

INSPECTION REPORT

BURNTWOOD SCHOOL

Wandsworth

LEA area: Wandsworth

Unique reference number: 101059

Principal: Helen Dorfman

Reporting inspector: Clare Gillies

Dates of inspection: 11th - 15th November 2002

Inspection number: 249546

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of students:	11 to 19 years
Gender of students:	Girls (and a few boys in the sixth form)
School address:	Burntwood Lane London
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Telephone number:	020 8946 6201
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J Tross
Date of previous inspection:	March 1997

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8992	Mr J Vischer	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development The school's care for its students
4359	Ms W Hola	Team inspector	Mathematics	
7483	Mr R Donne	Team inspector	French	Curricular and other opportunities for students
23380	Ms O Hall	Team inspector	Art	
10895	Mr D Wasp	Team inspector	History Sociology	
2561	Mr A Byrne	Team inspector	English Media studies	
23522	Dr E Sidwell	Team inspector	Geography	
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10060	Mr D Gutmann	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Burntwood is a much larger than average, foundation, 11-19, comprehensive girls' school with 1722 students, of whom 331 are in the sixth form, which includes 20 boys. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals, 22 per cent, is falling, but it is still above average. About one in ten students has special educational needs, well below average, including a below average number with statements. The school has a wide social and ethnic intake, with 37 per cent white, 14 per cent Pakistani, 13 per cent Black Caribbean, 10 per cent Indian, 9 per cent Black African and 17 per cent from other groups. Almost one third of the students speak English as an additional language, a high percentage, but only a very few do not speak it fluently. Their main home languages are Urdu, Bengali, Gujarati and Punjabi. There are three refugees. Of the 283 places offered each year, 90 are by selection; students from several boroughs sit the entrance test. The school is increasingly over-subscribed, with over three applicants for each place. Students come from over 100 primary schools. Standards on entry are above average. Burntwood received an HMCI outstanding award in 1998 and DfES and local education authority achievement awards in 2001 and 2002. It has Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark status. It is a Beacon school, involved with numerous national initiatives, such as Excellence Challenge, and seeking to acquire science specialist status.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Burntwood School continues to be a very good school with significant strengths. Its performance compared to similar schools is outstanding. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above average. The percentage of students attaining five GCSE grades A*-C was above average in 2002. Teaching is good, including examples of excellent practice, particularly in the sixth form. The school is very well led and is organised and managed most effectively. The income per student is above the national average and supports the high quality of education provided. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- National test results at the end of Year 9 are well above average. The percentage of students attaining five GCSE grades A*-C was above average in 2002. The percentage of GCSE A*/A grades was high in 2001 and 2002 in English, art, dance, drama, geography, history and religious education.
- Teaching was good or better in the majority of lessons seen in Years 7 to 11 and very good in a quarter. Teachers work very hard to make sure that all students learn as much as possible.
- Most students get on very well together and happily respect each other's cultural backgrounds. They openly acknowledge and celebrate their different abilities and talents. They work hard and contribute to the success of many lessons.
- Teachers respond constructively to their meticulous analysis of data. They combine this with thoughtful attention to the full range of abilities and social needs. As a result all students achieve well.
- The range of extra-curricular activities is very good, particularly for gifted and talented students.
- Leadership, including the governors' contributions, is very good. This very large school is organised and managed very effectively.
- The successful sixth form is a strength.

What could be improved

- Science GCSE results overall, and the percentage of students attaining one GCSE grade A*-G, were below the national averages in 2002.
- The accommodation is reaching bursting point, with a desperate need for more laboratories, a more efficient heating system, more space for sixth-formers and replacement windows in several areas.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION (March 1997)

The sixth form has doubled in size. Teaching time, which has increased, is used effectively although time is lost between some lessons. The need for staff training, in the few subjects where it was required, has been dealt with fully. The number of subjects offered in Years 10 and 11 is better, the GCSE options have recently been rearranged well and a vocational design course is available. Statutory requirements for a daily

act of collective worship in all years and religious education in the sixth form are not met. Standards and results at the end of Years 9 and 11 have gone up, at least in line with the national trend and the school has an increasing number of applicants. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16- and 18-year-olds based on average point scores in GCSE (for 2002, each student's best eight results) and A-level/AS-level/vocational examinations.

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

Key

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

A* - only the top five per cent of schools show this very high performance.

Year 9: national test results have improved at a higher rate than that seen nationally. They have been well above average since 1999. In English, mathematics and science, over 75 per cent of students reached Level 5. In 2002, an impressive percentage of students reached Levels 7 and 8 in English and mathematics. Students attain above average standards and make good progress in Years 7 to 9.

Year 11: the percentage of students attaining five GCSE grades A*-C was above average in 2002. The percentage of students attaining at least five or more high (A*/A) grades at GCSE was lower than expected, largely due to the below average science results. The percentage of students attaining one GCSE grade A*-G was below average in 2002. The percentage of A*/A grades was high in 2001 and 2002 in English, art, dance, drama, geography, history and religious education. The best results overall were in art and religious education. Students attain above average standards and make good progress in Years 10 and 11.

Year 13: the overall A-level, AS-level and vocational average points score in 2001 was average. The A- and AS-level points score was the same in 2002. The high, 98 per cent, A-level pass rate continued in 2002, 40 per cent of the total grades being A/B. The best results were in art, biology, business, French, media studies, physics, sociology and AVCE art. Progress between 2000 and 2002 was best in art, biology, business, drama and music, but not good enough in chemistry. Present students make very good progress in most subjects, good progress in mathematics, biology, physics, information and communication technology (ICT) and French, but unsatisfactory progress in chemistry. Overall, standards seen were above average.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	A significantly high percentage of parents observed that their daughters like school and this was confirmed by the students' generally very good and positive attitudes to most aspects of school life, particularly the extra-curricular activities. Most Year 11 students appreciate what the school provides for them.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	In practically all lessons students get down to work sensibly and work hard. Movement between lessons is at times noisy on the narrow staircases, but generally behaviour is good. A small minority of students is inattentive in lessons and boisterous around the school. By the end of lunchtime the students' lavatories are untidy.
Personal development and	Most students get on very well together and happily respect each other's cultural backgrounds. Their personal development and relationships are very good. They

relationships	understand the reasons for being taught academic subjects in sets and openly acknowledge and celebrate their different abilities and talents. They work sensibly together and help each other willingly.
Attendance	Just below average in Years 7 to 11. Very good in the sixth form. The number of fixed-term exclusions, which was high last year, has dropped dramatically since September.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 - 9	Years 10 - 11	Years 12 - 13
Lessons seen overall	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 was good or better in two-thirds of the lessons seen in Years 7 to 9 during the inspection. It was very good in over a quarter, including five lessons when it was excellent. It was particularly effective in Year 7. Most teachers are enthusiastic, use interesting resources and prepare students well for examinations. Literacy and numeracy teaching is good. Students' different learning needs are addressed well as they are taught in ability sets in most academic subjects. Students who speak English as an additional language, or have special educational needs, are taught well. Teaching in the sixth form was at least very good in 60 per cent of lessons. Here the teachers' very good subject knowledge contributes to the high quality of learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. Students particularly enjoy having dance and drama lessons every week in Years 7 to 9. ICT is now taught in all years. Plans to teach citizenship, mainly through other subjects and in assemblies, are reasonable. Students have a good choice of GCSE subjects, although vocational courses are only available in ICT and design and technology. The range of extra-curricular activities is very good. The school provides an unusually wide spread of activities for gifted and talented students, particularly in the Saturday masterclasses. Statutory requirements to teach religious education in the sixth form are not met.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Very good. In addition to providing sensitive individual support, the team of specialists makes sure that all staff know exactly what students' physical, emotional or learning needs are, so they can help them effectively.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Very good. These students participate in most lessons and only occasionally miss them for extra language work. They are very well supported in class, and teachers and specialist staff collaborate well. In lessons, teachers sensitively decide how to group students, so those with English as an additional language can make the best progress.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. A particularly strong element is the school's celebration and respect of its students' different faiths and cultural backgrounds. Students know that high moral and social standards are expected, but a strong emphasis on these does not permeate the atmosphere outside lessons. A few students need encouragement to behave sensibly in the lunch hour.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good. One student commented 'They never give up on you'. This is a true reflection of the form tutors' and year co-ordinators' diligence. Students who need it, receive much individual attention and care to help them to cope with school life.

So that they can support their daughters' progress, parents are provided with much helpful information as well as two information evenings and meetings with teachers every year. The school maintains very good contact with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the principal and other key staff	All tiers of leadership are very good. This very large school is organised and managed most efficiently. The new principal has quickly appreciated the many well-established strengths generated since the school opened. She has already clearly identified those areas for further development in the future.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are very effective, astute and always question and probe successes and areas of concern. They are fully involved in the key areas of long-term planning and finance.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Teachers analyse students' standards on entry, their progress and their test and GCSE results meticulously. Reflection on past performance contributes effectively to future planning. Teachers are observed regularly and encouraged to share good practice.
The strategic use of resources	The considerable sums the school receives to support specific initiatives, such as Excellence in Cities, are used carefully, effectively and correctly. The budget deficit is mainly explained by the high cost of maintaining the old heating system. Working with the local education authority, the school is addressing this. The governors and senior management team have firmly resolved to retain and attract high quality teachers by giving them a below average number of lessons a week. Overall, the strategic use of resources is good.

