

INSPECTION REPORT

THE KINGS OF WESSEX SCHOOL

Cheddar

LEA area: Somerset

Unique reference number: 123896

Headteacher: Mr David Dams

Reporting inspector: Mr George Knights
3268

Dates of inspection: 2nd - 5th December 2002

Inspection number: 249867

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 13 to 18 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Station Road
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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr P. Lythgoe

Date of previous inspection: March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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3268	George Knights	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? How high are standards? How well are students taught? What sort of school is it?
12775	Judith Goodchild	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
23080	Robert Isaac	Team inspector	English	
11548	David Lee	Team inspector	Mathematics	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
31441	Maggie King	Team inspector	Physics	How well does the school care for its students?
20124	Jo Peach	Team inspector	French German	Attitudes, behaviour and personal development.
18854	Malcolm McGregor	Team inspector	Art and design Design and technology	
4317	Ken Madrell	Team inspector	Geography	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Kings of Wessex School is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 13 to 18 years of age. It is located in the village of Cheddar in Somerset. The school draws its students from a large catchment area, with around two thirds of students using school transport. Almost all of the students transfer to The Kings of Wessex from two middle schools. Attainment of pupils on entry to the school is above average. There are 1110 students on roll, making the school larger than average. The school is over-subscribed. The school is situated in a relatively prosperous rural area. Unemployment in the area is below average. The number of students eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. Only 1 per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds and none has English as an additional language. The number on the school's register of special educational needs is below the national average, though the number with Statements of Special Educational Need is close to the national average. The school hosts a unit for seven students with hearing impairment. The school received Technology College status in 2001. Around nine tenths of students transfer, at the end of Year 11, to sixth form or further education. Around three quarters of these remain at the school.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The Kings of Wessex School is a good school with a very good sixth form. It has considerable strengths, but areas where improvement is needed. Standards are improving steadily because consistently good teaching helps students make good progress in their learning and personal development. Leadership and management of the school are both good and the school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school enables students to reach very good standards in public examinations and tests.
- It ensures that there is a very smooth transfer of students into Year 9 in the school.
- It helps its students to develop as mature and independent young people.
- The school's clear educational direction is developed in consultation with all members of the school community.

What could be improved

- The evaluation of the impact of teaching on the quality of learning.
- The tutor role in order to provide better support and guidance to students.
- Aspects of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11, particularly regarding provision for religious education.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has maintained the good standards reported following the previous inspection in March 1996. In recent years results have been improving at a faster rate than nationally in tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE and GCE A level examinations. The school has maintained the good overall quality of teaching. It has made satisfactory progress, overall, in dealing with the key issues identified in the previous report. It has made very good progress in improving its accommodation. While consolidation of the changes in aspects of management has been successful, the evaluation of the impact of these changes has so far been limited. Arrangements for appraisal were put in place and these have now been subsumed into the performance management programme. While this programme meets basic requirements, performance management is not yet well integrated into the school's strategy for further improvement. Progress on two other key issues has been inadequate. The school still does not provide courses in religious education for all students in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form which are adequate to meet statutory requirements. Nor has it taken steps necessary to ensure that all students are able to take part in a daily act of collective worship.

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				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	2000	2001	2002	2002	
Key Stage 3 tests	A	A	A	B	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A	
	1999	2000	2001		
A-levels/AS-levels	n/a	B	*		

* 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 the previous year, results in mathematics and science were well above the national average, while English results were above average. GCSE results have also been improving at a faster rate than nationally for several years. These results are the outcome of good teaching, which holds the interest of students of all abilities and encourages them to adopt positive attitudes to study. The school met its targets in the past two years and has set itself challenging but achievable targets for the next two years. The work of students currently in Years 9 and 11 is above average and students are achieving very well, indicating that the good pattern of results will be maintained in the coming year. Students' numeracy and literacy standards are good, with students applying these skills well in other subjects. Results in the sixth form were well above average in 2001. Although slightly lower in 2002 than in the previous year, they represent good overall progress by that group of students. Sixth form targets were met in 2002 and the school has set higher targets for the coming two years. Students currently in the sixth form are achieving very well as a consequence of very good teaching. The good examination performance of recent years is likely to be maintained in the coming year.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students' attitudes are good. They work very hard and with considerable enthusiasm. Many students enthusiastically take part in the additional activities the school provides.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good, both in lessons and as students move around the school. The school is a friendly, harmonious community.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between students and with teachers are very good. Students respond well when they are encouraged to take responsibility, both in lessons and in wider aspects of school life.
Attendance	The level of attendance of students is satisfactory. The school works hard to monitor and promote good attendance.

Students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, working successfully both independently and in groups. This prepares them well for their sixth form study, where they display mature attitudes to their work. In a small number of lessons some students' concentration levels fall because teachers are not providing work which meets their needs, with the result that they do not behave well. This occasionally distracts other students from their work.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good overall in Years 9 to 11, with a considerable amount of teaching which is very good or excellent. There is, however, a significant amount of unsatisfactory or poor teaching. The teaching of English, mathematics and science is good, as it is in most other subjects. Only in modern foreign languages is there a significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers know their students well and prepare stimulating, interesting and challenging lessons. Teachers pay careful attention to meeting the needs of all, including those with special educational needs. Students are consequently enthusiastic and work hard to achieve their best. Good attention is paid to the development of students' numeracy and literacy skills, with good groundwork in mathematics and English being consolidated by teachers in other subjects. In those lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory, teachers do not pay sufficient attention to meeting the needs of their students. As a result, little learning takes place in these lessons, with students become bored and, occasionally, misbehaving. Currently, the arrangements for evaluating the quality of teachers' work are inadequate to ensure consistency. Teaching in the sixth form is very good. As a result, students develop very good study habits, which stand them in good stead for moving on to higher education. Lesson planning is based on the detailed knowledge that teachers have of each student and thus the needs of all are met very successfully. As a result, all sixth form students learn very well and make very good progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a good range of courses for students to study in Years 10 and 11 and a very good range for students in the sixth form.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	This is good. The needs of all students are known in detail and are communicated well to staff. Teachers ensure that lesson activities are modified to meet the needs of these students. Additional support, either in class or in short-term withdrawal from lessons, helps students make good progress. These students are fully included in all aspects of school life.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The school has very few of these students and does not, therefore, have a general strategy for dealing with them. When individuals for whom English is not their first language do attend the school their specific needs are carefully noted and teachers very successfully integrate these students, enabling them to achieve well.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	This is good overall. The social and moral development of students is good. Students' good moral and social development has a positive effect in their learning successfully together. More emphasis needs to be placed on preparing students for life in a multicultural society.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The overall care and welfare of students is good. The procedures for providing educational guidance and support for students are effective. Arrangements for using assessment data to help guide students are satisfactory, but teachers are not using effectively the wealth of data available to guide an overall view of the progress of each student.

The curriculum for students in Year 9 builds very successfully on work in the middle schools. The curriculum does not provide adequate time for an effective course in personal, social and health education, including citizenship, in Years 10 and 11. Nor does it enable all students to follow an adequate course in religious education in these years. The curriculum is enriched by a good programme of activities outside lessons, including trips and visits, which students support well by their attendance and involvement. The school hosts a unit for students with hearing impairment. Staff in the unit work very closely with teachers and, as a result, students with hearing impairment are well

included in all aspects of school life, make good progress in their lessons and achieve well. The role of the tutor is under-developed. The means by which the school reviews the academic progress made by each student requires further development.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	This is good. The headteacher provides clear leadership, which is focused on helping the school achieve its aims. The school is managed well, but levels of accountability are not adequate to ensure that all aspects of the school are as good as they should be.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have become increasingly involved in helping guide the direction in which the school is moving. They fulfil their responsibilities well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	While planning is good and careful steps are taken to make sure that the planned actions are undertaken, the steps to evaluate the impact of teaching on standards and quality are not adequate to ensure consistently good quality.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes good use of the strategic resources available to it.

The school has a clear set of aims, which all members of the community understand and seek to achieve. The staff and governors work very hard. The school's strategic plan for development highlights important priorities, and sets out clear courses of action. Arrangements for evaluating the work of staff are not well enough developed, however, to ensure that all are working to maximum effect. Governors fulfil most of their responsibilities well, but do not ensure that all students can take part in a daily act of collective worship and do not provide an adequate course in religious education for all students from Year 10 upwards. The school applies the principles of best value well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Before the inspection, 31 parents attended a meeting with the Registered Inspector. Questionnaires were returned by 439 parents (22 per cent) and additional comments were appended to 41 of these.

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students like coming to school. Students make good progress because the school has high expectations of them. The school is approachable when parents have problems or wish to make suggestions. The school is well led and managed. The school offers a wide range of activities for students outside lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The closeness with which the school works with parents. The information that they receive about their children's progress. Arrangements to ensure that students receive the right amount of homework.

Inspectors agree about those things which please parents most. Students are happy in school. They make good progress and a key reason for this is that teachers have high expectations of what they will achieve. The school is genuinely welcoming when parents approach with ideas or concerns. Good leadership and management ensure that the school runs smoothly. The range of clubs, societies, trips, visits and other activities for students to participate in is impressive and is much appreciated by students. Inspectors believe that the school does seek to work closely with parents, keeping them well informed about general aspects of school life. The school's arrangements for keeping parents informed about their children's progress meet requirements, but lack creativity and thus do not help parents feel confident that the process is telling them all that they need to know. Arrangements for homework are good, helping students to develop as independent learners.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this large comprehensive school has 289 students and is larger than the average sixth form. Numbers are rising steadily. The school provides a good range of AS and A level courses and one vocational course. Around two thirds of those who completed Year 11 at the school in 2002 have entered the sixth form, with around 50 others remaining in full-time education at local further education colleges. Roughly similar numbers of male and female students follow sixth form courses at The Kings of Wessex. The number of students from minority ethnic groups reflects the composition of the school generally. Students in the sixth form follow AS and A2 level courses or the intermediate GNVQ course. Courses in the sixth form are open to students considered to be able to complete those courses successfully and thus the overall ability of students on entry to the sixth form is above average.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The effectiveness of the sixth form is very good, with cost-effectiveness being good. Standards are above average, reflecting good progress by the students, given their attainment on entry to the course. This is the result of very good teaching, which helps students to become interested, responsible and successful learners. Careful attention is paid to the needs of all students. Leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory.

Strengths

- Very good teaching produces confident, mature and independent learners.
- The wide range of academic courses on offer to students.
- The very good relationships among sixth form students and staff.
- Students adopt very positive attitudes to work.

What could be improved

- The use made of tutor time in the sixth form.
- The enrichment curriculum for sixth form students.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Results have fluctuated over recent years, but in 2002 were the best ever. Very good teaching, which is enthusiastic and well informed, enables students to achieve high standards.
English	Very good. Standards are well above average because good teaching ensures that students make good progress.
Biology	Very good. The department has a team of well-qualified and experienced teachers who share very good relationships with their students. The teaching is very good and leads to well above average attainment at A level.
Chemistry	Very good. Students achieve very well at A level due to their very good attitudes to the subject and the very good teaching they receive. The teachers are well qualified, enthusiastic and experienced and give the students very good support and guidance.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Physics	Good. Achievement is good as a result of good teaching, good support and very good relationships. Students enjoy physics.
Art	Very good. Standards are consistently above average with a rich variety of work. Teaching is very good and supports high standards of imaginative and independent learning.
Drama	Good. Students are taught very well and, as a result, standards of work are above average.
Design and technology	Good. Standards are above the national average at advanced level and improving rapidly at AS level. Teaching is good overall and assessment is very good.
French	Good. Students are very well prepared for the demands of the examination and achieve good standards.
German	Very good. Standards in German have risen. Students achieve very well because of the very good teaching that they receive.
Geography	Very good. Standards achieved by students are generally above average. Very good teaching and very effective use of information and communication technology enable students to make very good progress with their learning.
Business education	Good. Students make very good progress because teaching is good. Students are very well motivated because of the encouragement they receive from teachers.
Psychology	Good. Results are above average and achievement is good. Good teaching leads to successful learning. The subject is popular and students' attitudes are good.

