manner that inspires an enthusiastic response from the students and results in very effective learning. Lessons are well organised and students benefit from the expert subject knowledge of the teachers. The expectation for each student to perform well is high. Students are confident and encouraged by the helpful, friendly and supportive climate that pervades through the positive relationships with their teachers. Homework is used constructively and marking is regular so that students are quite clear from feedback of their learning.
69. Lesson planning and schemes of work are effective in ensuring that learning relates closely to the specifications for AS and A Level courses. However, insufficient attention is given to planning a greater diversity of teaching strategies due to the lack of a variety of learning resources. Also, ICT is not used in the laboratory with sufficient regularity to support and enhance students' learning.
70. Leadership and management are very good and the chemistry teachers work efficiently as a team. Resources are managed well and, although accommodation is satisfactory, further improvements are needed. The effectiveness of teaching and curriculum planning is monitored through regular departmental reviews and an analysis of examination results. Target setting and the evaluation of students' progress are well established and this contributes to the high standards being achieved. The department is strongly self-evaluating, critically assessing its performance against a range of clear success criteria. Good improvements have been made since the last inspection.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

No subjects in this curriculum area were inspected in depth, but the work in design and technology was sampled. The provision in **design and technology** is very good. There are no previous examination results as this is the first year of entry. The work of the students at A level is above average. Students show a real enthusiasm that is reflected by them all carrying on their study into Year 13.

BUSINESS

No subjects in this curriculum area were inspected in depth, but the work in business studies was sampled. The provision in **business studies** is good. Results are well above average. The teaching is good and this promotes good progress being made by the students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology (ICT)

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

Strengths

- Examination results are well above average and students achieve well.
- Procedures for monitoring and assessing students' attainment and progress are very good.
- Teaching is very good and promotes very positive attitudes by the students to their learning.
- Strong start in A level results for the first year groups.

Areas for improvement

- The number of visits and visitors to provide opportunities for students to gain relevant and up-to-date experience of the use of ICT by organisations in the wider community.
- Development of a wider range of resources to support learning.

71. Since the last inspection, ICT A level and ICT Key Skills Level 3 have become part of the post-16 provision. The first results for ICT A level in 2001 were well above the national average. In 2002, a larger number of students took the exam and results show an improvement on the previous year. Retention rates on the course are very high and the number taking ICT A level is increasing annually.
72. The work of students seen in all sixth-form lessons, including coursework in portfolios, confirms that standards overall are very good. Students' responses to questioning show understanding of both theoretical and practical aspects of the requirements of the ICT courses. Students' work shows evidence of a high level of independent learning and research skills. The presentation of coursework is of a very high standard, particularly the 'User Guides' required for the applications project. All coursework shows considerable depth of investigation and analysis.
73. Students' attitudes to the subject are excellent. They show enthusiasm for the subject with many intending to continue with ICT-related higher education courses. In lessons, students show respect to each other, resulting in a confidence about asking questions to gain understanding. Good use is made of peer support to solve practical ICT-related problems.
74. Teaching is very good and this ensures students make rapid progress in developing their practical skills and understanding of key concepts. The teachers' planning, use of resources and high expectations enable the students to complete work to a high standard. In Year 13, classes good use of power point and task sheets resulted in students discussing in a mature and informed manner about the social, ethical and moral implications of the use of ICT, which at the start of the lesson they found difficult to understand. This made a positive contribution to their personal development.