Teaching staff are well qualified. Support staff contribute significantly to the smooth day-to-day running of the school. The accommodation is reaching bursting point, with a desperate need for more laboratories, a more efficient heating system, more space for sixth-formers and replacement windows in several areas.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 90 per cent (100 per cent in Years 7 and 12) feel their children like school. Over 90 per cent are confident that their children are making good progress, especially noted by Year 9 and parents of sixth-formers. Over 95 per cent believe the school expects students to work hard and achieve their best. Almost 90 per cent think the teaching is good and that the school is helping their daughters become mature and responsible adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less than 70 per cent believe the school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons – particularly noted by Years 10, 11 and 13 parents. About 25 per cent do not feel they are kept well informed about their daughter's progress or that the school works closely with them. Year 11 parents have concerns that there is too much homework. Year 9 parents are less confident than others that behaviour in the school is good.

Over half the parents returned the pre-inspection questionnaire, many wrote comments and 43 attended the parents' evening. Several observed that their daughters cannot always secure places on school trips and that participation in after-school activities is related to ability rather than interest. The former is a difficult area that the principal is considering. The school is determined to make access equitable and transparently fair. Auditions are held for major productions and so, inevitably, several students are disappointed. The number of activities that are open-to-all, all year round, for example singing, could be extended. Any student can always ask to be considered for activities specifically designed for gifted and talented students. Parents find the gap between receiving reports at the end of the summer term and discussing them at the beginning of the autumn term, too long. The principal accepts that the educational reasons for this arrangement need to be explained better. A few parents are concerned that students eat packed lunches outside and that the water fountains do not work. This is no longer the case. During the inspection, students rightly commented that the lunch queues are long.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Burntwood is a much larger than average, foundation, 11-19, comprehensive girls' school with 1722 students, of whom 331 are in the sixth form, which includes 20 boys. The sixth form is larger than most; it has doubled in size since the last inspection. The percentage of students eligible for free school meals, 16 per cent, is well above average. Eight students have special educational needs. The school and the sixth form have a wide social and ethnic intake. Almost one third of the students speak English as an additional language, a high percentage, but only a very few do not speak it fluently. Standards on entry are average; about half the highest Year 11 attainers move to college or sixth forms in other schools. About two-thirds of Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form and between 30 and 45 students, including a few boys, enter from other schools. Students are interviewed for sixth-form places and the entry requirements are reasonable. The good range of academic and vocational courses is well suited to the students' abilities and aspirations. Retention rates are above average and over 95 per cent continue into higher education. Burntwood School received an HMCI outstanding award in 1998, DfES and local education authority achievement awards in 2001 and 2002. It has Artsmark Gold and Sportsmark status. It is a Beacon school, involved with numerous national schemes, such as Excellence Challenge and Earn and Learn, and seeking to acquire science specialist status.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Students are successful in this most effective sixth form. Practically all of them proceed to further education or university. Examination results and standards are average or better in all subjects except chemistry. Teaching and learning are very good and students can join in many interesting extra-curricular activities. Leadership and management are very good. The income per student is above the national average. It is used well to provide good value for money so the sixth form is cost effective.

Strengths

- A very high pass rate and consistently well above average results in art and media studies and above average results in biology, business, music and sociology.
- Very good teaching in most lessons. Teachers encourage students to take responsibility for their progress and help them to study independently.
- Excellent relationships between students and between students and teachers. Students receive high quality academic and personal support. They are well prepared for life beyond school.
- This successful and growing sixth form is very well led by an effective assistant principal, who is well supported by the principal, senior management team and sixth-form tutors.

What could be improved

- Below average standards and unsatisfactory aspects of teaching in chemistry.
- The accommodation, as described in the main school report, but particularly the small sixth-form area and those chemistry lessons that do not take place in laboratories.

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. Above average standards. Good teaching supports students' learning well by keeping a close check on their work and progress. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and the department is very well led and managed.
Biology	Good. Above average A-level results but less good progress at AS-level. Good teaching and very good attitudes to the subject mean that most students learn well and make good progress. The number of students taking biology is increasing rapidly.
Chemistry	Unsatisfactory. Below average results and standards. Teaching varies from outstanding to poor, and students' learning is further affected by unsatisfactory accommodation and resources. Many students do not progress as well as they should.
Physics	Good. Small numbers and fluctuating, but at least average results in recent years. Above average standards. Very good teaching and learning. Lessons include a very good blend of explanation, discussion and experimental work so students achieve well.
Business	Very good. Above average results in A-level and in vocational courses. Above average standards. Good teaching and learning by well-qualified, talented and enthusiastic teachers. The subject taken by the most students. Very good leadership and management.
ICT	Very good. At least average results and rising standards. Very good teaching and learning. An increasingly popular AS-level choice. A valuable after-school course leading to a technician qualification. Excellent leadership and management.
Art	Excellent. Consistently well above average results and well above average standards. Very good teaching, learning and progress. Excellent leadership. Artist residencies, workshops, exhibitions and regular visits to galleries extend students' knowledge most effectively.
Drama	Very good. High percentage of A/B grades in AS- and A-level and consistently above average standards. Very good teaching, learning and leadership. Interesting school productions and theatre visits.
Media studies	Very good. Consistently well above average results and standards. Very good teaching and learning. Students achieve very well. Excellent management. Students have access to very good resources and excellent background notes.
Geography	Very good. Above average standards which have improved since the last inspection. Very good teaching, learning and progress. Excellent leadership and management, with rigorous assessment and good resources. Breadth of opportunity is offered through fieldwork, masterclasses and external lectures.
History	Very good. Above average results. High standards and very good progress. Very good teaching and excellent relationships. Excellent leadership and management which combines enthusiasm, experience and good humour.
Religious education	Very good. Above average standards. Very good achievement and learning because of the very good, demanding teaching based on excellent subject knowledge. The leadership of the subject is excellent.
Sociology	Very good. Above average results and standards. Teaching, learning and progress are all very good. Excellent leadership and management. An increasingly popular and successful subject which students thoroughly enjoy.
English	Very good. Fluctuating, but above average, results. Standards now well above average. Very good teaching, learning and progress. Inspirational leadership.
French	Good. Improving pass rates. Average standards. Increasing number of students.

	Considerable staff turbulence in the past, which is now resolved with good leadership and management. Hardworking and committed teachers teach well so students make good progress and learn well.
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A few lessons were observed in critical thinking, dance, further mathematics, product design, Spanish, photography and psychology. It was not possible to see any A-level music lessons during the inspection.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. Teachers and form tutors monitor students' work and progress regularly and carefully. They provide much constructive individual support and guidance. Students settle into the sixth form quickly and they receive very helpful advice about higher and further education.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	This successful and growing sixth form is very well led by an effective assistant principal, who is well supported by the principal, senior management team and sixth-form tutors. Governors are most supportive of the sixth form, which is securely cost effective.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over 90 per cent enjoy being in the sixth form. Year 12 students, more than those in Year 13, feel they are treated as young adults, whereas Year 13 students reflect that they were helped to settle into the sixth form well. Over 90 per cent feel that they are taught well, helped, challenged and encouraged to do their best. The choice of courses suit what they want to do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About half of Year 13 students feel they are not kept well informed about their progress. A smaller percentage does not feel work is assessed thoroughly. A minority, particularly in Year 13, does not think there is a good range of extra-curricular activities.

Over 80 per cent of students completed the questionnaire. The inspection confirmed all their positive views. Students' views during the inspection did not support their negative observations in the questionnaire. There was no evidence that they are not kept fully informed about their progress and how likely they are to meet their predicted grades. If an activity they are interested in is not offered, then they are encouraged to set it up. A few students do run clubs for younger students.

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

National test results at the end of Year 9 are well above average. The percentage of students attaining five GCSE grades A*-C was above average in 2002. The percentage of GCSE A*/A grades was high in 2001 and 2002 in English, art, dance, drama, geography, history and religious education.

1. Year 9 national test results have improved considerably since the last inspection, at a higher rate than that seen nationally. They have been well above average since 1999. Results are very high in comparison with schools with a similar percentage of students eligible for free school meals. In English, mathematics and science, over 75 per cent of students reached the expected Level 5. In 2002 an impressive percentage of students reached the higher Levels 7 or 8: 35 per cent in English, 32 per cent in mathematics and 18 per cent in science. Science results at the higher levels were not as strong as the others.
2. The percentage of students attaining five GCSE grades A*-C was well above average in 2001 and 2002. The average points score in 2002, based on each student's best eight results, was above average. Practically all students take English language and English literature, which is good. In 2001 and 2002, at least one in five students attained A*/A grades in these subjects, and in art, dance, drama, geography, history and religious education. Based on their predicted grades, the 2002 students made the best progress in art, design and technology, French, Spanish, music, media studies and religious education. The average points scores, which reflect all the grades students attain, were particularly high in art and religious education.
3. During the inspection, highlights of the high standards seen included:
 - skilful inclusion of quotations in Year 10 English essays and deep understanding of poems in Year 9;
 - sensitive and mature interpretation of photographic material linked to an ambitious dance project in Year 11;
 - good development of number and algebra skills in Years 7 to 9;
 - impressive essays in history and thoughtful diaries, written through the eyes of American slaves;
 - mastery of Urdu script in Year 9;
 - excellent summaries of visits to art galleries by GCSE students, and above average standards of mixing colours in oils and pastels in Year 9;
 - excellent use of many apt statistical techniques in geography;
 - ambitious Indian melodies composed by high attainers in Year 9;
 - lively and imaginative PowerPoint presentations in ICT and mastery of mail merging in Year 9;
 - very good extended writing with ambitious expression and accuracy in French; higher attainers use an excellent range of tenses.