Work was also sampled in other sixth form subjects. In both history and religious education standards of work are above average. This is a result of good teaching in both subjects, enabling students to make good progress in their learning. Very good teaching in photography enabled students to achieve very well and reach above average standards. A group of students following an AS level course were reaching average standards and teaching in the lesson observed was good.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are well supported and guided by their subject teachers. The induction programme is very good, leading to high retention rates on courses. Preparation for higher education is good. The tutor system is under used and overall monitoring systems are not well linked to procedures within each subject.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Leadership is good and there is a commitment to maintaining high standards. Management is satisfactory, with strengths in the academic and personal support given by subject teachers, but there is a lack of coherence in the role of the tutor.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Before the inspection, questionnaires were received from 181 (63 per cent) of students in the sixth form. During the inspection, groups of sixth form students had discussions with inspectors.

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of the teaching and the level of challenge. The support they receive from teachers. The help they receive to enable them to study independently. The range of activities open to them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lack of access to computers for private study. The lack of information about their progress and their future options. The way the school responds to their views.

The inspection team agrees with the students' very positive views of the school. Where a significant minority expressed a negative view there was, at the same time, an equal number expressing a positive one. For example, although some students strongly believed that they did not have sufficient access to computers to use in their own time, a similar proportion recognised that this was a temporary problem which would shortly be resolved by access to the facilities in the new learning resource centre. The inspectors agree in part with the concerns about information on progress and future options. Students in Year 12 were concerned about a lack of preparation for their future, but these students had not yet had the benefit of the careers education course. Inspectors agree with students that their progress is not monitored closely enough through the tutorial system, although the information is available from individual subject staff when requested. Inspectors do not agree that the school does not respond to students' views. There is a well-organised committee of elected representatives from each tutor group who meet once a month to discuss students' views. This has led, for example, to an increase in the number of car parking spaces and to the installation of vending machines in the common room area.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The school enables students to reach very good standards in public examinations and tests.

1. When students join the school they are working at standards which are above average. Because of the very good arrangements for transfer from middle schools, students pick up their studies quickly and make very good progress during Year 9. In national tests in 2002, overall results were well above average. Results in these tests have been improving for several years at about the same rate as the improvement nationally.
2. The good grounding in Year 9 provides a secure platform for further improvement in Years 10 and 11 and for several years results in GCSE examinations have been above average, with improvement at a faster rate than nationally. Although 2002 results at the end of Year 9 were broadly the same as those in similar schools¹, those at GCSE were above the average for similar schools. These represent very good improvement when the prior attainment of these students is taken into account.
3. A major factor in enabling students to reach these standards is the good teaching that characterises most lessons and encourages students to learn successfully. Teachers know their students well and cater for their needs. As a result, there is little difference between the results of boys and girls when compared with boys' and girls' results nationally. Similarly, good provision is made for students of different ability. The most able students are challenged to achieve high grades. At the end of Year 9, for instance, the number of students gaining Level 7 or above² is above average in science and mathematics. In GCSE examinations, the number of students gaining A* or A grades was above the national average in most subjects in 2002.
4. The school ensures that students of all abilities are helped to achieve well. In the most recent GCSE examinations, for instance, almost all students gained five or more grades G or better. Teachers are aware of those students who have special educational needs, including those who have some hearing impairment, and provide work which is modified to meet their needs. Teachers are provided with very good information about these students' needs by the learning support department and this helps them in their lesson planning. Many of these students also receive very good in-class support. Similarly, the very few students who have English as an additional language are well provided for so that they can achieve well. This attention to the needs of particular individuals and groups of students illustrates well the school's commitment to the inclusion of all.
5. Teaching is good overall. During the inspection over a third of the teaching observed in Years 9 to 11 was very good or excellent and over six tenths was good or better. One of the reasons that students learn well is that teachers know how to make lessons interesting and stimulating for students. In turn, students respond with enthusiasm, concentrating well and working hard. Teachers and students relate well together and this helps create an atmosphere in lessons where students feel sufficiently confident to ask questions and to try out their ideas. Teachers monitor students' work well and provide good feedback for them. This means that students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve still further. One of the strongest features of teaching is that students are encouraged to develop good habits of independent and collaborative work. This is helping them to establish very good working habits, which

¹ Similar school comparisons are made with schools having a similar proportion of students eligible for free school meals.

² Level 7 is two National Curriculum levels above the average for students at this age.

benefit them when they enter sixth form study. The encouragement to work together makes a strong contribution to students' social development. Good independent study skills also mean that students are able to benefit from the tasks that teachers set them to undertake outside lessons. Homework is, therefore, also an important feature in helping students learn well.

6. Teachers have begun to adopt aspects of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. Evidence that this is having an impact is seen in the way that teachers set out clear objectives or purposes for lessons. This helps students know what the lesson is about and what is expected of them. In the best lessons, teachers use these objectives to help students review what they have learned. These steps, which make students more aware of their learning, are significant in helping students achieve well. While the good teaching is a strength of the school, a small amount continues to be unsatisfactory or poor.
7. The school, in its quest for continual improvement in standards, sets targets for performance in public examinations and tests. Targets for national tests at the end of Year 9 have been met in mathematics and science for the past two years, though those for English have not been achieved. For the past two years the school has met its targets for GCSE examinations. Both in Year 9 national tests and GCSE examinations, the school has set itself challenging but achievable targets for the next two years.

It ensures that there is a very smooth transfer of students into Year 9 in the school.

8. Students transfer to the school at the beginning of Year 9 and, therefore, have very little time to settle before they are confronted with the national Year 9 tests. In this year there is the potential for students to fall back somewhat in their learning and the short time until testing could easily mean that students at the school under-perform in these tests. At The Kings of Wessex School this is emphatically not the case. The main reason for this is the excellence of the partnership which has been established between the school and its two main partner middle schools. Within the locality there is, through the Cheddar Valley Schools group, a very strong commitment across all first, middle and upper schools to ensuring continuity of learning from when pupils start school at five years old until they leave to go into further or higher education. Students at The Kings of Wessex School benefit greatly from this continuity. Teachers build very successfully on the firm foundations laid by colleagues in partner middle schools. These enable students to learn successfully and achieve very well.
9. The links between staff in The Kings of Wessex and their colleagues in the middle schools are very good. Headteachers meet regularly and all are strongly committed to the long-standing partnership between all schools in the Cheddar Valley. Their commitment provides a good role model to colleagues and sets a strong tone for collaboration. Governors of the school are equally supportive of the partnership arrangements which have become a strong factor in good overall achievement in the family of schools.
10. The very good links between staff in the group of schools help to ensure that the strengths and needs of all students are known before they actually arrive in the school. Teachers use this information well to group students and to prepare to cater for their needs. Students pay visits to the Kings of Wessex School before their transfer. Teachers visit them in their middle schools and students therefore feel very well supported in making the change from middle to upper school. The quality of the links is particularly well illustrated by the work that takes place to help smooth the transfer of students with special educational needs, including those with hearing impairment³.

³ The Kings of Wessex School hosts a unit for students with hearing impairment. The staff of the unit are employed and managed by the local education authority, but the students and staff are well integrated into the life and work of the school.

Special educational needs co-ordinators meet together regularly, share information and expertise and work very successfully to ensure that the students within their care make a successful move from one school to another.

11. A key factor in helping students become quickly established in the upper school is the good arrangements for ensuring that there is continuity of learning in the different subjects. Careful decision-making helps provide clear links between the curriculum in the middle schools and at the upper school. This is well illustrated by the fact that work on a second modern foreign language is started in middle schools, thus enabling a firm foundation to be laid for upper school study. Teachers of all subjects regularly meet together across the family of schools. This helps with long-term subject planning. Teachers in the upper school know what students will have learned, while middle school teachers are fully aware of what they are helping students to prepare for.
12. Because middle school teachers know their pupils well, they set targets with pupils for what they will achieve in national tests at the end of Year 9. These targets are passed on to staff at The Kings of Wessex as students enter the school and are adopted in the upper school. This is an indication of the very good levels of trust that have been built up among staff of the partner schools. This trust is the cornerstone of the overall success with which students are helped to move from the middle to upper school phase of their education.

It helps its students to develop as mature and independent young people.

13. A striking aspect of the school is the positive, mature and confident attitudes that students adopt to their work and other aspects of school life. This attitude manifests itself in good overall behaviour, in hard work in almost all lessons, in a strong commitment to the wide range of extra-curricular activities in the school and in the very good relationships which characterise school life.
14. Teachers and support staff are very positive in their dealings with students. This means that relationships between staff and students are good and are focused on helping students develop both personally and educationally. Students respond well, showing respect for staff and recognising that their best interests are foremost in the school. Teachers are willing to provide good levels of individual support to students, giving freely of their time when students experience problems, either with their work or in their personal development. Students appreciate this very much and recognise that they can ask for help and be confident about receiving it. Parents are similarly appreciative of the commitment of staff to their children's development.
15. In lessons, students are encouraged to develop good learning habits. They are frequently encouraged to develop their interests through research and investigative work. Very good use is made of new technology to support enquiry, including constructive use of the Internet. As a result, students learn to take responsibility for their work. Teachers provide good guidance to students on how they can improve their work and this, too, nurtures in most students a personal responsibility for their learning. The benefits of this approach by staff are best illustrated in the sixth form, where many students adopt standards of independent study that are similar to those that would be expected of undergraduates at university. In other words, the work being undertaken by teachers in Years 9 to 11 has long-term benefits for all students who aspire to higher education. This aspiration is nurtured by teachers, as a result of which students generally clearly see their work at the school as preparation for the next stages of their education.

There is a corresponding unit for hearing impaired pupils in one of the two middle schools and liaison between the two units mirrors the good overall links between the two schools.

16. Students are helped to show initiative and take responsibility in lessons, but the school provides a very good range of activities for students to participate in outside lessons. Teachers give generously of their time to provide a large number of clubs and societies. These activities are appreciated by students and the take-up of these opportunities is good. Additionally the school regularly stages concerts and dramatic productions, again with high involvement by the students, either on stage or behind the scenes. Each of these activities helps enhance students' personal development.
17. Within the curriculum, the school offers a course in personal, social and health education. This now encompasses many of the requirements for the course in citizenship. Although time for this course is limited, it nevertheless provides a very good framework for students to learn about many aspects of personal development and helps them to a greater understanding of their place in society. Students are encouraged to be mindful of the needs of others. The success of this is illustrated by the way in which students care for the needs of others in the school. Students with hearing impairment, for instance, are very well included and fellow students are attentive in helping them to play a full part in all activities. Outside lessons, students are very committed to helping raise money for charity. This also helps to raise their awareness of the needs of others.
18. Whether in lessons or in more general aspects of school life, members of staff have high expectations of students. They encourage students to take initiative, to develop independence and to show responsibility. Students recognise that the school provides an environment where they are valued and where they can grow and develop in safety and with confidence. As a result, students develop as mature, responsible young people who are well prepared for the next stages of their education and for life in society.
19. Very good attention has been paid to improvement to the buildings. This was a priority following the previous inspection of the school. The improvements have successfully created a school environment which is now much more conducive to study. Much of the improvement has directly improved study facilities for students, thus supporting their development as mature and independent learners. Work continues on these improvements. Most of the building and refurbishment work has been the outcome of very successful work by senior staff and governors in raising funds and managing the school budget carefully. The current relatively large carry-forward figure in the school budget is, for example, a planned build-up of funds to pay for the work currently being undertaken to enhance the learning resource area in the school. Very good work has been undertaken to enhance computer facilities throughout the school. This has helped students to develop their information and communication technology skills and also to enhance their ability to study independently.

The school's clear educational direction is developed in consultation with all members of the school community.

20. The school's mission statement, supported by a clearly stated set of aims, was drawn up in consultation with staff, governors, parents and students. The mission is 'to get the best out of everyone' and the school is moving toward achieving this as it progressively meets its aims. The headteacher and senior colleagues have been successful in encouraging the contribution of all members of the school community. They have also successfully managed to ensure that the aims form the basis for planning for improvement.
21. The mission statement is used as a starting point for drawing up the school's long-term plan for improvement. This comprehensive and useful document sets out a

programme of action over a three-year period to move more closely to meeting the school's aims. All staff and governors are involved in drawing up this plan and governors' financial planning is guided by the priorities within the school 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.