75. Systems for monitoring individual students' progress and target setting are very good. Coursework projects are marked with helpful comments for improvement. More detailed feedback is provided by one-to-one discussions with each student. Students commented that they found the individual tutorials very helpful, particularly in relation to organising their projects. Marking of homework is not always as rigorous.
76. The subject is well managed by the head of the technology faculty, who is the only full-time member of the ICT department. The increase of students taking the subject in the sixth form and the demands for more access to computers throughout the school is placing greater demands on the department to continue the level of support currently given to the students.
77. The ICT staff make very good use of their limited resources for this newly introduced subject in the sixth form. Good use is also made of the school's network to allow students access to teaching materials developed by the ICT team. The department as yet does not give students sufficient opportunities to have direct contact with external organisations and people, who use ICT in work environments. A greater range of textbooks and computer magazines is also needed.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was on physical education.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Students' attainment is well above the national average and their achievement is good.
- Teaching is very good and teachers use interesting and varied ways to help students progress.
- Leadership and management of the department are excellent.
- Students are very positive about the courses and they have excellent relationships with their teachers.
- Students are very well informed about their progress and constructive advice is consistently given to help them improve.

Areas for improvement

- There are no computers in the subject base and, consequently, information and communication technology (ICT) is infrequently used as a learning resource in lessons.

78. A Level results in 2001 were above average and well above average at AS level. A Level results in 2002 showed much further improvement with 73 per cent of students attaining A and B grades. All previous results indicate that students achieve very well in relation to their prior learning and examination results over time indicate a rising trend in both students' attainment and achievement.
79. The standards attained by the majority of students presently in Years 12 and 13 are well above average. Students attain high practical standards in their own specialist sport and have a very good knowledge of the theoretical aspects. This particularly applies to trampolining, netball, hockey, swimming and athletics. Year 13 students understand the nature of stress and anxiety and relate it to a variety of sporting situations. Their learning in this unit is excellent because the teacher gives many

opportunities for students to discuss with one another and relate psychological theories to their practical experiences. Year 12 students have a very good knowledge of anatomy and physiology and describe the respiratory system accurately using advanced technical terminology. Students' personal performance portfolios are very well presented with good use of ICT.

80. Teaching is very good overall with several excellent features and this promotes very good learning. Teachers plan a wide range of activities that interest and challenge students of all abilities. Lessons start promptly and proceed with pace and purpose. Students recognise and appreciate the frequent and effective links teachers make between the practical and theoretical elements of the courses. This helps students to understand outcomes through their own experiences. Homework is used well to give students experience in answering examination questions and to prepare them for new topics. However, Internet and computer programs are not used frequently enough in lessons as a means of independent research because there are no computers in the subject base. Students are extremely positive about physical education, have excellent relationships with their teachers and take an active part in the subject. Many students gain the Community Sports Leaders Award and others are senior school officials. These students help younger pupils in the school and in local primary schools. Both initiatives extend students' skills and widen their learning opportunities.
81. The leadership and management of the department are excellent and very good improvement has been achieved since the previous inspection. Comprehensive documentation indicates a very clear vision for the examination courses. Planning, record keeping, analysis of examination results and target setting are meticulous. Students' learning benefits by the opportunities provided to visit a number of national sporting events and the well-organised subject base with its informative display, magazine library and reference material. Girls report how much they value the courses because they provide an accreditation linked to proposed careers in sports science, for example.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

82. No work was inspected because the school currently offers no subject in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and theatre studies were sampled in this curriculum area. Provision in theatre studies is very good. In the one lesson observed, students demonstrated a high standard of skill and enthusiasm as they prepared and acted out a scripted assignment for their A level assessment. The provision in art and design is excellent. The excellent teaching results in very high standards at AS and A Level with the majority of students achieving a grade A at A Level and with a 100 per cent pass rate. Students achieve well, given their prior attainment. In the one lesson observed, the teacher provided an exciting and stimulating environment in which students were encouraged to develop their own individual styles of presentation.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography, history, sociology and psychology, but religious education and government and politics were also sampled. The provision in religious education is good. Recent results at A Level have been above average. At present, there is one group of students in Year 12 and standards of work are high. In the one lesson observed during the

inspection, the quality of teaching and learning was very good and students displayed very positive attitudes towards the subject. The provision in government and politics is very good. Teaching and learning are highly effective and examination results have improved steadily over the past three years. In 2001, results were well above average with a 100 per cent pass rate. The teaching style and relationships with the students provide a challenging and exciting environment in which students develop very good independent study skills.