Teaching was good or better in the majority of lessons seen in Years 7 to 11 and very good in a quarter. Teachers work very hard to make sure that all students learn as much as possible.

4. Teaching is good. It was good or better in two-thirds of the lessons seen during the inspection. It was very good in over a quarter, including five lessons when it was excellent. It was particularly effective in Year 7. The paperwork behind lessons is mostly of an exemplary standard, with carefully thought-out schemes of work and plans. Whilst these

are valuable, it is the teachers' enthusiasm and enjoyment that makes many lessons successful.

5. When teaching is bright and cheerful, energetic and engaging, students get involved and respond with interest. The teachers' enthusiasm is so infectious, that occasionally a few students became over exuberant. This was seen in a Year 10 GCSE mathematics lesson, for example. When teachers established a brisk, efficient, no-nonsense approach, linked with warmth and humour, lessons were invariably successful. Several lessons got off to a fast start, for example in Year 7 music, with quick questions before recorder practice. Students invariably responded well to smiles, praise and encouragement, particularly seen in a Year 7 Spanish lesson.
6. Teachers appreciate the importance of lively and interesting materials. Numerous examples were seen, but the following were particularly effective:
 - bananas and chocolate to set off a discussion on fair trade in Year 9, or recent newspaper articles about flooding in Year 11 geography;
 - incorporating an excellent range of materials reflecting many cultures in art;
 - enlarging, for example advertisements in Year 10 media studies, so that students could annotate them easily;
 - referring to a local area, Brixton, in a Year 11 sociology lesson on changes to drugs laws, or exploring a nearby open space to evaluate sustainability in Year 7 geography;
 - introducing negative numbers with reference to fridge and freezer temperatures in Year 7 mathematics;
 - practising turning nouns into plurals by playing 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' in English.
 - very helpfully showing Year 8 students clay sculptures at different stages of completion;
 - mastering nationalities in Year 9 Spanish by referring to well-known people that the students are interested in;
 - understanding how muscles work in terms of why people want to exercise in gyms.
7. Teachers are skilful at knowing what helps students to learn. In ICT, examples of what some Year 11 students had got wrong were turned into an effective learning point. Students particularly appreciate seeing examples of work at different GCSE grades, which they did in English. Teaching students in Years 7 to 9 how to carry out research and prepare their sketchbooks, means they are experienced when they start GCSE. Stressing the importance of reading questions carefully to Year 8 history students certainly helps them to cope with tests and examinations, in all subjects.
8. Many teachers combine preparing students for examinations calmly, with constant, subtle reminders about coursework or assignment deadlines. Being asked to write down the steps they take for certain mathematical computations in Year 7 is very good practice as it encourages thinking skills. As one GCSE student observed, 'They teach you what you need to know for exams, but go beyond that and encourage your creativity, to see what lies beyond the obvious meaning.'
9. Examples of where students contributed significantly to learning well included:
 - creative and excellent group work in dance;
 - taking responsibility in art for work, preparation and clearing up;
 - showing good powers of retention in Spanish;
 - listening to each other carefully in wind ensemble and groups, singing with gusto in the gospel choir or persevering when tackling two-part recorder music in Year 9;
 - managing to select from a range of methods for mathematical calculations and appreciating that several solutions exist;

- tackling chemistry experiments with determination and completing them in limited amount of time;
- confidently writing notes in their own words in Year 10 biology;
- evaluating their drama performances with maturity in Year 8;
- labelling printouts of ICT work, with all the detailed steps taken, which is a valuable way to remember different programs and techniques.

Most students get on very well together and happily respect each other's cultural backgrounds. They openly acknowledge and celebrate their different abilities and talents. They work hard and contribute to the success of many lessons.

10. In conversations held with students throughout the week, it was striking how happy they were to discuss their different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Practically all of them argue the case for being taught in sets with conviction, because they feel happy working at a level they can cope with. Equally, they do not feel stuck because they know that movement between sets is possible. That several sets can be taught at the same time is certainly an advantage of a large school. It creates the flexibility to respond to students who attain higher standards during the year, by moving them into a higher set. Students are mostly aware of which of them are labelled students of marked aptitude, or gifted and talented, and they accept this as the reality of their different abilities and aptitudes. When a Year 7 student swam unaided for the first time, the whole class was genuinely delighted.
11. Students work with good concentration which makes their learning effective and enjoyable. They create exciting and imaginative shapes together in dance; their enthusiasm for this subject is striking. Year 9 students worked extremely well together as they practised charleston routines. Year 8 students were totally absorbed in their drama rehearsals. The harmony of mixed groups working together in dance and drama significantly contributes to the racial tolerance in the school. Students who are skilled in activities, for example badminton, willingly take the lead and help others to get better. During the inspection a group of students persevered in windy and cold weather to improve their netball skills.
12. In many classroom lessons students help each other: speaking Spanish in pairs; sharing a computer; tackling true/false statements in history or grouping human and physical factors in geography. In other lessons students worked quietly: in complete silence tackling graphs in mathematics or writing interesting and thoughtful poems in English. In personal and social education lessons they contributed thoughtfully in a Year 7 lesson on bullying and discussed sensitive health issues, for example breast cancer in Year 10 or smoking in Year 8, without any embarrassment.

Teachers respond constructively to their meticulous analysis of results. They combine this with thoughtful attention to the full range of abilities and social needs. As a result all students achieve well.

13. The amount of data analysis the school does is impressive. For many years, end of Year 9 national test results and GCSE grades have been taken apart and put under the microscope, to be reviewed by ethnic groups, sets and individual teachers, or even by performance in individual questions. Responding to such analysis, the mathematics department succeeded in raising black Caribbean students' GCSE grades in 2002. The school is aware that, in several subjects, it is lower attaining white students who do not do as well as expected. Results are considered against past performance and predicted grades, which in turn are based on attainment on entry, including reading and spelling ages and verbal reasoning. As much background information on students as possible is collected from primary schools. All this is very good practice.

14. It is clear from talking to teachers, observing their lessons and examining their records, that they are fully aware of each student's abilities, strengths, talents and learning needs. In many lessons teachers decide where students sit, which means they can group them so they are both happy and producing their best work. Students with English as an additional language sometimes sit together, but teachers also sit them next to other students so they can be helped to understand the work; the other students learn well by explaining.
15. In a Year 11 English lesson, the students clearly respected the teacher and the English as an additional language support teacher as equal partners. The support teacher knew in advance what was to be covered so she contributed valuable notes, which all students found helpful. Students in a Year 9 English lesson picked up the good humour between the class teacher and the specialist English as an additional language teacher. The latter's help, interpreting a poem about old age, meant that all students made the same good progress.
16. Teachers have access to copies of individual education plans for students with statements of special educational needs, so they are alert to their targets. Learning support assistants who help students with special educational needs, provide excellent support, whether giving guidance about using computers or just providing encouragement. In a special educational needs workshop, students' individual education plans had specific and manageable targets on comprehension and reading. These students not only improved their literacy skills but also their social skills, by working together and focusing on helping each other.
17. The school took onboard the Key Stage 3 Literacy and Numeracy Strategies early on, and it is clear, from the 2002 Year 9 test results, that students who received support made excellent progress. Almost 30 students' reading and writing improved by one National Curriculum level. The summer school, for future and present Year 7 students, focuses on literacy and numeracy, as well as ICT and study skills: 'The best week of my life. I did lots of different things I did not expect to do' (a future Year 7 student). The personal and social education programme, which includes careers guidance, is valuable and well structured. Students are generally positive about these sessions. In Year 11 they receive sensible and realistic suggestions about how to cope with examinations.
18. Teachers boost students' self-confidence by conveying a positive attitude to multilingualism, which was seen in several English classes. The school makes a determined effort to celebrate different faiths and cultures. Assemblies often focus on significant religious festivals. A few Year 10 students commented that the school does not do as much as it could to respect and celebrate different cultures, but acknowledged that students socialise in mixed groups. Students feel confident that the school tackles bullying firmly and quickly. The school council and Year 11 prefects feel valued and respected. Many individual success stories, for example a student overcoming her embarrassment at doing gymnastics, confirm the sensitive way that teachers raise students' self-esteem and confidence.

The range of extra-curricular activities is very good, particularly for gifted and talented students.

19. In addition to a rich list of visits and field trips which are included within the main curriculum, practically all students said they can find something interesting to do in the lunch hour. The range of physical education activities offered is impressive, including

football, swimming, netball and aerobics, which is very popular. The chamber choir and gospel choir sing, sometimes in several parts, extremely well. The school orchestra, a brass group, steel band and woodwind group meet once a week. In the lunch hour students can attend homework or subject support sessions, a dance club in Year 8 or visit the well-stocked library.

20. A dance evening, involving over 100 students and a major dramatic production take place each year. Various music groups perform in places such as the Commonwealth Institute and Westminster Abbey. The physical education department organises many matches and competitions. Trips to Spain, France and the Lake District are available, but the number of places is restricted. The school rightly describes all these activities as enrichment.
21. Several Years 8 and 9 gifted and talented students study a Latin course after school, delivered through ICT. These students are also introduced to the world and civilisation of Ancient Rome. It is a valuable and stimulating course. Saturday masterclasses for gifted and talented students have been organised for several years. Science, ICT, English and the humanities departments contribute most of the sessions. On the Saturday before the inspection, students were competently getting to grips with web design in an ICT room and, after listening to a lecture on drugs, three large science groups were beavering away on a related experiment. Many of these students take separate sciences for GCSE. Gifted and talented students also go out of school on many interesting visits. The programme varies each year, but has included, for example, Year 10 designing web sites at the City Learning Centre and Year 9 visiting the Museum of London.