22. Many of the school's aims are already being achieved. Particularly well developed is the aim of teaching in a way that both inspires and challenges each student to become responsible for his or her own learning. Most teaching in the school is now characterised by teachers' endeavours to bring this aim to fruition. Equally well developed is the aim of promoting an active partnership between the school, parents, the communities of the Cheddar Valley and the school's international partners. As has been explained, the partnership between the Cheddar Valley schools is exemplary. Other partnerships are also well established, though the school could do more with parents by ensuring that they are even better informed about the progress being made by their sons and daughters.
23. The school aim of creating an environment which is caring and orderly and in which every student can feel secure and valued as an individual is fully illustrated in practice. The school takes great pride in its care and welfare of students. Equal care is also taken to ensure that there is equality of access and opportunity, which is also an aim of the school. The school is an inclusive community where the contribution of all is valued and where the needs of each individual are recognised and attended to. This is evidenced by the attention given to those students who have special educational needs, including hearing impairment, and to those with English as an additional language. The success in educating these particular groups of students is based on their individual needs being well known, successfully communicated to staff and taken account of in teachers' planning. These students are fully included in all aspects of the life and work of the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

The evaluation of the impact of teaching on the quality of learning.

24. While teaching is good in Years 9 to 11 and very good in the sixth form, the range of teaching quality is too varied. In Years 9 to 11, for instance, teaching observed during the inspection ranged from excellent to poor. Not all the unsatisfactory or poor teaching is confined to one or two departments, though three of the seven lessons observed in modern foreign languages were judged to be unsatisfactory or poor. In most unsatisfactory lessons, the problem was that the teachers had not sufficiently taken into account the needs of the students in the class, with the result that little progress was made.
25. Considerable steps have been taken to help teachers improve their teaching. Recent attention to some aspects of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy has begun to raise the awareness of teachers to the need to focus in their planning on exactly what it is intended students should learn from lesson to lesson. The impact of this is shown in Year 9, where more good or very good teaching was observed than in Years 10 and 11.⁴ Having provided relevant training, the school has recognised the need to provide further support through a programme of classroom observation. This programme has been in operation for some time, with teachers being observed by both heads of department and by members of the senior management team. When teachers are observed they are provided with feedback.

⁴ While ~~ee~~ this comparison is accurate on the basis of the particular lessons observed, comparisons needed to be treated with some caution because the sample of observed lessons was relatively small.

26. This classroom observation is not rigorous enough to help the small number of teachers who are not performing as well as others. The observation checklists and other review methods in use in the school do not take enough account of whether students are learning as much, as fast or as well as they should be. Too much focus is placed on what teachers do, rather than on what students learn. Although learning is implicit in the statements in the checklists, the senior and middle managers using them are not yet experienced enough to look beyond the basic plans and actions of teachers to provide accurate and adequate feedback to teachers about the learning that is taking place. As a result, teachers receive feedback on what they do rather than on the impact that their work is having on students' learning.
27. Because the classroom review process is relatively new and not tightly focused in aspects of students' learning, teachers are not yet able to focus sufficiently on details of their practice that would bring about further improvement. As a result, performance management has not yet become fully integrated into the school's improvement strategies. Currently, teachers' targets for improvement in teaching are too broad and not sufficiently specific. This is slowing the overall process of ensuring that teaching in all lessons is at least satisfactory and is good or better in a higher proportion than is currently the case.
28. While much of the teaching in the school is very good or excellent, the review of classrooms is not yet sufficiently robust to ensure that there is a good analysis of why these lessons are as good as they are. Neither middle nor senior managers are sufficiently experienced in identifying the characteristics of very good teaching and, thus, this good practice is not consistently being shared with colleagues. There is a good framework of links between members of the senior management team and heads of subjects. Not enough work has hitherto been undertaken, however, to make heads of subject sufficiently accountable to senior managers, and hence to governors, for the quality of work in their areas of responsibility.

The tutor role, in order to provide better support and guidance to students.

29. All students are placed in a tutor group and spend a considerable amount of time each week with their tutors. As far as possible, students stay with the same tutor for the three years in the main school, with a similar rotating two-year programme in the sixth form. Tutors are responsible for registration and for following up on absence. They also monitor whether the students' planners are being used and signed by parents. Tutors do not, however, have the main responsibility for maintaining an overview of the personal development of students in their group. This responsibility rests with year-group co-ordinators, who receive information on work and behaviour from other teachers. It is these year-group co-ordinators who provide the liaison with external agencies, such as the education welfare service.
30. What is missing is that there is not a well-developed system for ensuring that any one person has responsibility for overseeing the academic progress of each student. When subject teachers have concerns about individuals they contact year-group co-ordinators and this sometimes leads to a review of a particular student's work and progress being undertaken. Beyond this, there is no mechanism for providing for each student a member of staff who can review with the student how well they are doing. Nor is there a good mechanism for reviewing targets with students or for guiding them on how to organise their work to help achieve targets. The school recognises the need for closer review of the progress made by each student and is exploring strategies for the implementation of a programme of academic monitoring.

31. Students generally place limited value on the relationship with their tutors and believe that they gain little from the sessions they spend with them. Students are clear that, when they have a problem, they go to the teachers with whom they feel most confident, but do not recognise that either tutors or year-group co-ordinators have a role to play in supporting their learning. At the time of the previous inspection the lack of monitoring of students' academic progress by tutors was highlighted as a weakness and insufficient work has been undertaken to remedy this situation.
32. The previous inspection report also highlighted the fact that the morning tutor period was unproductive. Although the school has latterly begun to introduce a programme of 'active tutorial work' into two of these sessions each week, weaknesses still exist in the use of this time. Tutors are not clear about how best to implement this new idea. Arrangements to review the quality of students' experiences in this session are not well developed and thus there is inconsistency. Some steps have been taken to link the work in these active tutorial sessions with the programme of personal, social and health education. This has been done in order to try to ensure coherence and to help overcome the problems of the short time available for the personal and social education programme. Currently, that intended coherence is far from being achieved.
33. The school has developed a very comprehensive database of academic and other information on each student, which could be used very constructively and productively in providing a starting point for regular review with students of their personal and academic progress. Currently, the systems to enable this to happen are not in place and so a potentially very good resource is not being well used.

Aspects of the curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11, particularly regarding provision for religious education.

34. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 provides a wide range of courses from which students can choose. Teachers make sure, however, that students choose a mix of subjects which maintains a breadth of study and does not limit choices when they reach the sixth form. Decisions about the range of subjects to offer have been taken by staff and governors after close consultation with one another. Almost all courses lead to GCSE examinations and many students will follow courses equivalent to ten and a half GCSE subjects or more. The most able students are able to take two modern foreign languages. In the current Year 10 the most able students are also able to prepare for GCSE examinations in physics, chemistry and biology, as opposed to entering the double science option.
35. Senior staff and governors regularly review arrangements for the curriculum. Recently they have decided that all students will follow the half course⁵ in information and communication technology (ICT). This helps the school to meet the requirement for this subject and reflects the fact that the school is now well equipped with computers and related hardware and software to make this possible. Teachers of other subjects are also becoming increasingly successful in using ICT applications.
36. As a consequence of this decision about ICT, senior managers and governors have decided that there is not sufficient time to provide all students in Years 10 and 11 with a course in religious education that meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. To do so is a statutory requirement. Although around one third of students take this subject as a GCSE option, the remainder do not study this course. Students have one period per fortnight of religious education, but this is inadequate. The lack of

⁵ The assessment of half courses gives the equivalent of half a full GCSE grade and work leading to the assessment usually takes half the time of a full GCSE subject.

an adequate course in religious education was highlighted as a gap in provision at the time of the previous inspection and the governors have not dealt adequately with this.

37. Making sufficient time available for a wide range of GCSE courses has put pressure on the time available for other courses. All students follow a general course in physical education. They also follow a course in personal, social and health education, but the time available for this is only one hour per fortnight. Within this course are the required elements of sex and drugs education, careers education and guidance about future educational plans and a course in citizenship. The course builds on work undertaken in previous years, but there is insufficient time for all aspects to be covered adequately. Thus, students do not receive an adequate education in these key aspects of their development. Additionally, the co-ordination and evaluation of the personal, social and health education programme is not sufficiently rigorous to ensure that all classes receive consistently good quality experiences.
38. The curriculum does much to foster students' personal development. The contribution the school makes, both in lessons and other activities, to students' social and moral development is very good. An outstanding example of this, observed during the inspection, was the collaborative work in preparation for the school's highly successful annual charities week. However, insufficient attention has been paid to helping students' spiritual development. Teachers in most subjects are not aware enough of what they can do to help students to become more reflective and aware of their personal responses to what they are learning. Recognising this, a working party has been set to produce guidelines on how to improve this aspect of teachers' work. Assemblies do not pay sufficient attention to encouraging students to reflect on the issues that are being dealt with. Within the curriculum, a good overall contribution is made to students' cultural development. Not enough work is being done to prepare students to take their place in an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

39. In order to build on the improvement that has taken place in the school in recent years, governors and staff should give attention to the following issues:
- undertake a more rigorous evaluation of the quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning, by:
 - ensuring that the checklists and other means of reviewing teaching focus more on the impact of teachers' work on students' learning;
 - providing more training for middle and senior managers in classroom observation techniques;
 - making both senior managers and heads of subject more accountable for the quality of the work of their colleagues;
 - focusing particularly on the teaching of modern foreign languages;
 - identifying good practice and sharing this expertise with other teachers;
(Paragraphs 24 – 28, 72 and 122)
 - strengthen and enhance the tutor role in order to provide better support and guidance to students, by:
 - ensuring that productive use is made of the daily tutor periods;
 - making sure that the academic and personal development of each student is reviewed;
 - providing all students with the opportunity to review their progress with the person who has responsibility for monitoring their development;
 - ensuring that the active tutorial work in tutor periods is linked effectively to the personal and social education programme so that time is more effectively used;
 - improving the arrangements for reviewing the quality of work of tutors and providing the necessary training to improve the effectiveness of the tutor role;
(Paragraphs 29 – 33)
 - review aspects of the curriculum for students in Years 10 and 11 in order to:
 - enable all students to follow a course in religious education that meets statutory requirements;
 - ensure that the overall time allocated to the course in personal, social and health education is adequate to cover the needs of careers education and guidance and all aspects of citizenship;
 - ensure that all students are better prepared for life in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society;
(Paragraphs 17, 32, 34 – 38)

Sixth form

- ensure that better use is made of tutor time in the sixth form, by:
 - making better use of the tutor period each day;
 - developing the academic monitoring programme and ensuring that, for all students, one member of staff has an overview of their academic and personal development;
(Paragraphs 66 and 71)

- improve the curriculum for sixth form students, by:
 - enabling all students to follow an adequate course in religious education;
 - making sure that all students are able to develop and apply their information and communication technology skills in all subjects;
 - reviewing arrangements for providing courses in general studies and in personal, social and health education.(Paragraphs 57, 60, 61 and 69)

In addition, the school should include the following in their action plan:

- ensure that all students, including those in the sixth form, are able to take part in a daily act of collective worship.
- (Paragraph 61)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 9 – 11	46
	Sixth form	61
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		50

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
Years 9 – 11							
Number	4	12	12	13	4	1	0
Percentage	9	26	26	28	9	2	0
Sixth form							
Number	4	22	30	4	1	0	0
Percentage	7	36	49	7	1	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 9 – 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than two percentage points in Years 9 – 11 and one percentage point in the sixth form

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y9– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	821	289
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	20	0

Special educational needs	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	19	3
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	68	3

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	13
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	36

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.4
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
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	151	120	271

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	101	126	131
	Girls	107	109	103
	Total	208	235	234
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	77 (74)	87 (83)	86 (88)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	41 (35)	65 (60)	47 (52)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	117	127	130
	Girls	113	105	106
	Total	230	232	236
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	85 (86)	86 (77)	87 (81)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	42 (39)	68 (55)	53 (38)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	133	125	258

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	84	127	131
	Girls	94	123	125
	Total	178	250	256
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	69 (67)	97 (100)	99 (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	49.3 (49.1)
	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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
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	2002	75	50	125

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All
School	(17.0)	(19.5)	17.6 (18.4)
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
1094	29	2
0	0	0
9	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
2	0	0
1	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
0	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: Y9 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	60.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.2

Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	16
Total aggregate hours worked per week	486

Deployment of teachers: Y9 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.8
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Average teaching group size: Y9 – Y13