Geography

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

Strengths

- The very good subject knowledge of the staff promotes depth of discussion and debate in lessons.
- The very good relationships between students and staff provide the students with a secure and nurturing environment in which they thrive.
- Staff coach individual students to achieve results that are well above average.
- The staff team work very well together to develop a positive learning environment for the sixth form.

Areas for improvement

- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) and other book resources to encourage independent research.
- More active teaching and learning strategies to develop independent study skills amongst the students.

83. The department's results compare very well with the overall school results. The A level results in 2002 are expected to be well above the national average as there was a 100 per cent pass rate. All students that took the exam gained an A or B grade. In relation to their prior attainment at GCSE, progress has been very good and all the students achieved very well.
84. The standards of work of the current sixth-form students are well above average. In Year 13, work seen during the inspection was very good. The effective teaching challenges the students to apply theory to real situations. In all the lessons seen, planning led to clearly focused learning for individual students. In one lesson on economy, a variety of information was used very effectively to prompt students to use their own knowledge and to think through the reasons for the development of the economies. In another lesson, careful use of case-studies served to encourage students to consider the physical and human complexities of the development of temperate ecosystems.
85. Students in Year 12 are well into their course and are achieving a very good standard. They show good knowledge of rural and urban theory and development. The students have successfully moved from GCSE courses to AS level with the help of the teachers. The use of individual advice and diagnostic marking has supported students in answering AS questions. Students have started to develop independent thinking skills. In a lesson on rural development, students were challenged to think through the multiplier effect using excellent probing questions by the teacher.
86. Teaching is very good overall. Particularly positive features include clear learning objectives, lesson planning and the support for individual students. This in turn encourages the students to strive to achieve very good work. In a very good lesson on

newly industrialised countries, the teacher ably moved students through an understanding of the impact of development of specific economies using a variety of strategies and resources.

87. The written work seen during the inspection included a variety of different tasks. Students mostly use case-studies to develop an understanding of human and physical theory. Homework is used well and in one lesson about ecosystems, the students were set a homework task to find out what they could about temperate woodlands and to be prepared to discuss and comment upon the impact of development in the Epping Forest area in the next lesson. Marking of the work is very good with clear, well-written comments to help students to work towards their target grade. Students are confident in using case-studies for research purposes and are able to extract information and make good notes. However, little use was observed of individual texts and reference to web sites in lessons as a wider source of research and information. ICT is only used occasionally as a teaching aid in lessons. However, there is evidence of individual students using ICT to complete coursework and personal research.
88. Students learn well. The relationships between staff and students are very good. The students respond positively to the variety of teaching styles amongst the staff. The students appreciate the individual support they get from the staff. In lessons, they are confident to discuss ideas and offer individual responses. They are mature and work very well with each other. The local fieldwork trips are well organised and enable the students to develop geographical and social skills. The fieldwork is planned to help the students to acquire an understanding of physical and human case-studies to use in their AS modular examinations. Student fieldwork portfolios seen during the inspection were well written.
89. The highly effective teaching and learning are the result of the subject being very well led and managed. The strong teamwork amongst the staff is very evident in the planning of the work. However, the development and use of resources by staff and students is inhibited by the nomadic nature of some of the geography teaching, as not all rooms are close to the resources. Assessment information and target setting are well used by staff to advise individual students on their progress towards examination success. There is a real commitment to building on what has been achieved by the students at GCSE and improving standards. The updated schemes of work reflect the use made of resources, but do not identify places in the AS and A2 syllabi when it is appropriate to develop more independent learning by the students.

History

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

Strengths

- Standards are very high and students make very good progress.
- The quality of teaching is very good and often excellent.
- Students are very mature and participate fully in lessons.
- Students develop their independent learning and research skills very well.
- History in the sixth form is led and managed very well.
- The subject makes a very strong contribution to communication and citizenship skills.