All tiers of leadership, including the governors' contributions, are very good. This very large school is organised and managed very effectively.

22. All tiers of leadership are very good. This very large school is organised and managed most efficiently. The new principal has quickly appreciated the many well-established strengths generated since the school opened. She has already clearly identified those areas for further development in the future. She has particularly focused on the science specialist status bid, reducing the number of exclusions and trying to secure funds from the local education authority to improve the accommodation. These are three key areas requiring attention. The senior management team, of principal, three deputy principals and three assistant principals, has clearly defined roles which are carried out with care and diligence.
23. The governors are very effective and astute, and always question and probe successes and areas of concern. They are fully involved in the key areas of long-term planning and finance. Minutes and discussions confirm that they analyse problems in detail. For example, they requested information about students excluded in the previous academic year and considered each individual case thoughtfully and sensitively. The considerable sums the school receives to support specific initiatives, such as Excellence in Cities, are used carefully, effectively and correctly. Money from this source is well spent, for example paying staff who teach the successful Saturday masterclasses. Financial management is secure. The governors and senior management team have firmly resolved to retain and attract high quality teachers by giving them a below average number of lessons a week.
24. Heads of clusters and heads of departments are dedicated professionals who work extremely hard to support the school and its students. They analyse students' standards on entry, their progress and their test and GCSE results meticulously. Their reflection on past performance contributes effectively to future plans. The physical education department, without a head of department at present, has flourished by excellent team work. Its development plan shows that all teachers are focusing on areas where they have

particular expertise, which is very good practice. Organisation of the English as an additional language department is also being shared. Leadership and management of this, and the special educational needs department, are very good.

The successful sixth form is a strength.

The sixth form is described in Sections D and E of this report.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Science GCSE results overall, and the percentage of students attaining one GCSE grade A*-G, were below the national averages in 2002.

25. In 2002 the percentage of students attaining A*-C grades in both English and mathematics was convincingly above the national and girls' average. However, the percentage of students attaining all three of English, mathematics and science was just under the national and girls' averages. At the top end, only 36 students attained five or more GCSEs with grade A or A*. There were no A* grades in any of the science examinations and fewer A grades than in other subjects. Analysis of GCSE grades in the three separate sciences shows that students did not attain their predicted grades, and therefore underachieved. The focus, which the school is already addressing, is therefore to raise standards overall in science, which in turn will contribute to raising the percentage of students attaining at least five top grades. Single science will not be offered from September 2003, but the three separate and double award science GCSEs will continue.
26. Talking to students it is clear that the number of science experiments they do varies between sets. Some mention copying out from textbooks most of the time, whilst others describe interesting experiments they have done, and remembered. Year 11 students commented on how much they copy from the board, as well as looking things up in textbooks. In a lower attaining Year 8 lesson, students did not make enough progress as they simply copied information from textbooks, which they were later going to transfer to a larger sheet for display. These students particularly, need a variety of activities to keep them interested as they do not find it easy to concentrate.
27. The 50 minute lessons can make it difficult for teachers to lead valuable discussions and carry out experiments, especially when students arrive late and time is lost taking a register. When teachers spend too long introducing the work and equipment and answering students' questions, then time for experiments and a summary at the end is limited. In both Year 8 top set and lower set lessons seen, teachers had to humour a few individuals to bring their behaviour into line. In more than one class, students chewed gum and were not told to take it out – a health and safety point. In a Year 11 class, the students did not listen properly and in discussion they stated that they had covered the topic before. Whilst repetition of basic knowledge is essential, when students are not told why they are repeating work it will not extend their understanding. In a Year 10 lesson, students worked extremely well and helped each other to tackle the work but the teacher had not thought carefully enough about how to explain the fundamental ideas; some explanations were too complex and confused the students.
28. In the science specialist status application there is a reference to making 'learning objectives more focused on real examples of applications'. In the Saturday science masterclass, observed just before the inspection, several Year 7 students could not explain how the experiment they were doing was related to the lecture on drugs that had preceded it. It is important that gifted and talented, and all other, students understand the relevance of their science work. In a Year 11 lower set lesson, students could not explain

why they were drawing, or copying, a diagram of equipment. The homework set was too dull and simple.

29. The principal stated in the science specialist status application: 'We are keenly aware of the continuing under-representation of women in the scientific professions, particularly at higher academic levels'. This is one of the many sensible reasons why the school is so keen to achieve this status. The department has 15 teachers, who teach lessons in very different styles and with varying degrees of success. Support for less effective teachers is in place but the head of department has too little time to monitor, guide and make sure good practice is shared and developed.
30. The percentage of students attaining five grades, or one grade A*-G dropped in 2002, to below average. Thus 18 students had no qualifications at the end of Year 11. Many of these students had poor attendance and failed to complete coursework on time. Some of them had more than one fixed-term exclusion during Year 11. Since September 2002 the principal has successfully focused on initiatives to reduce exclusions and keep students in school. The number of exclusions dropped dramatically in the first half of the autumn term. The learning skills centre is contributing to the effectiveness of individual pastoral support programmes, whereby the school, and sometimes outside agencies, work with students and their parents to offer individual plans for improvement. For some students a reduced curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is the best way forward and the principal is keen to further apply increased flexibility into these years.

The accommodation is reaching bursting point, with a desperate need for more laboratories, a more efficient heating system, more space for sixth formers and replacement windows in several areas.

This issue speaks for itself but comments are included in paragraphs 72-75.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

31. In order to maintain and improve the already high standards, the governors and senior management should:

Years 7 to 11

- (1) Improve science GCSE results overall by:

- using a greater variety of activities to improve students' understanding and to help them to collect information for themselves, rather than copying from the textbook;
- continue to share good practice to eliminate the gap between the most and least effective teaching;
- monitor how often students carry out investigations so that all groups have a similar chance to do them;
- complete and use the revised schemes of work and assessments so that underachievement is picked up early on and addressed.
(paragraphs 25-29)

- (2) Raise the percentage of students attaining one GCSE grade A*-G by:

- persevering with recent successful initiatives to reduce exclusions and keep students in school;
- developing the already effective work of the learning skills centre and individual pastoral support programmes;
- further applying increased flexibility into the Years 10 and 11 curriculum.
(paragraph 30)

Sixth form

- (3) Improve standards and the unsatisfactory aspects of teaching in chemistry by:
- encouraging teachers to use a wider range of techniques;
 - supporting professional development for all teachers;
 - considering the purpose and content of homework and private study so that students learn better how to undertake research and read widely around topics;
 - reviewing the allocation of laboratories to make sure that all groups have a reasonable amount of time in the laboratories.
- (paragraphs 87-92)

The whole school

- (4) Address the deficiencies in the accommodation by:
- persevering with the application for science specialist status to secure funds to increase the number of laboratories;
 - pushing forward with all plans agreed with the local education authority to replace the heating system;
 - evaluating how to increase the space available for sixth-formers;
- (paragraphs 73 and 74)

In addition to the issues above, the governors and senior management should consider the following for inclusion in the action plan:

- a focus on raising the percentage of students attaining five or more A*/A GCSE grades; (paragraph 25)
- more singing in Years 7 to 9, both in lessons and extra-curricular activities; (summary)
- explaining to parents the educational reasons for the timing of reports; (summary)
- monitoring the new behaviour policy and particularly how it contributes to students' social skills and behaviour around the school; (summary)
- considering whether anything could be done to improve the lunch queues; (summary)
- insisting that chewing gum be banned, particularly from science lessons where it poses a health and safety risk. (paragraph 27)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	73
	Sixth form	77
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		54

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7-11							
Number	5	15	28	19	4	1	1
Percentage	7	21	38	26	6	1	1.
Sixth form							
Number	12	34	24	6	0	1	0
Percentage	16	44	31	8	0	1	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7-11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	1391	331
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	320	60

Special educational needs	Y7-11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	22	4
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	173	8

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	560

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	8

Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving
--

40

Attendance

Authorised absence 2000/01

	%
School data	8.9
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence 2000/01

	%
School data	1.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	0	282	282

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	237	217	228
	Total	237	217	228
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	84 (78)	77 (78)	81 (74)
	National	66 (65)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	61 (42)	62 (61)	48 (43)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	220	237	231
	Total	220	237	231
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (73)	84 (80)	82 (43)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	64 (29)	60 (62)	50 (44)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	0	265	265

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	164	241	247
	Total	164	241	247
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	62 (60)	91 (95)	93 (99)
	National	51 (48)	89 (91)	95 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average capped point score per student	School	37.9
	National	34.6

The average capped point score is calculated by adding up the points for students' top eight GCSEs/GNVQs

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	51 88
	National	n/a (81)

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations	Year	Male	Female	Total
	2002	4	113	117

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	4	113	117
	Average point score per candidate	10.5	14.8	14.8
National	Average point score per candidate	n/a (16.9)	n/a (18)	n/a (17.5)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	1	86	87	3	27	30
	Average point score per candidate	16	16.1	16.1	8.7	11.1	10.9

National	Average point score per candidate	n/a (16.9)	n/a (17.7)	n/a (17.4)	n/a (9.8)	n/a (11.4)	n/a (10.6)
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

n/a – not available

Ethnic background of students

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 students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
640	61	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
175	1	0
235	5	0
46	1	0
4	0	0
226	70	2
145	19	0
99	40	0
22	0	0
118	12	0
12	10	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7-13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	103.5
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.6

Education support staff: Y7-13

Total number of education support staff	23
Total aggregate hours worked per week	745

Deployment of teachers: Y7-13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	62
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Average teaching group size: Y7-11