Key Stage 3	27.7
Key Stage 4	26.4
Sixth form	17.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001 - 2002
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	£
Total income	3,433,981
Total expenditure	3,662,456
Expenditure per pupil	3,056
Balance brought forward from previous year	175,329
Balance carried forward to next year	299,976

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	15.15
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	16.85

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate 22%

Number of questionnaires sent out	1110
Number of questionnaires returned	243

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	56	5	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	39	52	5	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	18	62	9	0	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	59	15	2	4
The teaching is good.	28	63	4	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	20	44	21	7	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	48	37	7	3	5
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	58	38	2	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	16	54	16	5	9
The school is well led and managed.	33	54	5	2	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	30	58	5	1	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	46	5	2	12

Other issues raised by parents

A small number of parents were concerned that the two-week timetable exacerbated the problem of many missed Mondays owing to bank holidays and teacher training days. Some parents of sixth form students were concerned about the lack of private study facilities, including access to computers, for their children.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

40. Study in the sixth form is open to all students considered to be able to complete the courses successfully. As a result, the overall ability of students on entry to the sixth form is above average, rather than well above average as might be expected on the basis of results in GCSE examinations. Overall results in 2001 GCE A and AS level examinations were above average. The performance of female students was well above that of females nationally. Overall results in 2002⁶ were slightly lower. These results were, however, above the target set by the school on the basis of the prior attainment of this group of students. In 2002 male students did slightly better than females.
41. There is some variation in results from subject to subject and from year to year⁷. In 2001, for instance, results were well above average in many subjects, including biology, chemistry, English language, English literature, French, geography, history and religious education. Results were average or above average in most others except mathematics and physics, where they were below average. The pattern changed somewhat in 2002, reflecting the different abilities of students starting the course rather than significant changes in the quality of teaching or the nature of courses. In physics and mathematics, for instance, results improved considerably, with mathematics results being the best ever in the school.
42. 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. This is because teachers are aware of the strengths and needs of each individual student and modify work accordingly. The most able students are helped to achieve the highest grades. In 2001 the proportion of students gaining the A or B grades was above average in almost all subjects, though it was below average in mathematics, physics, computer studies and business studies. In almost all subjects, all students completing courses are successful in gaining at least an E 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. The needs of these students are well known to staff, who modify tasks to ensure that these students achieve well in examinations. Similarly, the very small numbers of students with special educational needs, including those with hearing impairment, are also helped to successful completion of their sixth form studies.
43. The inspection focused on work in 13 subjects and courses. The overall standard of work being produced by students currently in the sixth form is well above average in English, mathematics, chemistry, biology, art and design, German and geography. It is above average in design and technology, French, psychology and drama and average in physics and business studies. Students are achieving well and making good or very good progress in most subjects because sixth form teaching is very good. In most subjects, teachers encourage students to develop skills of independent study and this is helping them to achieve very well. Only in subjects such as psychology do students not get sufficient encouragement to develop these independent study skills. This leads to slightly slower progress than in most other subjects.

⁶ At the time of preparing this report national comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not available.

⁷ 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.

44. 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. Recently, restricted access to the necessary computers and other equipment has slowed the development of these skills for some students, but the school has new ICT resources dedicated to support the study of sixth form students. From January 2003 this will provide a good resource for students to develop further their ICT skills.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

45. Students have very good attitudes towards their studies. They demonstrate a high degree of enthusiasm for all aspects of the school and play an active role in its life and work. The annual charities week is organised by sixth form students, who arrange cabarets and other fund-raising events that involve the whole school. During the week of the inspection, students were selling tickets for the various events to students in the lower school at break and lunchtimes. Sixth form students also support Year 11 tutor groups, an initiative they set up, and others volunteer to listen to Year 9 students who are experiencing reading difficulties.
46. Relationships are very good, both between teachers and students and among the student body. Teachers treat students as mature and responsible young adults and they respond well as a result. Lessons are conducted in a relaxed but purposeful manner, with students appreciating that they can approach teachers with confidence and have their concerns and ideas treated with respect. These relationships play an important part in helping students develop a range of interpersonal skills that will stand them in good stead for adult life.
47. Sixth form students present very positive role models for younger students. Personal and learning skills are very good and this contributes significantly to the success of students in external examinations. In their studies they frequently conduct themselves in a similar fashion to undergraduates at university. The attendance of students is satisfactory. A new system of registration that includes rewards is being introduced in January 2003 to raise attendance rates.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

48. Sixth form teaching is very good. During the inspection, over two fifths of the sixth form teaching observed was very good or excellent and over nine tenths was good or better. Only very rarely is teaching in the sixth form unsatisfactory. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. The result of this very good teaching is that students achieve very well and learn to take responsibility for their own learning.
49. Teaching in the sixth form is very good in mathematics, chemistry, biology, art and design, German, geography and drama. It is in these subjects that students are making the best progress. Teaching is good in all the other subjects that were the focus in this inspection.
50. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subjects they teach, enabling them to present work that is interesting, stimulating and challenging for their students. In turn, students work very hard and show considerable enthusiasm in lessons. In many subjects, students are able to take considerable responsibility for their studies, undertaking research, investigations and experiments with maturity and confidence. Teachers support these activities very skilfully, providing guidance when needed and

carefully monitoring progress. This approach to learning is very 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.

51. Because teachers know their students very well they can plan lessons which are focused on the needs of individuals. 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. Students are also encouraged to use the power of computer software to analyse and present information in sophisticated ways.
52. A strong feature of the work of sixth form teachers is their assessment of students' work. This is detailed, accurate and helpful to students, providing them with clear indications of what they need to do to improve their work. Students value this feedback and respond positively to teachers' comments. Because students are well aware of how well they are doing, they are confident to follow up their lessons with work which they undertake in their own time. Teachers guide this well, ensuring that tasks set either build on previous learning or help students prepare well for future lessons. Because teachers know students well, they can modify tasks accordingly. While this benefits all students, it ensures that those with special educational needs or those with English as an additional language are fully included in lessons and make good progress.
53. All teachers of sixth form students are aware of the need to support them in the development and application of their language and mathematical skills. In the absence of separate courses to ensure that these skills are developed, teachers of other subjects 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, although there is no specific basic skills course in information and communication technology for all students, teachers of many subjects make sure that these skills are developed successfully.
54. Although teaching in the sixth form is very good overall, there is still too great a variation in quality in some subjects. In English, for example, sixth form teaching observed during the inspection ranged from excellent to unsatisfactory. This variation arises because the school does not yet have sufficiently effective arrangements for evaluating teachers' work in classrooms. This means that the best practice is not adequately shared. Managers are not sufficiently aware of where additional guidance, help and support are necessary to help all teachers to improve their effectiveness.

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

55. Curriculum provision is very good. It is well planned and meets the needs of all students. Students recognise this, acknowledging that it meets their needs, interests and aspirations. The school has embraced recent recommendations for the post-16 curriculum and, as a result, students have a wider range of subjects from which to choose than previously. For example, the curriculum now allows students to undertake up to four AS level subjects in Year 12. Most students then study at least three of these subjects at A level in Year 13. Only a few students make changes to their chosen options early in Year 12 and this reflects the good guidance given to them when they make initial choices. The school is recognised locally as the main provider of academic studies in the sixth form and its increasing popularity has attracted a small number of students to join the school from elsewhere after GCSE examinations.

Similarly, some students are guided to transfer to local colleges for sixth form study if they wish to follow a more vocationally oriented course. The school's successful bid for Technology College status has enhanced the learning opportunities for both students and the community.

56. Student numbers in the sixth form are rising, with over two thirds of the students from Year 11 returning to undertake sixth form courses in 2002. Well over three quarters of students who completed Year 12 studies in 2002 chose to stay to complete their A level studies this year. Students in Year 12 are able to choose from 25 AS level courses, the vast majority of which are continued through to A level. In addition, an AVCE⁸ course in business education is offered. The school recommends that students should have a minimum of five C grades or better at GCSE to embark upon an A level course, although students with lower grades are accepted onto AS and A level courses if teachers consider that they can complete them successfully. A small number of students re-take GCSE examinations in English and mathematics and successfully improve in their grades.
57. The school offers no course in any of general studies or personal, social and health education to complement the broad academic curriculum. Nor does it offer a general course in religious education for all students in the sixth form. This lack of a range of enrichment activities restricts students' opportunities to broaden their knowledge and aspirations. The provision of a religious education course is a statutory requirement. The previous inspection report also highlighted the lack of such a course and governors have failed to deal adequately with this issue. All students are able to engage in recreational activities every week, but not all choose to do so. The lack of regular enrichment activities is offset partly by students taking part in termly one-day conferences. During this term the conference focused on drugs education and related issues. This was the first opportunity for students in Year 12 to experience a large scale focused discussion. These conferences are a recent addition to the sixth form curriculum and have the potential to enable students to explore a number of issues, including aspects of citizenship.
58. Although key skills is not offered as a taught course, standards of communication and the application of number are satisfactory overall and students are able to apply these skills to help meet the challenges of their chosen subjects. The school has recognised the importance of information and communication technology, not least in its work associated with gaining Technology College status. In the very near future, students will have very good access to computers within the recently opened learning resource centre for private study.
59. Many students in the sixth form benefit from a programme of extra-curricular activities, which complements that provided in the main school. There are specific activities in sport, theatre visits, foreign exchanges, a school choir, music groups and a dance practitioners' class. The annual charities week, organised by sixth form students, is a major event in the life of the school. It raises very large amounts for charity and provides an excellent range of experiences that help develop students' talents and skills. Students are encouraged to take an active part in the wider school and some, for instance, offer their support to younger students as reading partners.
60. The provision of careers education and guidance for sixth form students is good. All students are able to have a careers interview. Advice on further education opportunities and on application to university for Year 13 students is very good. Students in technology develop knowledge of industrial processes through a work

⁸ Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education

placement as part of their study, but work experience is not a feature of provision for all sixth form students.

61. Overall provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and this has a positive impact on students' learning. An assembly each week provides students with the opportunity to consider and reflect on a range of moral and social issues. Not enough attention is given, either in lessons or in other activities, to the need to prepare students to take their place in a multi-cultural, multi-faith and multi-ethnic society. The school does not comply fully with the statutory requirement to enable all students to take part in a daily act of collective worship. This was an issue at the time of the previous inspection and has not been adequately dealt with.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

62. Assessment systems are good overall. Teachers have a detailed knowledge of examination board criteria. This knowledge is a real strength of sixth form provision. Teachers use it well to guide the marking of students' work and in giving constructive and informative feedback to students. The diagnosis of and provision for the learning needs of individual students are very good, especially in art, geography, English and psychology, and teachers provide high quality advice and support. Assessment procedures are at least good in all the subjects inspected. They are very good in business education, mathematics and design and technology and excellent in drama. Students are fully involved in the assessment process in individual subjects and are well aware of their own skills and how they can improve their grades in examinations. The quality of subject teachers' feedback also helps students to learn how to learn and take increasing responsibility for their learning.
63. The newly introduced academic monitoring system provides a sound framework for the overall monitoring of students' progress, which is satisfactory. It provides information for biannual reviews with students and annual reports to parents. The system does not, however, link well with the assessment processes used in individual subjects. Although assessment is good from subject to subject, there is inconsistency between subjects in the methods used. Thus, at present, the system lacks coherence, with potential confusion for students as a result. Accountability for students' overall performance is unclear to students, since no one person has the responsibility for overall monitoring of how each student is progressing.
64. Arrangements are in place for students to have targets in each subject they study in the sixth form. The minimum target grade, based on GCSE results, is a sensible starting point in setting these student targets. However, inflexibility in its use means that it often generates targets which lack challenge and which are, therefore, not helpful for students or their parents. The presentation both of this target and a predicted grade on the same report causes confusion and contributes to a lack of clarity in the annual reports to parents. An interim referral system, used between reviews, ensures that rapid action is taken where there is evidence of under-achievement, poor attendance or failure to meet deadlines for assignments. Parents are kept informed of any concerns.

Advice, support and guidance

65. The quality of support and advice to students is satisfactory. The prospectus gives clear information about the sixth form. A very good, well-planned induction programme and individual in-depth interviews with each applicant together ensure that students choose appropriate courses. This leads to high retention rates on courses and contributes to students' positive views about the sixth form.