Areas for improvement

- ICT and the Internet are not yet fully developed as resources for learning.
- Students would benefit from opportunities to attend conferences and listen to visiting speakers.

90. There are currently 13 students on the AS course in Year 12 and 21 students studying for A2 level in Year 13. In recent years, results in the A2 level examination have fluctuated, both in terms of the proportion of students achieving a pass and for those achieving the highest grades. The results in 2001 were below the national average, but, in 2002, they were well above national norms and almost all the students at both levels achieved at least a C grade. The standards reached by students, as seen in the current inspection, are above the national average in Year 12 and well above in Year 13. On the AS course in Year 12, students use a wide range of evidence to produce structured arguments and reach coherent conclusions. They also examine sources critically and are at ease with the skills of interpretation and analysis. Their oral progress is very good and their written work is carefully organised. For example, some very detailed and analytical notes and essays were seen from Year 12 students on the suffragettes and the reforms of the 1906 Liberal government. In Year 13, students build very well on their earlier progress and develop the more complex skills of evaluation and independent research. Higher-attaining students in particular display impressive depth to their writing. In this context, these students have produced excellent essays on the development of the democratic process in Britain during the nineteenth century. In both years, students are highly articulate and very efficient in their note-taking. As a result, they make very good progress.

91. The quality of teaching is very good overall and it is often excellent. Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and plan lessons very well with carefully timed exercises that stimulate students' interest. Teachers also use a variety of methods to enliven lessons and these include brainstorming, class discussion, individual and group research and short written tasks. As a result of these stimuli, students make considerable learning gains both in the development of study skills and in their historical knowledge and understanding. This was seen in an excellent Year 12 lesson, during which students displayed a very impressive array of communication and collaborative skills in group presentations on Lloyd George's role in the 1906 Liberal government. The lesson was orchestrated with great skill by the teacher. Expectations are very high and there is an excellent rapport between teachers and students. The latter are committed to hard work and respond very well to the very good teaching they receive. Students are very positive about their learning opportunities and clearly enjoy the pursuit of knowledge. As a result, there is a clear sense of purpose in lessons and students make very good progress in the development of their independent learning and research skills. This was demonstrated to the full in a Year 13 lesson in which

students conducted research in the computer suite, the library and the classroom to investigate the causes of the decline of the Liberal party after World War One.

92. The subject is led and managed very well and has a very strong teaching team. Evaluation of students' work is thorough and detailed marking helps students to focus on how to achieve the highest grades. The range of resources in classrooms and in the library is wide and the subject makes a very important contribution to the development of students' communication skills and citizenship awareness. ICT and the Internet are making an increasing impact on the work of the department, especially in terms of coursework, but more work is needed in this area. Students would benefit from opportunities to attend conferences and listen to visiting historians.
93. Overall, this is a successful area of sixth-form provision with an enthusiastic and dedicated team of teachers. Students are thoroughly appreciative of the support they receive and the issue now is to ensure that the very good provision for history is maintained so that all students achieve their full potential. There have been good improvements since the last inspection.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- Students' attainment is above average and their achievement is good in relation to their GCSE results.
- Students' attitudes are very good. Students enjoy their lessons and have very good relationships with their teachers.
- Teaching and learning are consistently good with some very good features.

Areas for improvement

- There are no computers in the main teaching base and, consequently, information and communication technology (ICT) is infrequently used as a learning resource in lessons.
- There are insufficient visits and visiting speakers.