Key Stage 3	27.5
Key Stage 4	26.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	6,111,449
Total expenditure	6,157,029
Expenditure per student	3,691
Balance brought forward from previous year	-101,066
Balance carried forward to next year	-146,646

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	32
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	33
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1722
Number of questionnaires returned	935

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	46	47	4	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	43	48	3	1	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	38	44	8	1	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	52	12	2	2
The teaching is good.	34	52	5	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	31	44	15	3	7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	43	42	8	2	5
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	30	1	1	2
The school works closely with parents.	26	48	14	4	8
The school is well led and managed.	36	47	3	1	13
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	41	46	5	2	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	28	41	12	3	15

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

- Standards of work seen were above average overall with considerable differences between subjects.
 - Students make good progress and achieve well.
32. Fewer students leave the school at the end of Year 11 than a few years ago, but the academic profile of students starting sixth-form courses has not altered much. Just under half the highest attainers move to other schools or colleges. Several students enter the sixth form from a few other schools and a few leave Burntwood and then decide to return. The sixth form is not mixed, but is a girls' sixth form which admits a few boys.
33. A-level and vocational results in 2000 were above the national average. Statistics between 2000 and later years are not comparable. The A-level, AS-level and vocational average points score overall in 2001 was average. The A-level and AS-level points score was the same in 2002. The school's high, 98 per cent, A-level pass rate continued in 2002 and over 40 per cent of the total grades awarded were A/B grades. The percentage of these top grades in 2002 was high in biology, business, French, media, physics, sociology and AVCE art. The percentage of AS-level grades A/B in 2002 was lower than in 2001, but students will retake certain modules and many do not continue with four subjects in Year 13.
34. The school's analysis of performance against predicted grades, based on students' GCSE grades, shows that students made good progress in art, biology, business, drama and music, but in several subjects, including English literature, history, physics, and chemistry particularly, between a third and a half did not attain their expected grades. In no subjects were there any significant differences in the standards attained by students of different ethnicity, a consideration which the school examines very carefully.
35. During the inspection, standards were well above average in art, average in chemistry, ICT and French and above average in all other subjects. Students achieve very well in most subjects, making good progress in mathematics, biology, physics, ICT and French. They make too little progress in chemistry. Students taking vocational courses have lessons in key skills and make good progress. Most other students have good enough literacy, numeracy and ICT skills to cope with their AS- and A-level subjects.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Students have very good attitudes to school.
 - Students' behaviour is very good.
 - Students' personal development and relationships are excellent.
 - Students' attendance is well above average.
36. Students have very positive attitudes to the sixth form, especially in Year 12. This is reflected not only in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, where over 90 per cent agree that they enjoy being in the sixth form, but also in discussions with them. They were particularly positive about the balance the school strikes between the pursuit of academic results and the need for personal time and interests. They cited this as a major reason for choosing Burntwood. The other significant reason for their choice is the friendly spirit of community in the school, of which they are justifiably proud. Many are pleased that they are studying the subjects they wanted, but even when this has not happened, they respond positively with unexpected satisfaction: 'I was a bit annoyed that I couldn't do.... but I find I'm really enjoying.... which I did not expect.'

37. Students praise the high quality of teaching, they feel that they are challenged and encouraged to do their best. In a lesson on critical thinking students worked hard, enthusiastically grasping new concepts which they had never considered before, and which will be key disciplines in the development of their thinking. Only in psychology do students comment on a particular problem: coping with the number of different staff teaching the various strands of the course. Many students join in extra-curricular activities, citing the choir, the various educational trips and the shadowing of a student at Oxford as particularly good. Students who speak English as an additional language or have special educational needs feel well integrated into school life. All students show a mature approach to discussion and the free exchange of ideas and beliefs. For example, in an ad hoc debate about the way attitudes to slavery are represented students were not afraid to reveal a very diverse range of opinions.
38. Relationships between students and between staff and students are excellent. Students have a high degree of confidence in, and respect for, the relatively new head of the sixth form. In Year 12, students are especially happy that staff are not condescending. The vast majority of students has progressed from the main school. They observe that the very good welfare and support they received there, is maintained in the sixth form. The number of boys is very small, but those interviewed said that they were made to feel welcome and included.
39. Students feel secure because they are confident that teachers track their progress closely and, when they feel overwhelmed, that teachers will give them the encouragement to succeed. However, in Year 13, about half of those replying to the questionnaire feel they could have been kept better informed about their academic progress. No evidence to support this view emerged during the inspection, as in practically all subjects teachers mark work regularly and give students much feedback about how they are doing.
40. Students enthusiastically pursue opportunities to help run the school, or to generate initiatives to improve it. Year 12 students are very happy to volunteer for the Year 7 reading buddies scheme. This has not only brought about a verifiable improvement in reading but has helped to build the co-operative sense of community that students are so proud of. A few students have taken up the offer of setting-up and running their own clubs, for example a recorder club for younger students, conducting the gospel choir, and several are keen to come up with new ideas. Five Year 12 students helped to run the successful summer school in 2002.
41. The confident group of six girls and one boy on the sixth-form committee represents a good cross-section of the ethnic mix of the school. These enthusiastic students are especially keen to have an impact on the school's future. They want to encourage students in all years to get involved in activities and fund-raising events, to have their say on the school council, and to help make the school an even better place. These very positive attitudes and excellent relationships are reflected in the attendance figures, which show an extremely high level of attendance in Year 12 and good levels of attendance for Year 13.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

- Teaching is very good overall.
 - Learning is very good overall.
42. Teaching was very good in 60 per cent of lessons seen during the inspection, including 12 lessons when it was excellent. Three of these were in English, two in religious education and the rest in art, chemistry, drama, history, ICT, physics, and a tutorial session. All

teaching observed was at least very good or better in art, drama, history, physics and religious education.

43. A striking feature of many lessons is the teachers' very good subject knowledge so their explanations and demonstrations are clear and helpful. In practically all lessons seen students worked hard, involved themselves fully and contributed significantly to the progress they made. In several lessons students commented that they really enjoyed the subject and were pleased they had chosen it. Teachers' enthusiasm, humour and enjoyment is another reason why many lessons are successful. When teachers combine this with their very good subject knowledge, students cannot fail to learn by experiencing:
- excellent, clear introductions to mathematical concepts;
 - demonstrations of chemistry experiments which effectively focus on interpretation;
 - superb expositions leading to secure understanding in physics;
 - links established between ICT programs and their practical, commercial and business applications;
 - critical and contextual studies merged with practical work in photography;
 - notation interpretation blended with performance skills in dance;
 - connections between artists' research and students' own work highlighted;
 - explorations of the contemporary significance of media in modern life;
 - issues in sociology that they easily relate to, such as why boys and girls achieve differently at school;
 - advanced information system software in geography and authoritative presentations, often with added video interest;
 - potentially dull sections of the religious education syllabus taught creatively and with imagination.
44. Most teachers set valuable homework or assignment tasks, mark them meticulously, test students rigorously and offer them extra time for help outside lessons. Students are clear about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Students taking any of the sciences, however, are not encouraged to use the library properly, nor to research topics on the Internet and read widely round them. This is particularly important as time can be a problem in these subjects. It really needs more than 50 minutes (and is often less in reality) to explain experiments, do them, and discuss them afterwards.
45. All teachers pose questions to students, but their effectiveness varies between subjects. In physics lessons, students ask questions which reveal how much thinking they have done in response to the teachers' very good questions to them. The religious education and sociology teachers are never stumped by their students' probing questions. In English, teachers skilfully judge when to let discussions flow and when to intervene with probing questions. Students taking French answer questions confidently, especially when the teacher prompts them to remember but does not give them the answers. Students learn best when they can see the relevance of their studies to real life. Mathematics and chemistry teachers could stress this link more. Art teachers encourage students to solve problems, refine their techniques and learn from each other.
46. Most teachers encourage students to work independently and, therefore, prepare them well for higher education. A few teachers find this difficult to do as they are so keen to help students towards the best A-level grades. Opportunities for students to pose questions and hypothesise are not frequent enough in mathematics, because teachers reveal the solutions too readily. Year 13 vocational business students have produced some excellent, independently researched, assignments but occasionally teachers do not expect long, reflective answers in class.
47. Media studies and geography students are good at thinking for themselves, partly explained by the stimulating resources teachers give them. In critical thinking, the teacher

skilfully steers students to see the errors in their logic. Students collaborate extremely well when designing experiments in mathematical mechanics, they expend considerable intellectual effort in biology, make careful practical observations in chemistry, search for interest and originality in their drama performances and write neat and detailed notes in most subjects. In only a handful of lessons did students not switch on fully, and this was clearly linked to teaching which was not stimulating.

CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

- The quality and range of learning opportunities are very good.
 - Statutory requirements are not met because religious education is not taught to all students and there is no daily act of collective worship.
48. A wide range of AS- and A-level subjects is offered. Students can choose drama, business, religious education, sociology, psychology, dance, media studies and Urdu in addition to the National Curriculum subjects. Photography and critical thinking are available at AS-level. A minority of students would welcome further alternatives such as English language and physical education and question why science cannot be added to English and mathematics for GCSE retakes. AVCE and intermediate GNVQ courses in business are also available. Popular subjects include English literature, sociology, all three business options, biology and mathematics. Students resitting GCSEs or studying on vocational business programmes also study key skills. The wide range of courses, predominantly academic, fits well with students' abilities and aspirations. The great majority of students are quite content with their choices. As in the main school, teachers are alert to gifted and talented students' particular needs.
49. A small minority of students in Year 13 and their parents, do not feel that the choice of extra-curricular activities is wide enough. They do not, however, suggest what is missing from those on offer. Many activities, including visits and trips, are closely related to the study of specific subjects and are part of the extended curriculum. This provision is unusually rich. Students are encouraged to plan and arrange trips for themselves. These activities are subsidised through a bursary scheme. Student-led activities are also encouraged and partly funded. These arrangements offer students excellent opportunities to use their initiative and to act, and be treated, as responsible adults.
50. Although students who responded to the questionnaire were not all positive about the careers advice, the school tackles this well. At key points in the sixth form, students are given good guidance and support about opportunities in higher education, future careers and employment. All Year 12 students attend a higher education day at school and receive general advice about future options. This is followed by the production of an interactive booklet, and sessions led by the local careers adviser, supported by a 'gap year' co-ordinator, giving advice about UCAS forms. To stimulate their interest in higher education, students can choose to attend interesting lectures and support sessions organised with two other local secondary schools. Specific advice is given to those students applying to Oxford or Cambridge. All students fill in destination sheets and thereafter receive good support in their choices from form tutors and careers advisers. Students also have the opportunity to listen to local employers such as hospital staff. The school library and sixth-form block have an extensive range of booklets and prospectuses.
51. A flourishing Young Enterprise scheme is up and running, but the business studies department has relatively few contacts with the local community, considering its popularity. ICT students' assignments are linked to local business uses. The school has forged excellent links with teacher training institutions; quite often trainee teachers stay on as full-time members of staff. The contact with St George's Hospital is also valuable, allowing students to gain an insight into many areas of medical work. All subjects, but less

in the three sciences, exploit London's rich cultural and academic institutions, for example geographical lectures at Kingston University, or drama and English theatre visits. The benefits for students' social and cultural development are enormous. In its role as a Beacon school, and with three advanced skills teachers, the school has a great deal of contact with other secondary schools and primary schools.

52. Students' good social skills are particularly noticeable in personal, social and health education lessons, where they readily co-operate and volunteer to participate in improvisation and group work. Standards of personal development are high. A very mature, caring approach, offering each other mutual respect, an understanding of responsibilities for their own actions, and the very good relationships between all ethnic groups, are excellent examples to support moral and social development. The school lives its positive approach to equal opportunities for all faiths and cultures.
53. Very good examples of multicultural themes and reference material were seen in art, photography, geography, religious education and sociology. Students are encouraged to explore their own cultures and this contributes well to a wider understanding of their different beliefs and insights. Some interesting reflective work was seen in autobiographical themes developed from the study of Asian, Egyptian and western cultures. Events such as masterclasses, artist residencies, revision courses, sporting activities, visits and residential trips develop students' social, moral and cultural learning well.

THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS

- Monitoring of students' subject performance is very good.
- Educational and personal support and guidance for students are very good.
- The steps taken to ensure students' health and safety are very good.

Assessment

54. The school has built on previous strengths and improved its data collection, its target setting and its recording and reporting. The process starts in Year 7 and continues right through. Sixth-form teachers continue to enter helpful data in their mark books. The school produces detailed reports for every year group in painstaking detail. A careful screening process picks up any issues that might impact on students' attainment, such as difficulties where English is not the first language or special educational needs, including physical disabilities, however slight.
55. Shortcomings in students' performance are identified according to a published time-scale and targets are set with students and parents at student academic target-setting days. Where weaknesses are identified, individual diagnosis is followed by a personal action plan, which teachers monitor closely. Gifted and talented students also receive specific, focused support and guidance. The school uses a commercial value-added system to predict and track students' and subjects' comparative performance to see where improvements are necessary.
56. Procedures for assessing and testing students' attainment and progress, following the pattern laid down in the main school, are very good. However, only about half of Year 13 students feel that they are kept well informed about their progress. Inspection evidence does not support this view. Numerous examples of good formal, and informal, oral feedback were noted and written work is often furnished with detailed comment of how to improve.

57. Departments monitor and discuss examination board syllabus changes. If these make a particular syllabus less suitable, then alternatives are studied and considered carefully and occasionally a different syllabus, maybe from a different board, is adopted. Similarly, if examination results show consistently that students score less well in certain skills or perform comparatively poorly on specific papers, schemes of work are modified to improve students' performance in that area. What mostly happens well, but not consistently, is the adjustment of individual lessons after tests.

Advice, support and guidance

58. About two-thirds of Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form. Three-quarters of them are offered places – of whom at least three out of five accept. Those who leave mainly go to sixth-form colleges or mixed school sixth forms; a few who change their minds are welcomed back during Year 12. Just under half the highest attainers in Year 11 move to other schools or colleges. About 20 students, including a few boys, enter from other schools. They have an average range of attainment.
59. Students are interviewed for sixth-form places, which is good practice. The entry requirements depend on whether they wish to study intermediate or advanced business, or AS-levels. For the latter, which most choose, students must have five GCSE grades A*-C, including English. Most subjects set particular criteria, for example a minimum of grade B in French or Spanish to study AS-level in these languages. These entry requirements, which are sensibly flexible, give the great majority of students the chance to follow the courses they want and for which they are best suited.
60. All parents of Year 12 students who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire, stated that their daughters or sons were happy at Burntwood. The great majority of students in both years feel the same and would recommend others to join the sixth form. This must reflect the very good way in which students are helped to settle in to the sixth form. In the pre-inspection questionnaire it was Year 13 students who were particularly positive about their introduction into Year 12. In both years parents can attend an information evening as well as parents' evenings to discuss progress. Teachers and tutors have detailed knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses and are thus well placed to assist students to make the most of their two years in the sixth form.
61. Retention rates between Years 12 and 13 are good, with a significant majority of students continuing into higher education. Less than 15 per cent leave at the end of Year 12, two-thirds into employment or further education. Almost half the Year 12 students who follow one-year courses stay on into Year 13, practically all the rest continue with further education. The school participates in the Earn and Learn scheme organised by the local education authority, which valuably keeps a few students in school. Over 95 per cent move on to higher education, at many universities, following a wide range of degree courses. The good careers advice and guidance they receive is described in paragraph 50.
62. The school encourages sixth-formers to be involved in the rest of the school, as school council members or mentors for younger students. They are expected to contribute to the community, for example by fundraising or visiting local primary schools. Many students are very good role models, assisting in assemblies and raising money for various charities.
63. A particular strength is the academic and encouraging support sixth-formers give to younger students, often those with special educational needs. One very good example was seen in modern foreign languages, where two sixth-formers provided various kinds of help and support for eight younger students during lunchtime. They soon helped them to overcome a range of problems in their language learning. Year 12 students also gain

valuable personal development by helping out at the summer school. Innovative elements in the curriculum include work-shadowing of parents and the Earn and Learn scheme.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM

- The sixth form is very well led and managed.
- The governing body fulfils its responsibilities very well.
- The school's monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the sixth form are very good.
- The strategic use of resources, including specific grants and other funding, is good.
- The principles of best value are applied well. The sixth form is cost effective.
- Staffing levels are very good, resources are satisfactory but the accommodation is unsatisfactory (because the number of students has increased).

Leadership and management

64. The principal correctly observed that the recently appointed head of the sixth form is 'moving the sixth form forward enthusiastically and holistically', by merging the best quality of academic provision with thoughtful guidance and care for each student. A few students wrote comments praising the head of the sixth form: 'Brilliant, 'A great asset'. She is keen to make the sixth form a vibrant place for young people, and the growth in numbers reflects this. The sixth form grew significantly in the last two years; it has now doubled in size since the last inspection.
65. As in the main school all tiers of leadership affecting the sixth form are very good. The principal and senior management team support the head of sixth form very well. The governors value the sixth form greatly and are delighted that it has expanded recently. They are aware that the school is now very large, and appreciate that any further increase in sixth-form numbers will make better accommodation for them even more essential. The school's administration of students' records and performance is centralised and easily accessible, so information can be extracted or changed quickly. This technology certainly helps the head of sixth form to keep track of over 300 students.
66. Heads of departments are practically all experts in their subjects and many give excellent, and sometimes inspirational, leadership. The modern foreign languages department now has a full-time head of department, so leadership is now good and improving. Too many teachers, including several non-specialists, are involved in teaching the increasingly popular psychology. The English as an additional language and special educational needs departments give much valuable support to students who require help; they flourish and cope very well with their academic courses. Day-to-day management of all subjects is very good, particularly record-keeping, because the school's ICT network is readily accessible and efficient. Heads of department have traditionally kept clear, up-to-date schemes of work, and they continue to do this.
67. The head of science has responsibility for the separate sciences, which means he has responsibility for 14 teachers. It is impossible for him to observe enough lessons, and have the time to support those teachers that do not deliver high quality lessons. Leadership of biology and physics is satisfactory, but with elements of poor teaching in chemistry, leadership of this subject is unsatisfactory. The sciences could not cope without the hardworking technicians, who manage to prepare materials for over 70 biology and over 50 chemistry students.
68. The head of sixth form is perceptive about the curriculum and lifestyle students want, eagerly supporting the recently introduced psychology and photography courses, or

delighting in the new football table in their common room. She also acknowledges that for a few students, alternative schools or colleges meet their career aspirations best. Students are encouraged not only to aim for university but to try for the most challenging courses and entry requirements.