66. Subject teachers provide good advice and guidance to students in their teaching groups and monitor attendance in lessons. Attendance in school, especially in Year 13, is less thoroughly monitored and published levels of attendance in the sixth form are low. However, attendance in lessons is much higher than registration records would indicate. This is because many students choose not to attend tutor group sessions regularly. While tutors spend time with their tutor group every day, this time is not successfully used for monitoring and supporting students. Although arrangements for monitoring attendance, providing support and guidance and ensuring students' health and safety are satisfactory, the students are unclear about who has overall responsibility for their welfare. Most students have more supportive relationships with their subject teachers than with their tutors.
67. The school provides good guidance about future courses, study and career opportunities. The careers library is adequate and the school has good arrangements for students to explore what is available to them. There is much more detailed preparation for higher education than for alternative career paths. Students consider that they are guided well and are both realistic and aspirational in their plans for the future. The inspection team finds little evidence to substantiate the concerns of some students, reflected in the student questionnaires⁹, about the quality of information provided to them.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

68. The leadership and management of the sixth form are satisfactory. The leadership stems mainly from the headteacher and his deputy, who provide a clear educational vision of what it means to be in the sixth form. This vision reflects the school's overall aims and values well. The vision is for a wide variety of courses to be offered at advanced level and for high standards to be expected. The realisation of this vision is reflected in the rise in examination results since the previous inspection. Students are also encouraged to become mature adults who take their responsibility to the local and wider community seriously.
69. The governors are well aware of the strengths of the sixth form and are very supportive of the teachers. 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 sixth form is cost-effective and the governors ensure that the principles of good value for money are applied. While governors are actively involved in helping 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 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 sixth form students.
70. The day-to-day management of the sixth form is satisfactory with several good aspects. Students are well supported, both academically and personally, by their subject teachers and conferences and courses help to prepare them for their life once they have left school. For example, they have to write an application letter and are given a mock interview for a job. They have a several sessions preparing them for higher education. They recently attended a half-day conference on drugs and alcohol awareness. These events are very well organised and students benefit greatly from them. Students are accepted into the sixth form based on their willingness to work hard and their potential to work to the best of their ability. There is no barrier to those

⁹ All sixth form students were invited to complete a questionnaire for inspectors before the start of the inspection.

who have not done as well as they might at GCSE. They are well supported by their subject teachers and by the head of the sixth form.

71. There is, however, no overall improvement plan that relates specifically to the sixth form and this means that there is no formal system for overseeing what is being offered to students. For example, there is little monitoring of the curriculum offered and thus gaps are not highlighted. Similarly, tutor time is not consistently used as a time for students to review their progress, to be guided on matters such as careers and to be helped through any difficulties. Many students thus regard it as simply a waste of time and they regularly choose not to attend. There is no formal content or programme for the tutor time and it is left to individual tutors to decide what to do. Too much responsibility is placed on students for seeking help. Students are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and appreciate the support that they receive from their subject teachers. They are, nevertheless, unclear that providing guidance and support is part of the tutors' role. The head of the sixth form has recently introduced a system of academic monitoring. This has the potential to ensure that problems are more easily identified, but most tutors are at an early stage of involvement with this initiative.
72. Overall, management within departments is good and is very good in departments such as German, mathematics, geography and business education. There are effective systems within departments for helping individual students to progress at an appropriate rate and students get high quality advice and guidance. A common area for development in management is in evaluating the work of the department. Most of the evaluation is done informally and without sufficient rigour. Thus, the system does not ensure consistency in teaching or identify and share strengths and areas of excellence.

Resources

73. The staffing in the sixth form is very good. There are sufficient teachers for all subjects and their qualifications are very well matched to the demands of the students. Results have improved since the last inspection and there is a shared commitment to improve still further. Teachers regularly attend training sessions to keep them up to date with their subject matter and are especially well informed on the new requirements for examinations. This knowledge they pass on effectively to students. The arrangements for performance management are satisfactory, but are not yet adequately linked to strategies for bringing about improvement in individual teachers' work.
74. The school has worked extremely hard since the last inspection to improve the accommodation and it is now of a very good quality in almost all areas. Work still remains to be done to improve the size of the rooms in subjects such as art and drama and to provide these practical subjects with the space that they require.
75. The resources in the sixth form are good overall. The learning resource centre has very recently being substantially enlarged to provide a purpose built block that will, very shortly, significantly increase the number of computers that students can use for their private study. There is a good range of books and general resources in departments to support students' studies in all areas.

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

76. 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	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	30	83		30		2.4	
Chemistry	29	89.7		27.6		2.6	
Biology	33	100		12		2.8	
Physics	25	80		24		2.3	
Design and technology	17	88.2		41.2		3.1	
Business studies	16	87.2		25		2.6	
Computer studies	14	100		57.1		3.4	
Physical education	14	100		28.6		3.1	
Art	26	88.5		50.0		3.2	
Music	2	100		50.0		2.5	
Drama	14	100		35.7		3.2	
Media studies	34	94.1		35.3		2.9	
Geography	20	100		70.0		4.1	
History	26	92.3		46.2		3.2	
Religious studies	18	91.1		61.1		3.7	
Politics	16	100		62.5		4.0	
Psychology	56	91.1		41.1		3.1	
English language	14	100		42.9		3.0	
English literature	26	96.2		23.1		2.8	
French	7	85.7		28.3		2.6	
German	5	100		80		4.4	

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	15	93.3		80		8.3	
Further mathematics	3	100		66.7		7.3	
Chemistry	20	95.0		35.0		6.0	
Biology	34	97.1		47.1		6.5	
Physics	16	100		62.5		7.3	

Design and technology	22	100		31.8		5.9	
Business studies	18	100		44.4		6.4	
Computer studies	14	100		35.7		6.3	
Physical education	10	100		40.0		6.6	
Art	11	100		72.7		7.8	
Drama	22	100		45.5		6.9	
Media studies	28	100		32.1		6.0	
Geography	20	95.0		50.0		6.7	
History	14	92.9		50.0		6.6	
Religious studies	5	100		40.0		6.8	
Politics	7	100		71.4		8.0	
Psychology	30	100		46.7		6.3	
English language	10	100		50.0		6.2	
English literature	19	100		31.6		5.8	
French	7	100		56.7		7.1	
German	3	66.7		33.3		4.0	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- The range of courses provided.
- Experienced teachers who have excellent subject knowledge.
- Teachers' enthusiasm for the subject, which motivates students to learn.
- Very good leadership and management.
- Increased use of computer technology in the preparation and presentation of lessons.

Areas for development

- More opportunities for students to undertake independent study.

77. In 2001 the standards achieved by students at GCE A level were below the national average, with males and females achieving similar proportions of the higher A and B grades. Almost all students achieved at least a grade E. In previous years, results in mathematics have fluctuated, though overall were slightly below average. In 2002 the school recorded its best ever results in A level mathematics, with four fifths of students gaining the higher grades. All but one student achieved better results than had been predicted. Male students achieved the greater proportion of the higher grades.
78. The 2001 student performance at AS level was well above the national average. A third of the Year 12 students who took the AS level examination in 2002 achieved the higher grades and all but five students achieved at least a grade E. This represents good achievement in comparison with their estimated grades. Generally, male students achieved a greater proportion of higher grades. Half of the 30 students who took AS level in Year 12 have returned to complete the A level course and two students are studying AS level in further mathematics. A good number of students take the opportunity to re-sit GCSE mathematics in Year 12 to improve their grades and they do so with notable success.
79. Students currently studying A level mathematics are achieving very well in lessons because they have been encouraged to think broadly about problem solving. Year 13 students studying the normal distribution, for instance, were able to apply their knowledge to practical situations within their experience. They then made good progress and achieved good standards when tackling more complex examples. Students in Year 12 have made a most encouraging beginning to their AS studies. This is because, in their planning, teachers are taking into account the breadth of students' ability and prior attainment and plan activities that reinforce students' knowledge and understanding. In turn, students are gaining the confidence to tackle more advanced work. The teaching of mathematical methods is evident in students' work and is underpinned by the high quality of students' note-taking and supporting examples.
80. Teaching in the sixth form is very good. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge and experience most effectively in the teaching of the methods and principles needed to approach standard problems in each of the modules studied. For example, skilled questioning by the teacher enabled a group of Year 12 students studying aspects of calculus to extend their understanding of a range of techniques. Teachers ensure that students understand topics before moving on and are particularly careful to support those students who did not follow the higher level course in their previous GCSE study.

81. Where teachers challenge them about the various methods used to solve problems and why they work, students begin to evolve a greater insight into understanding how and why these methods do or do not work. Teachers sometimes involve students in discussion or in the presentation of their solutions to the class, but greater student participation in lessons would improve their confidence and their ability to explain their mathematics. Teachers make very effective use of a range of new technology to present ideas. Students are also encouraged to use information and communication technology to enhance their learning and deepen their knowledge of particular topics. In all lessons, students receive effective individual support, praise and encouragement. This enables them to consolidate their learning and move on with greater confidence. Teachers currently do not make enough use of open-ended tasks or encourage students in independent research. These aspects of students' mathematical experience are thus less well developed.
82. Although students' work is marked and assessed, teachers do not always provide written comments guiding students on ways in which they could improve their work. However, discussion in class does much to give students pointers to how well they are doing and what needs to be improved. The department collects very good assessment information on each student and accurately predicts student's likely outcome in forthcoming examinations. Students are made aware of their predicted grades for the forthcoming examinations and this gives them targets to work for.
83. The enthusiasm for mathematics shown by all the teachers has a considerable impact on students and their attitudes to learning. Students are attentive and work well together, giving mutual help when necessary. The atmosphere in lessons reflects the very positive relationships that have been forged between students and their teachers. Lessons are challenging, with teachers having high expectations of what students will achieve. This motivates students to learn.
84. The overall leadership and management of mathematics in the sixth form are very good. Teachers share their expertise with one another and seek to improve their own knowledge and understanding of the subject and of how it can be taught effectively. Departmental guidance is extensive and schemes of work set out clearly what is to be taught. Teachers are very knowledgeable about the requirements of the examination courses and use this effectively to plan lessons. Resources for the teaching of sixth form lessons are good and are used well. The department has recently moved to new accommodation, overcoming a criticism from the previous inspection.

SCIENCES

The focus was on chemistry, biology and physics.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Attainment at A level, which is well above the national average.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students.
- The students demonstrate very good attitudes and behaviour.
- The teachers are experienced and well qualified.
- The course is well planned to deliver the examination syllabus.

Areas for improvement

- The use of computers in order to extend the range of teaching styles.
- The monitoring of teachers' work to support further improvement in all aspects of teaching and learning.

85. Results in A level chemistry have risen steadily over the six years since the last inspection. In 2001, results were well above the national average. There was no significant difference between the attainment of male and female students. In 2002, results were lower than in the previous year. The teachers have investigated the reasons for this decline. As a result, they have modified their approach to some aspects of coursework assessment and planning in order to revert to their previous high level of attainment. The department uses the previous attainment to set targets for each individual student and results clearly demonstrate that the majority of students achieve these. Attainment at AS level is lower than at A level. This is largely a consequence of the wide range of prior attainment of students taking the course. Overall, the achievement of Year 12 students is good. Students build successfully on their work in the first year in the sixth form and the achievement of students currently in Year 13 is very good.
86. In Year 12 the standard of work seen during the inspection is average, with students showing good levels of understanding of a range of ideas and demonstrating that they can think logically. The standards being produced by Year 13 students are well above the national average. These students can devise and perform practical investigations with great care and accuracy, setting up and testing hypotheses with skill and understanding. The written notes and assessments of students are complete, accurate and well presented. These notes will form a very good revision base for use in examination preparation.
87. The teaching of chemistry is very good. Lessons are well planned and resourced, using a variety of teaching styles. The students show a lively interest in the lessons and are actively involved in the planned activities. Teachers set up lessons that enable students to make very good progress when working independently. Students answer the questions asked of them with confidence and enter into detailed discussions about aspects of the work. They carry out practical work in a safe and effective manner. The progress and attainment of all students is assessed well and records are reviewed on a regular basis. Assessed tasks and homework are marked in detail, with many constructive comments that help the students improve.
88. Relationships between the teachers and students, as well as among the students themselves, are very good, especially in Year 13. This leads to a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere in lessons. Teachers have high expectations of students. They are supportive of the students, ensuring that they all understand the work covered. They do this by discussing the work on a one-to-one basis throughout lessons. Students appreciate the support and guidance given by the teachers and the fact that the teachers are prepared to help and assist. Year 12 students have found the

transition from GCSE easy because of the guidance from the teachers. They also appreciate the detailed marking and assessment of their work and feel this helps them make progress and raise their standards.