94. The 2001 A Level results were better than any previous year and continued a rising trend. The proportion of students attaining A/B grades was above the school and national average. In 2002, the proportion of students gaining the higher grades fell. In both 2001 and 2002, all students attained pass grades. Students' achievement over time has been very good when compared to their GCSE results. In 2000 and 2001, the achievement in sociology was better than in most other subjects in the school. However, in 2002, two of the 12 students on the course attained grades that were low when compared to their prior attainment.
95. Students' work seen during the inspection indicates above average attainment in Years 12 and 13 and good achievement, based on their success at GCSE. Higher-ability students are confident and articulate and extend their thinking beyond the initial topic. Students in both years have a sound understanding of the theoretical foundations of the subject. Year 13 students demonstrated this when discussing various religious sects. Students showed considerable skill and confidence when presenting their group research into the role of women in developing countries to their peers. Year 12 students have a good knowledge of a variety of research methods. Students' files are organised and presented very well. Their essays are detailed and show a knowledgeable and thoughtful argument. A few students find difficulty in drawing their final conclusions.

96. Teaching is good and students of all abilities learn well as a result. Relationships are very good and students are prepared to ask for help and clarification. Teachers have a high level of subject expertise and are able to deal with the girls' responses very effectively. In one very good lesson, the teacher did not allow students to settle for unchallenged assumptions about religious cults and robust discussion resulted. The content of the work ensures students face up to difficult moral and social issues in society and contributes significantly to their personal development. There is very little evidence in students' files of the use of ICT in lessons or for research. However, the good presentations by Year 12 students and the web sites given to Year 13 students show teachers do encourage students to use the Internet. Resources used in lessons are mostly videos, handouts and textbooks. The use of computers in the subject base would provide more opportunities for independent learning. Opportunities for students to extend their knowledge by visiting organisations or by inviting professionals to the school are limited and insufficiently planned as an integral part of the course. Students' attitudes are very good. There is a very good level of engagement in all lessons and students say that they learn best through the discussion and debate they experience in most lessons. They do not feel, and inspectors agree, they learn well when excessive note-taking is used as a teaching strategy.
97. The leadership and management of the department are good and ensure clear educational direction. The two teachers work well together and complement one another in their areas of subject expertise. The marking of tests and essays is consistent and provides students with good advice about how they can improve their work. However, files are not regularly monitored to ensure students have an accurate and complete future learning resource. The main teaching base provides good accommodation and the second room is adjacent.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Standards in oral and written work are high in both years.
- Teachers use their subject knowledge very well to stimulate learning.
- Students have very positive attitudes and show commitment to their studies.
- The new subject leader has commendable efficiency and vigour.
- There is a very wide range of books and journals to support students.
- Psychology is a very popular and successful area of sixth-form provision.

Areas for improvement

- Students in Year 12 need more detailed marking to show them how to improve their work.
- Students would benefit from opportunities to attend conferences and listen to visiting speakers.

98. In recent years, results in the A2 examination have been above national expectations and, in 2002, three-quarters of the students entered achieved the highest (A/B) grades. Results in the AS level examination have also been impressive and, in 2002, two-thirds of the students entered achieved the highest grades. In lessons seen and work analysed during the inspection, standards are above average in both years. In Year 12, students develop an early knowledge and understanding of the key approaches and major theories, such as those concerning cognitive and developmental psychology. They organise their folders very well and write fluently; for example, in some detailed

extended writing on attachment. They are also given very good support in coping with the academic rigour of a new subject with comprehensive induction and coursework booklets. Retention rates from Year 12 to Year 13 are high and, in the latter year, students build well on the progress they have made on the AS course. They analyse and evaluate psychological perspectives to greater depth in Year 13 and demonstrate an ability to promote their own independent learning and research skills. Their written work at this stage is very well organised. In this context, some very impressive coursework was seen from Year 13 students on various aspects of memory.