69. The sixth form is cost effective and one of the strengths of the school. The money the school receives as a whole, including the sixth form, is well above average. The amounts spent on the sixth form are broadly in line with allocations for post-16 students in the local education authority, so there is no subsidy from other stages in the school. In fact the sixth form subsidises, only slightly, the costs of provision in other years. As in the main school, grants for specific purposes, for example for gifted and talented students or those with special educational needs, are used correctly and effectively.
70. The principles of best value are now being applied well. This was not entirely the case at the time of the last audit report in February 2002. This report found some minor shortcomings, for example in the records of inventory checks, and these have now been rectified. The school has dealt properly with the more serious concern about quotes not being obtained for all large purchases or services.
71. The school has experienced some financial pressure, mainly because building maintenance and the heating system in particular, place a heavy demand on the budget. In addition, supply costs have been high and the school is seeking to minimise this. As in the main school, part of the school's staff recruitment and retention strategy is that teachers have less contact time with students than in most schools; this strategy is reasonable as, for as long as the school can afford it, it allows for the possibility of internal supply cover and pays for some of the extra-curricular activities which are one of the positive features of the school's work. Overall, the school works well to ensure that financial resources and staff are effectively used to achieve educational priorities.

Resources

72. The sixth form has its own block, with two computer rooms and a photography darkroom, but the latter is a long way from the classroom where photography is taught. With increased numbers, the sixth form area is now very overcrowded. The library is well stocked and particularly useful for history, geography, media studies and sociology but less so for psychology. It has many up-to-date references, for example newspaper cuttings, and the librarians provide excellent guidance. Careers and university information is extremely well-organised and helpful. Further references are located in the sixth-form block.
73. During the inspection several windows in the upper block rattled violently. The school is fully aware of these problems. The science specialist status application comments that A-level laboratories are too small for AS- and A-level group sizes – 'with the increasing popularity of the sciences we need to establish a science centre'. This is indeed the case. Too many chemistry lessons are not taught in laboratories and technicians have to move equipment, such as microscopes, for biology lessons. Both these factors make it harder for students to learn well.
74. A few classrooms used for modern foreign languages let in too much noise from outside, but the department has a reasonable language laboratory. The dance studio is wonderful, although it has no changing rooms. The drama department's main room is good, but the other spaces used are not. The rooms used for business studies are not all suitable, especially for vocational work. Not all business lessons need to take place in ICT rooms, whereas ICT lessons, which do, occasionally take place in ordinary classrooms.

75. The quality and number of textbooks and other resources have not kept up with the numbers in the sixth form, especially in psychology, with over 50 students now, and biology. The latter needs more equipment, particularly microscopes, and all the sciences, art and humanities, need to have easier access to computers so they can use them more often.

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

76. In the inspection, 15 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

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
Taken in Year 13 IN 2002							
Art	10	100	n/a	70	n/a	8.40	n/a
Biology	17	100	n/a	41	n/a	5.88	n/a
Business	15	100	n/a	60	n/a	7.20	n/a
Chemistry	10	80	n/a	0	n/a	3.00	n/a
Chinese	4	100	n/a	100	n/a	9.00	n/a
Drama	10	100	n/a	60	n/a	7.40	n/a
Design and technology (product design)	11	100	n/a	36	n/a	6.91	n/a
English literature	38	97	n/a	34	n/a	5.89	n/a
French	8	100	n/a	38	n/a	6.25	n/a
Geography	9	100	n/a	56	n/a	6.67	n/a
History	11	100	n/a	36	n/a	6.18	n/a
ICT	19	100	n/a	16	n/a	4.84	n/a
Mathematics	20	95	n/a	50	n/a	6.40	n/a
Media studies	8	100	n/a	63	n/a	7.50	n/a
Music	1	100	n/a	100	n/a	10.00	n/a
Physics	7	86	n/a	43	n/a	5.71	n/a
Sociology	20	100	n/a	40	n/a	6.3	n/a
Spanish	10	100	n/a	50	n/a	6.60	n/a
Urdu	2	100	n/a	50	n/a	6.00	n/a
AVCE Art	9	100	n/a	56	n/a		n/a
AVCE Business	17	94	n/a	12	n/a		n/a

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics were inspected in depth. Further mathematics was sampled.

The school is in its second year of providing A-level **further mathematics**. Both students who took the examination in 2001 passed. Six Year 13 students, working on the discrete and

decision module, have a good grasp of the techniques and successfully apply them to real-life commercial problems. They are making good progress.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Above average results and standards. Students make good progress because they, and their teachers, are committed and work hard.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They make sure that students achieve their best and keep a close check on their effort and progress.
- Positive relationships, based on mutual respect, contribute to good learning.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for students to hypothesise, predict and explain their reasoning are too limited.
- ICT is not used frequently enough in teaching or learning.
- Teaching and learning do not include enough examples of how the skills being taught are used in real life.

77. Mathematics is a successful area of the school's work. Students embarking on A-level courses have had a good grounding, for example in the algebra techniques. Although the minimum entry requirement is a B grade in GCSE mathematics, students with C grades are sometimes accepted, and they are successful. Overall attainment at the beginning of Year 12 is average. Several students, including a few boys, join the sixth form to study mathematics and these students feel welcome and secure very quickly.
78. A-level average points scores were above average between 1998 and 2000. In 2001 they dipped slightly, and were average. In 2002, 75 per cent of students attained A/B grades and all passed, a significant improvement. AS-level results were below average in 2001 but they improved considerably in 2002 with over 50 per cent A/B grades. Standards of work are above average overall. Year 13 students, working on the discrete and random variables module, have a very good grasp of a range of statistical techniques, which they select and link appropriately to solve problems.
79. Another Year 13 class, working on mechanics coursework in small groups, collaborated extremely well to design and conduct an effective experiment and to compile data. They had a good understanding of the variables involved, and how to establish a connection between them, as they considered sliding an object down a slope and examining its trajectory. In a pure mathematics lesson, students quickly grasped the relationship between the graph of a function and that of its inverse. Students make good progress and achieve well.
80. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and expertise for advanced work. They support students extremely well and are readily available for extra help. They take steps to check that students work hard and really understand the concepts. Students are diligent and many say how much they enjoy the subject. The way teachers assess students' work is also very good. Students are very clear about how well they are doing and what they should do to improve. Teachers and students rarely use computers and other new technologies, which does not prepare students well for higher education courses. In addition, opportunities for students to hypothesise, predict and explain their thinking are not frequent enough because teachers reveal outcomes or solutions a little too readily, rather than drawing them out from the students.

81. Student/teacher relationships are a strength, which contributes to the good learning. Students rarely, however, pose questions or volunteer comments about topics or techniques being considered, because teachers have not generated an expectation that this is important. The materials teachers use are generally very good and provide both practice, and some opportunities for problem solving, in a range of contexts. Nevertheless, lessons are not frequently peppered with examples of how the skills being taught are used in real life.
82. The department is very well led and managed. Staff work in effective partnership and rigorously employ the very good methods of assessment they have devised. Access to computers is not good enough. The last inspection report stated that 'in a few lessons at A-level, teachers lack confidence in the subject knowledge or make inadequate preparation for a lesson' – this is far from true now. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. With the exception of the dip in 2001, above average standards have been maintained.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Students' hardworking attitudes to the subject.
- An increasingly popular subject.
- Good progress in Year 13.
- The good quality of teaching, and support given to students.

Areas for improvement

- AS-level results, which were not as high as expected.
- The results of assessment are not used to alter teaching plans.
- Too little use of ICT to help students, especially higher attainers, to learn well.

83. Over the last few years, students have started sixth-form biology with broadly average standards. Most of them made good progress; nearly all students passed and in some years more than half gained A/B grades. With the introduction of AS-level in 2001, many more students have chosen biology and their range of GCSE grades on entry is much wider. Overall attainment at the start of the course is now below average. Despite this, those who take A-level still progress better than expected and results in 2002 and 2001 were similar. Nearly half attained A/B grades. The number planning to take A-level in 2003 is almost double the 2002 number. Almost 40 students took AS-level in 2002 and, although about two-thirds of them made good progress and gained at least as good as predicted grades, nine did not pass. Overall, achievement in Year 12 is as expected, and in Year 13 it is above average.
84. Present standards of work are average, but better in Year 13 than in Year 12. Some students do very good work, for example in a Year 12 lesson where they made models which illustrated the structure of DNA. The activity gave them a very clear understanding of the composition and function of the various parts of the structure, and they skilfully used their models to show how the structure supports the function. Students' work is sometimes less good, often because they do not have enough time to complete it in the 50 minute lessons. This is a continuing problem in most practical lessons. Students write neat and useful notes. Teachers devise good activities to help them gain a real understanding of their work so they can learn detailed facts more easily. Ten weeks into the Year 12 course, for example, they have already gained a good understanding of how the tertiary and quaternary structures of enzymes control their activity.

85. The quality of teaching is good overall, with very good features. All teachers create a very good atmosphere, which students appreciate. They manage lessons well, but are continually inhibited by lack of time to introduce the activity, allow students to collect results, and reflect upon them. Teachers sometimes have too little time to bring the lesson to an orderly close by summing up what has been learned. They are very good at making sure that the necessary discussion happens in the next lesson, but doing this inevitably interrupts the flow, making it harder for students to gain that deep understanding which makes learning easy. Teachers are generous in their support for students where necessary. For their part, students invest a good level of intellectual effort, and this again supports good learning. They work hard and are interested enough to make good use of the very good library facilities for independent work.
86. The head of science is overall manager of the subject. He has been in post for only a year, and has already overseen the writing of very good schemes of work and a good system for keeping track of students' progress. This system is not developed well enough to improve the way teachers identify problems as they arise, so that they can plan and, if necessary, alter future lessons. The laboratory staff provide excellent support, though the increase in student numbers means that they are sometimes short of equipment. Moving microscopes from one room to another affects learning because it takes valuable time from lessons. One room used for biology is equipped with a data projector and individual desktop personal computers. Teachers do not use these enough, especially to stretch higher attaining students. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Some outstanding teaching.
- The recently improved schemes of work.