89. The leadership and management of the department are good. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The teachers are well qualified and experienced and they demonstrate good subject knowledge and enthusiasm. The department is aware of the need to maintain the assessment of student progress and give support where needed. The systematic monitoring of teaching and learning of all the staff in the department is not adequate to ensure that the improvement seen is continued further. The department is aware of the need to review the range of teaching styles in order to extend the use of relevant computer software in lessons.

Biology

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

Strengths

- The attainment of students at A level, which is well above the national average.
- The very good relationships seen between teachers and students.
- Students have very good attitudes to the subject.
- The teachers are experienced and well qualified.
- The course is well planned and taught.

Areas for improvement

- The use of computers in order to widen the range of teaching styles.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning in order to evaluate the impact of new approaches and initiatives.

90. In 2001 the GCE A level results were well above the national average. Results in 2002 were similar to those in the previous year. Results have improved steadily in the six years since the last inspection. The department's data on each student shows that the majority of students reach their predicted grades and in many cases exceed them. There is no significant difference between the attainment of male and female students. Attainment at AS level is lower than at A level, reflecting the broad range of prior attainment of students taking the course. Overall, achievement in Year 12 is good. Students in Year 13 who are continuing to study the subject to A level are achieving very well.
91. The standard of work seen in Year 13 during the inspection was well above the national average. In Year 12 the standard is close to the national average. Year 12 students, for example, showed a good understanding of the causes of cancer in a lesson that was very sensitively handled by the teacher. Their written notes and assessments were performed in a careful manner and students showed a pride in their work. Year 13 students were able to describe the role of regulators in plants and the structure of the nervous system in mammals with confidence and in accurate detail.
92. Teaching is very good and is linked effectively to a good assessment process that has been enhanced this year. Lessons are well planned and resourced. This gives them pace and a structure that maintains the interest and involvement of all students. Lessons observed incorporated several activities that enabled students to work independently or as a group. Students were able to answer the questions asked of them with confidence. Assessed tasks and homework are marked in detail, with many constructive comments being provided by teachers to help the students improve.

Relationships in lessons are very good. This gives rise to a very pleasant working atmosphere. Teachers are supportive of all the students and ensure they all understand the work covered by asking well-structured specific questions throughout lessons. Students appreciate the support and guidance given by the teachers and the fact that the teachers are prepared to help and assist. They are fully aware of their current attainment and what is required of them for improvement in the future.

93. The leadership and management of the department are good. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The monitoring of students' progress is satisfactory, but the department is aware of the need to improve further the assessment of student progress so that suitable support can be given to students who start to fall below their potential grade. There is also a need to extend the monitoring of teaching and learning of all the staff. This is because the department is not currently in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of new initiatives and approaches. The department is also aware of the need to incorporate additional techniques that will support learning, such as extending the use of relevant computer software within lessons.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Good quality of teaching, which helps students to achieve well.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students.
- Good advice and support for students.

Areas for development

- Evaluation and development of teaching in the subject.
- Systematic monitoring of students' progress and the use of this information to inform planning.
- Clarity of leadership of the newly stabilised teaching team.

94. In the 2001 examinations A level results were below the national average. The school's records show, however, that these results were as expected when taking into account the prior attainment of the students involved. In 2002, results improved significantly, with many students performing better than expected. This represents good levels of achievement. The number of females studying physics is very small, so that it is not possible to make statistically significant comparisons of their results with those of their more numerous male peers.
95. Standards of work, as seen during the inspection, are average. They are higher in Year 13 than in Year 12. The highest attaining students rearrange and use complicated formulae, such as that for potential energy of a satellite orbiting the earth, to solve problems. Lower attaining students remember definitions and formulae, but find difficulty in choosing, rearranging and using these. Year 13 students show higher standards in mechanics than in waves, while Year 12 students show comparable standards in the modules they are studying. Standards of practical skills are at least as good as levels of knowledge and understanding. Students are achieving well because they are taught well and are interested in their subject. The most able students make good progress, attaining the highest grades and developing a very holistic understanding of physics as a living, evolving science.

96. The overall quality of teaching is good. Some lessons are excellent. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and are very well informed about examination board requirements. This helps them ensure that students are well prepared for both module tests and practical examinations. Students are encouraged to work independently and to experiment with practical techniques. Teachers develop very good relationships with students. In the best lessons the learning activities are varied, work is relevant to students' interests and a very good pace is maintained. For example, in a Year 13 lesson a brisk introduction enabled students individually to review and consolidate knowledge and understanding that had been shown to be insecure in a recent test. This was followed by a cycle of activities putting the knowledge and understanding into a practical context. The teacher's individual discussions with students encouraged them to link theory and practice, to maintain a good pace, to consider the implications of their findings and to explore beyond the syllabus. Their learning was, therefore, excellent. Where teaching is good rather than excellent, there is more direction by the teacher, the pace is more modest and students are not actively encouraged to hypothesise and reflect on their work. Students complete the practical work set, but do not always identify links with related theory and they show limited curiosity beyond the experiment. Teachers provide a great deal of individual feedback to students, both verbally and in writing when assessing their work. Students enjoy the subject and work hard. When encouraged to do so, they develop as independent learners, using information and communication technology and the library to support this.
97. Leadership and management are satisfactory. There has been a substantial turnover of staff over the years since the last inspection and, for a period, there were significant recruitment problems. The subject is now fully staffed with very well qualified teachers. Outline long-term plans and recently prepared schemes of work provide a framework for the team. Although there is no written development plan for sixth form physics, there are targets for student outcomes and a number of priorities identified, arising out of the relatively poor results in 2001. These have already led to an improvement in 2002. However, there is a lack of clear direction for the newly stabilised team of staff and the management of the subject is not sufficiently systematic or thorough. For example, the progress of students in the early stages of Year 12 is not being monitored across the subject, even though under-achievement in Year 12 has been identified as a priority to address. Similarly, the quality of teaching is not being evaluated, even for staff new to the school, and there is no structure for sharing the good practice that exists in the subject.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

98. The focus was on design and technology. Food technology was also sampled. This AS course in food technology is in its first year and one lesson was seen. Learning is very good and attitudes are very positive as a result of the very good specialist teaching. Standards are in line with course expectations.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths.

- Teachers use their specialist skills well.
- Students' attitudes to their learning are very good.
- Resources for learning, particularly computer-aided design, are very good.

- Systems for monitoring work and advising students are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The use of information and communication technology.
- The rigorous evaluation of teachers' work in order to effect continued departmental improvement.

99. Since the previous inspection, standards have improved and, in 2001, A level results were above the national average for design and technology. In 2002 results were similar to those in the previous year, with females achieving better than males. The number of students gaining A and B grades has declined, however, in recent years. Results in 2002 AS level examinations were good and represented a significant improvement on those in the previous year.
100. The standards of students currently in Year 13 are above average and students have, in most cases, well-developed design skills. In the development of their project work they demonstrate understanding of a range of materials and processes. Levels of independence and maturity are good and this helps learning. Students make very good progress with their skills in product analysis as a result of specialist teaching that involves and challenges them through questioning and class discussion.
101. Homework is linked to study in class and is used well to develop knowledge and understanding. For instance, in some lessons students gave short presentations to the rest of the class based upon their own research of ferrous and non-ferrous metals. The teacher consolidated this learning very effectively through further discussion and practical analysis of a range of metal objects. Students have very positive attitudes and work well in groups to discuss their ideas about, for example, manufacturing methods. The rigorous assessment and monitoring of work enables students to understand how to improve and achieve high standards. The school's Technology College status has provided industrial placements for many of the students and this has given them a valuable insight into industrial practices.
102. In Year 12, students are making good progress developing their graphical skills and techniques from Year 11 and are working at the expected standard. Students follow a product design course with an emphasis either on graphics or resistant materials. They develop their designing skills as a group and have separate lessons for graphics and resistant materials. Teaching is by a number of different staff, but the improved project monitoring systems put in place at the start of the year enable all teachers to monitor progress and give written comment on how to improve. Students with hearing impairment are very well supported by learning assistants and this ensures they make similar progress to other students.
103. Teachers use questioning skilfully. In a lesson on design methodology, for instance, the teacher gave concise illustrations and examples of the different applications and uses of models, prototypes and mock-ups. The teacher backed these up with questioning to check students' understanding and consolidated their learning. Students make use of computers in the development and presentation of their work, but the use of computer-aided design is not a strong feature of their work to date. Good use is made of practical experiences. For instance, a teacher developed students' knowledge of silversmithing construction and heat treatment methods through a short practical task. This ensured students used their knowledge and practical skills very effectively to design and make more complex items using copper sheet. Progress over the lesson was consequently very good and the standards of practical work produced were above average.

104. Teaching is good overall with some very good features. In the best lessons teachers use their knowledge and assessment of students' progress to plan lessons that build effectively on earlier learning. They also use a wide range of methods to involve students in their learning and ensure a very good pace to lessons. This rigour in planning and range of methodology is, however, not yet of a consistently high standard across the department. For example, in a lesson with a visiting speaker, the teacher failed to provide guidance and a structure for the speaker prior to the lesson and this meant that learning opportunities were missed. Evaluation of assessment methods has led to improvements in monitoring project work and the quality of information provided to students. Team teaching also enables good discussion with individuals about their work and ensures that temporary teachers are fully supported. Teachers are becoming more familiar with the new requirements of the examinations and this is improving the guidance they give to students.
105. Day to day running of the department is continuing under the guidance of another member of the department during the temporary absence of the head of faculty. The team of teachers are working successfully to sustain standards. Adequate monitoring of teaching and learning has not taken place to evaluate changes already implemented or consider issues arising from the analysis of examination performance. Although workshop space remains limited, there has been considerable improvement in accommodation since the previous inspection. The school's success in gaining Technology College status has provided more resources for computer-aided design. The full impact of these improvements is not yet evident in the work of all students as not all teachers are regularly using the new resources in their teaching.

BUSINESS

106. A good range of business courses is provided. In the sixth form, AS, A2 and GNVQ intermediate courses help meet the needs of a wide range of students. About half of AS and A2 students have previously taken GCSE in business studies, but this is not a requirement for entry to the course.

Business

Overall, the quality of provision for business education is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching, which helps students make very good progress.
- Very good marking and assessment.
- Very good relationships with teachers, which help students remain very well motivated and encourage very good attitudes to work.

Areas for improvement

- Students' use of information and communication technology (ICT) in lessons.
- Planned work experience placements to enrich students' business learning.

107. Overall, standards in business are average. Results in A level business examinations have improved significantly since the last inspection, where they were below average. Students make very good progress given their previous performance in GCSE and develop very good attitudes to their work because consistently good teaching enables almost all students to reach their potential.
108. In 2001 A level business results were average, though male students attained above the school and national average and made more progress over time than did females. In 2002, students on the new A2 course obtained similar results to those in 2001 and

on the new AS course Year 12 AS results were above average. Students taking intermediate GNVQ¹⁰ tend to obtain pass rather than merit grades and this is below national expectations. However, in 2002, 12 of the 13 students entered passed, which is above the average pass rate, showing considerable improvement from 2001. Results, overall, suggest that both female and male students' make very good progress, often exceeding teachers' expectations.