99. The quality of teaching is very good. Specialist teachers have an excellent grasp of subject material and use this very well to promote students' learning. Lessons are structured with skill and expectations are very high so that there is a sense of purpose in the classroom. This was demonstrated very well in a Year 13 lesson, during which the teacher encouraged students to examine in depth the debate between free will and determinism, resulting in a very high level of discussion. Teachers employ a wide range of techniques that include the use of video, class discussions, role-play and written tasks. They also pay close attention to the consolidation of learning through the use of sharp questioning that helps students to understand the progress they have made during the lesson. There is a very strong rapport in class between teachers and students. As a result, the latter make good progress in their subject knowledge and in the development of communication and number skills. Students show a commendable commitment to learning and thoroughly enjoy lessons. This was shown to very good effect in a Year 12 lesson that included an enjoyable and effective role-play to illustrate the physiological responses to stress situations.
100. The subject is led and managed very well. The new subject leader has developed a comprehensive handbook and teachers are fully aware of new developments within the subject. Progress is monitored carefully, but students in Year 12 need more specific advice about how to improve their written work as they embark on a new subject at A level. There is a very good range of books and other materials to support students both in the department and in the school library. Information and communication technology and the Internet are making a strong impact on the work of the department and the subject makes a very important contribution to the development of other key skills of communication and number. Students would now benefit from opportunities to attend conferences and listen to visiting speakers.
101. Overall, this is a very successful and increasingly popular area of sixth-form provision. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and students have excellent attitudes towards their work. Psychology was not reported at the last inspection.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus in this curriculum area was on English, French and Spanish, but the work in German and Classical Civilisation was also sampled. The attainment of students taking German has been well above average in the last few years. One Year 12 lesson was observed and teaching was very good, demonstrating careful planning and excellent use of resources. In classical civilisation, there has been a wide variation in attainment from year to year. In the Year 12 lesson observed, standards were above average. Teaching was good, providing activities that involved all students and ensuring progress was made.

English

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

Strengths

- Standards are very high and students achieve very well.
- There is very good teaching, particularly in encouraging active involvement by students.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards the subject and this contributes to their success.
- There is very good leadership and management of a thriving, high-performing department.

Areas for improvement

- The small minority of more passive students needs to be more actively involved in lessons.

102. The 2001 Advanced level (A2) results were well above the national average for students on both the language and literature course and the literature course. The results were amongst the best in the school. Although the 2002 results in literature were not as good for students attaining the higher grades, the language and literature results remained high. The trend in results has been consistently high, both in terms of overall pass rates and for the percentages gaining A-B grades. Current standards of students by the end of Year 13 on both courses are well above expectations and this represents very good achievement for the great majority of students, including the gifted and talented.

103. Students following the language and literature course make very good progress in learning to analyse and distinguish the characteristics of the spoken and written word when considering different genres such as children's speech and dramatic dialogue. They also recognise the linguistic devices used in the media and in well-known speeches such as those of Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. Students on the literature course make very good progress in developing the ability to critically analyse and evaluate a range of texts from Chaucer to the present day. They develop the ability to make perceptive comparisons, for example, between different novels by Jane Austen. When studying texts such as Marlowe's *Faustus* or metaphysical poetry, students are equally adept at producing a personal response, well substantiated by appropriate textual references, and in analysing how and why writers use particular forms and imagery. Some students show more limited understanding of the historical and literary contexts of texts such as William Blake's poetry. However, students develop both the confidence to make presentations and the skills to research and summarise texts. The work covered makes a valuable contribution to students' moral, social and personal development. Communication skills are very good and students take a great sense of pride in their work.