109. The work of students currently studying the subject is average. Students are making good progress because of teachers' very good assessment techniques, which help each individual improve and fulfil her or his potential. In good lessons seen, Year 12 AS level students gained a good knowledge and understanding of factors affecting where businesses locate and developed satisfactory discussion skills. They did not, however, sufficiently explore economic concepts and relationships in their case study work and their evaluations lacked depth and rigour. Year 13 students developed sound skills of calculating the net present value of investment projects with the help of clear and well structured guidance from the teacher. This helped sustain their interest and motivation in what is usually a difficult topic to understand. Students did not, however, read around the topic enough or use ICT to model investment appraisal solutions by altering key factors such as interest rate to analyse possible effects.
110. On the intermediate GNVQ course, students make good progress on their individual assignments and show good understanding of the ways businesses are owned and financed. Written work seen was below national expectations because average and weaker students did not use word processing enough to build their descriptions of business concepts and evaluation was weak because it lacked suggestions for improvement.
111. Completed Year 13 A level coursework projects are well presented and in the best work students explore liquidity ratios for their chosen local business well and make good use of internet research. Analyses are generally sound, but the majority of students do not fully evaluate financial data and produce limited suggestions for improvement. Generally, students show insufficient understanding of how ICT can be used to improve business performance or evaluate research data.
112. Teaching and learning are good. Students are very well motivated and interested in their work because teachers have very supportive relationships with them. Teachers mark students' work frequently and in detail. They often refer to the examination boards' marking scheme and indicate specific targets for students to achieve. This helps students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
113. GNVQ students get a great deal of personal tuition in the small class. This helps all students, including those with special educational needs, to make good progress. In less effective lessons, teachers sometimes miss opportunities to improve students' key skills in communication and ICT. Students do not always know when presentations are due to take place. They are very pleased with their overall progress, but feel they do not use ICT enough in class, or go on short work placements in local businesses to develop project work.
114. Leadership and management of business are good. A strong, experienced, staff team keeps up to date through training and has built up good local industry links for student visits. A Young Enterprise club is run in Year 10, but not currently in Year 12. Well-focused departmental plans recognise the need for further development of local

¹⁰ General National Vocational Qualifications

business links to improve students' learning. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good and the subject is well placed to improve further.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

115. Work was sampled in this curriculum area. In a lesson leading to AS level information and communication technology, teaching was good, enabling students to achieve well. Their overall standard of work was average.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

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

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

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

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

118. The focus in this curriculum area was on art and on drama. Work was also sampled in art textiles and art photography. Standards in both the lessons seen were above average with good learning taking place. Levels of independence and motivation were very good and were well supported by the specialist teaching. The numbers of students choosing to take both courses are increasing. Standards are high at AS level in both areas and are very high in photography at A2 level.

Art

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

Strengths

- The sustained high standards at advanced level.
- Standards in the AS examination are high.
- Specialist teaching is very good and supports highly individual work.
- Students' attitudes and independence are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Evaluation of teaching styles to the widening ability range.
- More class discussions and sharing of ideas.

119. Since the previous inspection, standards have been consistently above the national average for both male and female students. In 2001 A level results were above the national average, with over half the candidates achieving either A or B grades. In the AS examination, standards were also good. Art is a popular and successful subject and each year a number of students go on to study art related subjects in higher education.

120. Current Year 13 male and female students achieved well in their AS examinations in 2002. The number of male students following art courses has increased and they are achieving well. Teaching focuses very much on giving individual advice and support and this helps students develop personal study skills and pursue highly individual lines

of experimentation and research. Students work with confidence in a wide range of media and handle complex concepts in their compositions. In the best work, students make clear references to the work of artists and use these effectively in the development of their compositions. Many students make use of computers for research and a few use them to experiment and develop ideas. The use of a sketchbook as a means of developing artistic thinking is very good, with students often doing considerable work in their own time. Attitudes to art are very positive and this, coupled with the support and encouragement from teachers, leads to very good learning. In an observed lesson, Year 12 students working on the theme of 'a sense of place' had developed a range of reference materials that included their own direct observations and photography. The teacher gave a brief review of the examination criteria and supported individuals very effectively. This enabled them to make very good progress and experiment confidently with media.

121. The specialist teaching is very good. Teachers do not seek to impose a particular style or method of working. They thus ensure each student has the opportunity to develop his or her own responses to a range of subject matter. Students are directed to specific areas of study and within these they are supported in developing highly personal work. The teacher provides regular written comments and evaluation for each student and this leads to very good progress and confident and mature work. The open entry policy of the department has enabled students with a wide ability range to follow an art course. Through well-focused individual teaching these students are supported in developing their composition and drawing skills. Teaching is very focused on the individual and this means it sometimes misses learning opportunities to engage students in whole class discussions to share knowledge and ideas.
122. The department is very well led and this ensures a very strong team approach. As at the time of the previous inspection, accommodation is cramped and is now under increased pressure from the number of students who opt for art. The department works hard to overcome these constraints, which include the lack of any departmental office for storage of documentation and other materials. Many students also follow photography or art textiles courses. These skills and experiences contribute to a rich and stimulating environment in which students make very good progress with their learning. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching has, in line with school guidelines, focused on the teaching. Departmental evaluation now needs to focus on the range and effectiveness of methods used to support all students' learning. Displays of a wide range of artwork enhance many areas of the school and celebrate students' achievements. The department has very good links with local colleges and other institutions that contribute to the quality of advice and experiences provided for students. Many students benefit, for example, from attending evening classes. The richness and quality of artwork has been recognised by the local diocese and the school has on two recent occasions been invited to provide and mount all the exhibits at an annual religious convention in Derbyshire.

Drama

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

Strengths

- Students are taught very well.
- Standards are above average in the work seen.
- Results have been consistently good and are continuing to improve.
- Students follow a very wide and enriched curriculum.

- Very good assessment systems.

Areas for improvement

- Appropriate and sufficient storage space.
- Appropriate information and communication technology (ICT) resources to support courses.
- The management structure in place to support the work of the department.
- Specific support for the analytical and critical writing demands of the coursework.

123. The overall provision for drama in the sixth form is good. Standards on entry to the course are very slightly above average. Results in A level examinations are above average and have improved in recent years. In 2001, results were above average, with all students gaining at least an E grade. However, no student gained an A grade. A similar pattern of results emerged in 2002. These results represent very good progress by the students involved. Standards of work seen during the inspection were broadly average in Year 12 and above average in Year 13.
124. Much of the work is done in groups and this reveals very good relationships between the students. They trust each other and engage in very productive debates over the staging of pieces of theatre. For instance, when planning the staging of Miller's 'A View from the Bridge', some students made the initial plan for the 3D scale model, on the board, sketching and modifying as they proceeded, while the other group planned the effective movements of characters around the allotted spaces. This they were able to do because of the quality of the previous discussion. Students listen carefully to each other, they concentrate hard and are efficient in assembling a very good range of elements which they think should be included. This represents good learning and good achievement. Students are very well taught and so are helped to make reasoned, informed and intelligent decisions on the basis of the knowledge which they have already acquired.
125. By the time they are in Year 13, students have a very good sense of joint endeavour. Their attainment is above average in their technical knowledge and in their understanding of how all the various skills and necessary considerations fit together to form theatre. Their work seen during the inspection on their devised piece for assessment showed very careful thought, good work records and a generous ability to appraise their own and others' work.
126. The quality of teaching is very good, leading to very good learning. The hallmarks of the teaching are the teachers' commitment to the fulfilment and advancement of the students, the equality of access for everyone to all the work of the department and the high expectations of success. Very good assessment procedures ensure that students know how they are doing and also precisely how to improve their work. There are very good and productive relationships between the teachers and the students. The characteristics of successful learning were very well illustrated by the highly professional and hilarious rehearsal of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' held at lunchtime during the inspection. All present maintained high levels of concentration throughout and when the group moved on to the prologue to the play within a play the atmosphere was one of focused efficiency and huge enjoyment.
127. There is a very wide range of extended curriculum activities, such as theatre visits, visits to the school by theatre-in-education groups, workshops at the Bristol Old Vic and school performances, in addition to the practical aspects of the examination courses. These all make a significant contribution to the range of theatre experienced by the students.

128. Currently the critical analysis of written coursework lacks the rigour to enable students to gain the highest grades. The students are constrained by the lack of a computer-aided design package as support for their studies and by the lack of word processing facilities in the department for those students who do not have easy access to this technology. There is also a lack of suitable storage space for the resources for the subject. The drama department is not part of a faculty and this restricts the potential for the sharing of ideas between drama and subjects such as art, media studies and music.
129. At the time of the last inspection the subject was taught as part of the English curriculum and, therefore, was not a separate department. However, several developments and improvements in the school's provision for drama have been made since that time, most notably in the results attained by students and in the very good and efficient assessment procedures now in place.

HUMANITIES

130. The focus was on geography, but religious education and history were also sampled. In religious education and history, examination results were well above average in 2001. In the 2002 A level examinations, results in religious education fell slightly but were still good. All students gained a pass grade and 40 per cent gained A and B grades. One lesson in Year 13 was observed. The teaching here was excellent. Very effective use of information and communication technology enabled students to progress well with their learning. In history, A level examination results in 2002 also fell slightly. Although nearly all students secured at least an E grade, only 20 per cent gained A and B grades. One Year 13 lesson was seen, in which the quality of teaching was good. A high quality discussion and the use of appropriate resources enabled students to make good progress.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Results, which are consistently well above average.
- Students have a good knowledge and understanding of physical and human processes.
- Very good teaching.
- Good leadership and management of the department.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for students to use information and communication technology.
- More formal procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the department.

131. The GCE A level results this summer showed a continuation of previous years' results, which have been well above average. Male and female students do equally well. In 2001, results were above the national average. Almost all students gained at least a grade E and a half of all students gained A and B grades. Students make very good progress in relation to their GCSE results, with most doing better than expected. AS level results were also very good. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade and 70 per cent gained A and B grades. Most students completed the course and in relation to their GCSE results most students did better than expected.

132. The standards of work of current students are also well above average. In Year 13, students are achieving well compared to predictions based on their GCSE results. In the lessons seen, they are doing well as a result of very good teaching. For example, in a lesson on glaciation students made very good progress in developing their understanding about glaciers. They could interpret complex information from graphs and explain how glaciers move. In a lesson on the location of the iron and steel industry in South Wales students demonstrated a very good understanding of locational factors and their use of analytical skills.
133. Students in Year 12 are also achieving very well because of very good teaching. They show a good knowledge and understanding of physical and human processes and are proficient in the use of geographical skills and techniques. In one lesson, students made very good progress in developing their understanding of factors influencing migration and demonstrated a satisfactory knowledge of place and the use of mapping skills. In another lesson, students were exploring the evidence for continental drift. They showed a very good understanding of the subject matter and could explain it accurately using the appropriate technical language.
134. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very well as a result. The teachers are subject specialists and provide high quality explanations of the subject matter. They ask pertinent questions and provide case study information to extend students' thinking. They teach the lessons with enthusiasm and students are well supported by a range of resources. In some lessons teachers make very good use of information and communication technology to help explain the subject matter. For example, in one Year 13 lesson the presentation included the electronic presentation of a range of aerial photographs and key features. This supported students well with note-making and with a mapwork task. In a very good lesson on glaciation the teacher provided high quality explanations and asked challenging questions of the students. The use of a video and additional resources enabled the students to acquire a detailed knowledge and understanding of the complex processes involved. Assessment and marking are strong features of the teaching. Marking is consistently accurate and provides students with a clear picture of the strengths and weaknesses in their work and what they need to do to achieve higher standards.
135. Students are given very good support with essay writing and lists of key words are provided as a summary to each unit of study. Analysis of previous work shows this has a positive impact on the quality of their written assignments and examination answers, which are consistently of a high standard. Written work is well structured, geographical terminology is used accurately and students show a good understanding of physical and human processes. In Year 13, for instance, good examples of such work were seen in assignments on soils and meteorology. In Year 12, examples of written work on hydrology show students' ability to interpret information from graphs and their understanding of the components of the hydrological cycle. Although standards in literacy and numeracy are high, there is only limited use and application of information and communication technology evident in their work.
136. Students make very good progress in their learning. In all lessons seen, relationships were very good and students displayed positive attitudes. They were confident in discussions and worked productively in class. Teachers give students very good guidance with assignments and this supports them well with their independent study.
137. The subject is well led and managed. High quality staff, teamwork, good quality accommodation and resources all contribute effectively to students' learning. The curriculum is enhanced in Year 12 through fieldwork activities. Although analysis of examination data is good, there are inadequate formal approaches to monitoring and

evaluating the work of the department. As a result, best practice is not adequately shared among all teachers of the subject.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **good**.

Strengths

- Above average attainment by the end of the course and good achievement.
- Some very good aspects of teaching and learning.
- Very good personal support and guidance for students.
- Good resources.

Areas to be developed

- Increased use of independent work, for example information research, extended writing, group discussion and investigation.
- Further development of key skills, including numeracy and the use of information and communication technology.