104. The quality of teaching in English is very good, resulting in very good learning and very positive attitudes by students. Teachers show very good subject knowledge in their explanations and questioning. They focus very effectively on the different assessment objectives, as seen in a Year 13 lesson when students examined the qualities of travel writing. As a consequence, students have a good understanding of how they can achieve a good grade and the teachers' constructive marking also keeps students well motivated and fully informed of their progress. However, the most effective quality of the teaching lies in the way in which teachers, working at a brisk pace, encourage students to become independent and active learners, whether working individually or collaboratively. This was evident, for example, in a Year 13 literature lesson in which students worked from interesting visual resources as a way into gaining an understanding of the deeper meaning of Marvell's poem *The Garden*; and the way in which Year 12 students analysed the linguistic features of a website. Occasionally, teachers, in otherwise very effective lessons, do not sufficiently draw all students into discussion. This happened in a Year 13 lesson focusing on *Pride and Prejudice*, so that a minority of students were allowed to become passive learners.
105. Leadership and management are very good. The department has come to terms with the demands of relatively new syllabuses and there has been effective professional development and monitoring. These have enabled all staff to share good practice in encouraging independent learning and discussion, which is appreciated by students. Theatre trips have added to students' enjoyment of the subject. The department uses assessment, including self-assessment by students, very effectively to monitor and track students' progress. The department has also given considerable thought to developmental planning, leading to initiatives such as the focus on making assessment objectives more explicit to students, something, which is having a positive effect upon standards.
106. As in 1997, standards and achievement are high. Since the introduction of the AS course, progress was initially uneven across the two sixth-form year groups, however, this issue has now been rectified. Students' attitudes are still very positive and the overall quality of teaching has improved. Considerable effort has gone into self-review and improving the English provision overall. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

French

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

Strengths

- Examination results are well above average; students' achievement is particularly strong in speaking and listening.
- The very high quality of teaching, which results from teachers' excellent subject knowledge and fluent language skills.
- Supportive student and teacher relationships that motivate learners to do their very best.
- The pace and challenge in lessons that are conducted exclusively in French.
- Very good resources and accommodation that provide an attractive learning environment.

Areas for improvement

- The increased involvement in lessons of some students, who are less confident in speaking French.
- Students' passivity when the teacher makes the dominant contribution to the lesson.

107. Standards in French in the sixth form are well above average. Students are particularly good at speaking and understanding their teachers' French. This is the case in both Years 12 and 13. In the last three years, there have been variations in group sizes and A Level results. The majority of students, however, obtained good, or very good, grades in relation to national averages. This was particularly true for 2002 when most students gained A or B grades. Average and more able students performed well in relation to their GCSE grades, making good progress in their two years of studying French.
108. In Year 13, students' achievement is very good and most reach their full potential. They are confident in speaking French and do so with accurate pronunciation and accent. They progress to using a good range of more complex language structures and abstract vocabulary. They extend the accuracy and length of their written work in essays on topics such as politics, religion and architecture. Higher attainers, in particular, develop good listening skills. In a lesson on the plight of women in Afghanistan, they understood most of a video from French television news and were able to fill in key words accurately. They understood their teacher's rapid French, following the different nuances of what she was saying without difficulty.
109. Attainment in Year 12 is usually well above average. Students are confident in describing a range of different pictures and photographs. They listen to rapidly spoken tape recordings, make accurate notes and record key details without difficulty. Analysis of their work shows that they make very good progress in reading and writing in their first year of learning French. In a lesson on racism, students expressed their opinions effectively with good accents. Skilful support from their teachers enabled them to develop a range of vocabulary specific to the topic they were studying. However, a small number of students were less confident in their oral work and do not contribute as well in class.
110. The teaching of French in the sixth form is very good and much is excellent. This results in very high levels of achievement by students. Teachers know their subject and French culture very well. They speak French fluently and rapidly throughout lessons. This challenges students to listen carefully and remain fully focused. They are aware that they too must speak in good French and they respond appropriately. Teachers have high expectations of the students and this encourages them to do their very best. There is a firm emphasis on improvement, learning from mistakes and setting targets for better work. Other particularly good features of teaching are the range of facilities and resources provided. Video clips are used effectively to teach about contemporary issues. This has a stimulating visual and cultural impact, which supports students' personal, moral and cultural development. Teachers work hard to prepare interesting and up-to-date resources. By making maximum use of the time available they ensure that lessons proceed at a good pace. Lessons are lively and enjoyable and are characterised by positive and supportive relationships. On some occasions in oral work, there is a need to include students, who are more passive and less confident. Teachers bring extensive knowledge and energy to their work. However, their contribution sometimes dominates that of their students and there is a need to redress this balance.
111. Students of French are very well motivated. They develop good skills in working independently through opportunities to take notes, use dictionaries and access library resources. They are well guided in using the Internet and appropriate web pages. This provides them with plenty of up-to-date and relevant information. Classrooms are mostly attractive and well decorated. They provide a pleasant environment in which to study.

112. Teachers of French benefit from policies and documentation that offer good guidance. Sometimes, however, these are written in such detail that it is not easy to get rapid access to the content. The teaching of French is well led and managed. Other good features of the department are the opportunities for work experience, visits and exchanges that are provided. These have a major impact in raising students' confidence in speaking French and their knowledge of French culture and society. Very good progress has been made in relation to the issues identified as requiring improvement at the last inspection.

Spanish

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

Strengths

- Attainment in Year 12 is well above average. Students make very good progress, especially in understanding spoken Spanish.
- Excellent teaching, which draws on a wide range of imaginative activities.
- The pace and challenge in lessons conducted entirely in Spanish.
- The very good relationships that create a positive climate for learning.

Areas for improvement

- Further help and support for less-confident Spanish speakers.
- The variation in some students' knowledge of vocabulary and some basic grammar.

113. The attainment of students is well above average in Spanish in Year 12. In Year 13, it is closer to the national expectation, but with significant differences in standards between students. Students' achievement is usually very good, particularly in oral skills. Over the last three years, small numbers of students have entered for A Level Spanish precluding a totally accurate comparison with national standards. Most, however, have attained good or very good grades that are above the national averages. This was especially true in 2002.

114. Observation of lessons and analysis of students' work in Year 13 shows that best attainment is in listening to Spanish. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, they understood their teacher's rapid instructions in the language without difficulty. They listened to tape recordings on news items and song contests, writing accurate notes and summaries in the foreign language. They used their notes confidently to prepare their own spoken summary. Listening to the words of the latest Spanish pop song, they quickly picked out deliberate errors, although some lower attainers had difficulty identifying correct accents. Students make very good progress in reading Spanish. They classify vocabulary correctly and are provided with a wide range of practice in reading texts from the Internet. The analysis of their work shows evidence of very good progress from Year 12. However, a small number of students of lower attainment continue to make errors of basic grammar. They have difficulty with the accurate use of some verb tenses and accurate spelling. A few are not so confident in spoken Spanish and require further support.

115. In Year 12, significantly more students now study Spanish than in previous years. The standard of their work is well above average. They make very good progress in building on previous attainment at GCSE. Many are keen to speak Spanish and do so usually with confidence and good accents. They use different tenses appropriately to describe events that took place in the past. They develop a very good range of vocabulary on a wide number of more abstract topics.

116. The teaching of Spanish is excellent, demonstrating very high levels of subject expertise and knowledge. A particularly good feature is the planning of a wide range of imaginative and creative activities. These include reading the latest information on Spanish pop stars downloaded from the Internet. The most recent recordings of their songs are used for listening practice. Lessons are characterised by good pace with resources carefully prepared and readily available. The consistent use of rapid Spanish for entire lessons requires students to give their full concentration and attention. There are carefully planned opportunities to help them develop skills such as note-taking and summarising information. They are helped to become more independent learners through careful guidance in accessing appropriate websites. Students' individual progress is carefully tracked. Appropriate targets are set. Work is marked in sufficient detail to help students learn effectively from their past mistakes.
117. Students of Spanish have very good attitudes to their work. Humorous and supportive relationships with their teachers result in eagerness to learn and progress. Students in Year 12 in particular are keen to respond and speak in Spanish in spite of occasional hesitancy in finding the right words and phrases.
118. A good range of resources is available with many up-to-date materials. Considerable effort has been made to provide well-chosen library and multi-media materials. These make an important contribution to students' moral and cultural education. Visits abroad, work experience and theatre visits further enhance students' language studies. Work in Spanish is very well managed and organised with enthusiasm. Good progress has been made on all issues identified at the last inspection. This is an increasingly popular subject within the sixth-form curriculum.