138. Results at AS level in 2001 were above average, while those at A level were well above average. A level results have been consistently above average since 1993 and, in most years, also above results in other subjects in the school. In 2002, results fell back somewhat, but were nevertheless close to the school average. Female students did better than males at AS level. On the other hand, males did better at A2, so there is no evidence of sustained difference between different genders.
139. Overall, achievement of students is good. The standards of students currently studying psychology meet expectations in Year 12 and exceed them in Year 13. The current Year 12 students started the course with average GCSE results, but have now reached AS expectations and are particularly strong in the ability to evaluate the core studies. The current Year 13 students were above average at the start of the A2 course and have made positive gains compared with their GCSE predictions.
140. Students' attitudes are very good and they are very keen on the subject. This is because teachers make the subject interesting and relevant to students' interests and aspirations. Teachers provide very good support for all students. Especially helpful is the guidance that teachers give to all students on how to improve the standard of their work. The quality of this guidance is the outcome of very good assessment of students' work. In one set of work samples seen, such guidance had led one student to progress very well in essay writing.
141. Teaching is good. The teachers are charismatic and entertaining and presentation of material is one of their strengths. Subject knowledge is very good and the lessons are characterised by very well planned teaching materials. In response, students' learning is good and interest levels very high. Students value practical activities, which are used to enliven the teaching. Learning is good and Year 13 students were able to use previously learned concepts to aid their understanding, such as cognitive labelling and Hans Selye's work on stress. During the inspection week a number of new topics were being introduced and lessons were characterised by a limited range of teaching styles. There was too much lecturing, albeit of very good quality, and too little independent work or active learning on the part of the students. The introduction of research methods was done well, but the students were over-directed on the choice of data handling techniques. This reduced their ability to select for themselves. The more reticent students did not participate as well in plenary discussions as they might have

done in individual, paired or group work. During the inspection week, the lack of independent learning limited the provision for all students and the most able students in particular.

142. The curriculum is good. The course makes a very good contribution to work on environmental and health psychology. Evaluative skills are strongly promoted in the Year 12 core studies, although the Year 12 students do little extended writing and the Year 13 students' essays are not yet up to the standard that they are capable of. Students make use of a range of information and communication technology in presenting coursework, but insufficient use of this is made for research. The course raises issues such as the ethics of experimentation and the cultural and social dimensions of health care and overcrowding in the third world. Thus it also makes a good contribution to citizenship.
143. Management of the subject is good. The schemes of work for some modules are newly created but effective, with very good case studies with specific reference to all the authorities that students need to evaluate, compare and cite, for example Derogowski's work on perception in Year 12. The curriculum is enriched by revision conferences and lunchtime sessions. Resources are good, having been much developed over the years. Their greatest strength is materials produced by the teachers, but they also include textbooks and good library provision. Staffing has changed in the past year, but a combination of backgrounds brings valuable experience into the course. Accommodation is well used, but the condition of the huts is only just satisfactory.
144. No mention of psychology was made in the previous report, but standards have been maintained at a high level for several years and the numbers taking the subject have much increased. Hence, improvement in recent years has been good.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus in this curriculum area was on English, French and German.

English

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average and students achieve well.
- Teaching is good.
- English is led and managed well.
- Students feel that teachers value their views and they enjoy the intellectual challenge of English.

Areas for improvement

- The evaluation of teaching quality.
- The use of information and communication technology in English.

145. Results in GCE A level examinations were well above average in 2001. In recent years all students have gained at least a grade E and the proportion gaining A and B grades has been above average. Results in 2002 were a little lower than in the previous year. Results have been higher in English language than English literature. Many students do very well in English because they have been prepared well at GCSE, they are taught well and are highly motivated. Most complete the AS level courses and embark confidently on the A2 courses in Year 13, with male students tending to do as well as females.
146. The standards of work of students currently in Year 13 are well above average and most are achieving very well. Teachers encourage students to achieve their full potential and many students write extended essays and projects which are well above average. Students are able to examine texts by contemporary writers and compare the underlying concepts with their own beliefs in an insightful way. The quality of their vocabulary is very good and they use terms such as paralinguistics and idiolect relevantly and perceptively. Students draw accurate conclusions because the quality of their research is focused, innovative, sharp and detailed and many are highly articulate.
147. Students are almost invariably animated learners who show a great love for the intellectual challenges of their studies and this often has a very positive impact on the progress they make. They put in a lot of hard work at home in drafting their writing and in using computers for research, but do not have adequate facilities at school for individual private study. The school hopes to address this problem in the very near future with the opening of the learning resource centre for sixth-formers. However, students do not use information and communication technology often enough in their day-to-day classroom work.
148. The overall quality of teaching is good. There are some instances of excellent teaching. One of the great strengths of sixth form English teaching is teachers' very good subject knowledge, which engenders learning of a high quality. Students speak of charismatic and caring teachers with much individual flair. In an excellent lesson analysing speech and language the teacher created a lively, intellectual ethos for students to explore and share their research with each other. As a result, the quality of their thinking was high. Where, rarely, teaching is less effective, it is because learning objectives are vague and teaching strategies are not varied enough.
149. The curriculum for language, literature and media studies at both AS and A2 level is very thorough, interesting and challenging. It is further enhanced by a broad range of extra-curricular visits to theatres and on residential courses. Teachers provide students with extremely good advice and support in terms of ongoing assessment of their work and involve them fully in evaluating their own work and that of their peers. This is a key strength of the department.
150. English is well led and managed by an excellent teacher who provides a clear direction to the subject. The department is staffed with teachers with an eclectic mix of experience and enthusiasm. New entrants to the profession are given very good support. Accommodation and resources are both very good, apart from the inadequate number of computers and their use in English classrooms. Although the monitoring of teaching is well-planned and occurs regularly, it lacks the sharpness necessary to identify weaknesses and does not focus enough on how to improve the quality of learning.

French

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

Strengths

- Students are very well prepared for the demands of the examination.
- Teachers transmit their enthusiasm for the language well and students enjoy the lessons.
- Most students benefit from spending time abroad and return with improved spoken skills.

Areas for development

- Consistency in the quality of written work.
- The correction by teachers of oral work in class.
- Students' filing of work, so that they can refer to it later.

151. In the A2 examination in 2001, students achieved results that were well above the national average, although over the past three years results have varied from well above average to well below. In AS examinations, students achieved results that were below the national figure. In general, students performed better at both AS and A2 than would be expected given their results in the GCSE. Boys performed as well as girls. In 2002, results were a little lower than those in the previous year, but relatively few students take the subject and so comparisons need to be treated with care.

152. Students currently studying the subject are achieving good standards given the GCSE results that they obtained in Year 11. Students in Year 13 are able to understand complex language and ideas on subjects such as pollution or political issues in France. During Year 12, students develop their ideas and are prepared to read difficult texts and persevere until they understand. By the time students reach Year 13, their spoken language is satisfactory. On occasions, students speak confidently and at length, but sometimes their spoken language lacks accuracy and fluency. Those students who have the opportunity to visit France and work in primary schools as 'mini-assistants' benefit from the experience and return with much improved pronunciation and fluency. Teachers concentrate on improving students' knowledge of grammar during Year 12. The quality of students' written work, however, still varies greatly. The most able use complex language and express their opinions and arguments clearly. For example, they can write about how AIDS affects society or the rise of the far right in France. The least able have a limited recall of vocabulary related to the topic and make basic grammatical errors in their written French. There are currently no students from minority ethnic groups or students for whom English is an additional language taking French in the sixth form.

153. The overall quality of teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and students are very well prepared for the demands of the examination. Students benefit from an overview of the course that sets out clearly what is involved and they are very clear about the coursework requirements. They produce some good work and are given good guidance about how to tackle the topic that they have chosen and how to improve their marks. Teachers transmit their enthusiasm for 'all things French' and use interesting materials such as songs and videos that help students to understand the cultural background of French speaking countries. Books, magazines and topical articles are a regular feature of the work and students enjoy reading these. Teachers ask students to work on reading passages at home before the lesson so that basic difficulties have been ironed out before they arrive to a lesson. This encourages weaker students, who have time to persevere with extensive texts. Teachers also offer

to help students outside lessons with problems that they may have and this enables students to make good progress. The marking of written work encourages students to improve both content and accuracy. Teachers are more reluctant to correct students' spoken work and sometimes they allow errors in pronunciation to go unchecked.

154. Students have positive attitudes to learning a language and work hard. However, some of them have problems organising their work in such a way that they can use it for future reference. Many are very dependent on the teacher to guide them and to supervise their studies. Students are encouraged to use the Internet in their free time to research topics and extend their knowledge. Teachers use information and communication technology well during lessons.
155. The leadership and management of the French department are good. The new acting head of department has had little time to monitor or influence the work of the teachers of French as yet. There has been a concerted effort to tailor the teaching to the requirements of the examination that has led to improved results. The provision in French is the same as at the last inspection, with students continuing to make good progress.

German

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

Strengths

- Results have risen over the past three years.
- Students are very well prepared for the demands of the examination.
- Students make very good progress in understanding and reading texts.
- Students use computers very well to practise grammar and to research topics on the internet.

Areas for development

- The quality of students' spoken work, especially those who have not been abroad.
- The amount of work that students undertake outside lessons.

156. Results in 2001, both at AS and A2 level, were above average. Over the past three years there has been a rise in the number of students with the higher grades. At both AS and A2 levels, students attained results in 2001 that were well above what would be expected, given their grades at GCSE. Results were similar in 2002.
157. Students in the current Years 12 and 13 are achieving very well given their grades at GCSE. There is no significant difference in the performance of different groups of students. In Year 12 the teachers put much emphasis on revising key grammar points to enable students to sort out any difficulties they might have. There is, nevertheless, an exceptionally wide variation in the knowledge that students have when joining the course and teachers have to work very hard to ensure that there is sufficient revision for some and new work for others.
158. Most students are able to understand authentic German from tapes and videos by the end of Year 12. This skill improves rapidly during the course through regular practice. Students in Year 13 have a good knowledge of subjects such as immigration and the causes and effects of racism. They understand tapes and newspaper articles on these issues well. Students still make errors in writing, even in Year 13, of case and word order, but when they check their work carefully they often eradicate them. The most able use complex language and express their opinions and arguments clearly. Others

have ideas that they express more simply and with less accuracy. In spoken work, students argue their case convincingly when given time to prepare their thoughts, but only the more able do so spontaneously. For example, one student sustained a heated argument with the teacher on the importance of nationality and gave opinions on areas from the introduction of the Euro to the political system in Germany. The range of spoken performance among students is wide. The most fluent are the students who have managed to spend time abroad practising their German.

159. Teaching is very good and leads to very good learning. A particular strength is the way that students are encouraged to practise what they have been taught, using the computer. They use tasks that have been specifically written by the teacher to help them. Information and communication technology is used extremely well by teachers during lessons to explain new concepts. Students are also encouraged to use the Internet in their free time to research their coursework topics and extend their knowledge and to e-mail contacts abroad. When reading German, students are given some difficult texts in class and are often asked to prepare these at home. They do this well. As a result the lesson can move on to discuss the key ideas without spending too long checking vocabulary. Students are also given some materials to use at home in order to improve their listening skills, but not all do this regularly.
160. Many lessons are well planned, with resources that are interesting and up to date, reflecting what is happening currently in Germany. Teachers clearly know a great deal about Germany and enjoy passing on their knowledge. When students are challenged to tackle difficult current issues, such as racism, they do so well and are able to express their opinions clearly. However, most are heavily dependent on the teacher for their information, rarely finding out new things for themselves. Students use dictionaries and refer to notes they have made on grammar, for example, but have to be reminded to do so. Most female students keep their work in such a way that they can easily revise from their files, but the same is not true of the male students.
161. The marking of written work is detailed and suggests to students how they might improve both content and accuracy. Students are very well prepared for the examination. They know what is expected and are given good feedback about how to get better grades.
162. The leadership and management of the sixth form course are very good. Teachers regularly work together to plan the course so that improvements can be made when necessary to meet the needs of the students. Students in Year 12 who are having difficulties are closely monitored and supported, which enables them to complete the course. Students are encouraged to use their German outside the classroom. Although there is no foreign language assistant, the trips and language events they attend significantly improve their language skills and motivation. Progress since the last inspection has been very good. The number of students gaining higher grades has risen and the quality of the teaching is now very good.