Areas for improvement

- Below average AS- and A-level results.
- The limited range of techniques teachers use to fire students' interest and commitment.
- Assessment is not used enough to alter lesson plans and improve students' understanding.
- Poor accommodation and resources.

87. Students start the course with below average standards. About half of them make satisfactory progress in Year 12, but the others attain lower than predicted grades. In 2002, a fifth of the AS-level students did not pass the examination; most who pass continue to A-level in Year 13. Most A-level results are lower than those predicted by students' GCSE grades, so overall, achievement is below average. In 2001, A-level results were below average in comparison with national figures. The overall points score was lower in 2002; no students attained A/B grades.
88. The manager of chemistry has been in post for just over a year, so that attainment overall is now average. However, standards of work seen in lessons vary considerably. When teaching is exciting and stimulating, students produce very good work, as seen in a lesson where they identified cations in groups 1 and 2 and developed their understanding of oxidation numbers. This lesson revealed their appreciation of the importance of careful practical observation, and relating what they see to the theoretical ideas they study. They interpreted their observations correctly, and explained them using the correct technical terms. They were extremely committed, related very well to their teacher, and their learning was first rate. In other lessons, work is of a routine nature and barely satisfactory.

In a lesson on the electron-pair repulsion theory, students understood that the shape of a molecule depends on the number of bonding and non-bonding electrons, and predicted the shape of some simple molecules, but they did not appreciate the power of this model to raise understanding of the interactions between atoms and molecules. Learning is poor in such lessons.

89. Standards of written work also vary. Most students keep their notebooks well, with a wealth of relevant subject matter. They do practice questions frequently, many taken from past examination papers, and get most of the answers right. They write good descriptions of experiments but they do not think critically about the subject, or research topics in depth. As a result, they do not develop the ability to sum up a situation, apply their knowledge and come to a greater understanding of unfamiliar situations. Much written work indicates that learning is less good than it could be.
90. Although the overall quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory, it ranges from outstanding to poor. In the outstanding Year 12 lesson referred to above, the teacher clearly communicated the very high standards needed in the experiment, and showed students how to make useful, safe observations in test-tube reactions. He explained how to carry out flame tests and interpret the colours, linking these observations to transitions between atomic energy levels, and showed students how to interpret them in terms of the periodic table, atomic structures and oxidation numbers. His excellent example inspired the students to work very hard and to think carefully about everything they were doing, so they made excellent progress. In this lesson learning was excellent.
91. In other lessons, teachers emphasise facts too much, at the expense of improving students' deep understanding. In a Year 12 lesson on the periodic table, a different group of students spent most of the time answering questions, which were clearly intended to improve understanding. In practice, however, the teacher emphasised the right answers, usually given by the same few students, without elaborating on explanations to show students how to think about the subject. The same thing happens when teachers go through homework in lessons; they do not discuss how problems should be tackled. Most students in these lessons show little commitment or interest, leaving the work to a few conscientious colleagues, so they do not learn enough. Teachers set homework regularly, but they do not use it to develop students' ability to work on their own, or to solve unfamiliar problems. Teachers do not always reflect on students' progress to alter their lesson plans when they are planning their lessons. These factors make learning less good than it could be.
92. The head of science, who is also the overall manager of chemistry, has been in post for just over a year. His schemes of work are good, as they set out clearly what needs to be taught and how teachers should approach the subject. He is extending the Years 7 to 11 good procedures for monitoring progress to the sixth form. He does not have enough time to observe other chemistry teachers often enough. The allocation of rooms and laboratories, in this large and complex science department, results in many chemistry lessons being taught in ordinary classrooms, remote from the main science block. The laboratories are bright and reasonably well appointed, but they are much too small for some of the large sixth-form groups and there is too little apparatus, for example pH meters, for some experimental work. Despite the excellent work of the laboratory staff, all these factors significantly lower the quality of learning. Overall, the poor teaching in some lessons, unsatisfactory accommodation and resources, and the below average progress by many students, leading to below average examination results, mean that leadership and management are unsatisfactory.

Physics

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching, some of which is outstanding, and the support given to students.
- Students' good progress in lessons and over the whole course.
- Students' intellectual effort and productivity.

Areas for improvement

- Assessment is not used enough to monitor progress and guide lesson plans.
- Too few activities outside lessons to encourage students to work independently.

93. Students start AS-level physics with a wide range of abilities, and GCSE grades ranging from A* to C. About twice as many students took A-level physics in 2002 as in earlier years. AS- and A-level results are broadly average, but they fluctuate and, with small numbers, they cannot be compared reliably with national figures. In 2002, three of the eleven AS-level students and two of the seven A-level students attained A grades. This was much better than in 2001, when three out of four students passed, none with grade A.
94. Standards of work seen are above average. Students understand the importance of precise observation and reporting and accurate measurement. Very good teaching inspires students to become completely involved in lessons, so they learn very well. Students' written notes are well organised, so they are easy to learn and will be valuable when they revise. They cover a good range of exercises which help them to do calculations well. A few find algebra difficult, but their teachers are quick to help them. In the many discussions, which are a strong feature of lessons, most students show that they have a good understanding of the work. The sensible questions they ask, and the answers they give, show that they appreciate the significance of what they study. They make good suggestions when faced with a problem, for example why several identical bulbs, wired in parallel, did not illuminate equally. The few students who find the work difficult are very well supported both in and outside lessons. Achievement overall is therefore good.
95. The quality of teaching is very good and sometimes it is outstanding. Teachers know their subject, and communicate their knowledge very well. They also inspire their students with their own enthusiasm, drawing them into the lesson; this leads to very good learning. In a lesson on the effect of a magnetic field on a current-carrying wire, students joined in a very good range of demonstrations which helped them to understand the ideas underlying the experiment, and developed their facility to use Fleming's left hand rule. Throughout this lesson, they were challenged to think, to analyse the situation, and to predict the outcomes of experiments.
96. In an outstanding lesson on waves, the superb exposition led to excellent learning and secure understanding of the idea of a standing wave. In lessons which are good, rather than very good, shortage of time often lowers the quality of learning. In such lessons, despite very good planning and organisation, there is not enough time to introduce the topic, undertake a practical activity and provide an effective summing up of what has been learned. Students are not guided to use their free time for research, which would give teachers an even better understanding of their progress. The well resourced library is underused; it could give students an excellent understanding of physics in our lives. This would help gifted students especially, to reach their full potential.
97. The head of science is overall manager of the subject. He has been in post for only a year, and has already overseen the production of very good schemes of work and a good system for keeping track of students' progress. The laboratories are old, and rooms which were not designed as laboratories sometimes have to be pressed into service for experimental work. Students use data loggers in some experiments but generally do not

use ICT enough. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

No courses were examined in depth. Product design was sampled.

98. **Product design** is the only technology course available in the sixth form. All students passed A-level and AS-level in 2002, with a similar, high percentage, 36 per cent, of A/B grades. Students in Year 12 work with interest and enthusiasm on their low-voltage lamp projects and when learning to use computer-aided design techniques. They are supported by very effective teaching. Year 13 students' work shows considerable flair, creativity and thoroughness in planning.

BUSINESS

Vocational and non-vocational courses in business were examined in depth.

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

Strengths

- At least above average results since 2000.
- Enthusiastic teachers who support students' wide range of learning needs well.
- Excellent planning and preparation. Leadership is very good.
- Well qualified teachers who have a good range of complementary industrial and commercial experience.

Areas for improvement

- Management of the subject. As it comes within a larger cluster, its distinctive contribution is not recognised.
- Several rooms are not suitable for vocational work.
- Teachers do not always use a wide enough range of teaching styles.

99. The department has grown rapidly since the last inspection. All students have passed A-level since 1999. Results were very high in 2000 and above average in 2001. In 2002, 60 per cent attained A/B grades. 2002 vocational course results were equally strong, with 76 per cent merits or distinctions for intermediate GNVQ, and a 100 per cent pass rate in advanced AVCE. All these results are particularly impressive, as students who choose these courses rarely have high GCSE grades. They reflect the department's thorough and well-organised preparation to meet examination requirements. Most students achieve very well.
100. Students without English and/or mathematics grade C at GCSE are accepted onto the AVCE course, and the GNVQ intermediate class includes students with low GCSE grades. Teachers are very responsive to these students' abilities and additional support is available for those with special educational needs. However, a minority of students on the intermediate GNVQ course find the work difficult, for example not understanding how spreadsheets can be used to model personal expenditure.
101. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average overall. Some students taking vocational courses have completed excellent assignments, showing high levels of independent learning and a good understanding of the relationship between different business functions, for example marketing and finance. Others used market research effectively to assess the viability of their business plans. Standards in lessons are more variable. A few GNVQ students lack confidence and are unsure about personal budgeting. Year 12 AS-level students have made a good start to understanding how businesses

might use break-even analysis. Year 13 students are beginning to use relevant theories to support their arguments. Students' files are well ordered and extremely comprehensive, containing ample evidence that they use various ICT applications including spreadsheets, graphics and wordprocessing.

102. Teaching and learning are good. The organisation and planning of all business courses is very thorough. Teachers use their considerable expertise to break down assessment tasks into manageable and understandable units of work. They share the responsibility for teaching particular modules, which is a highly effective way of checking that students remain focused on particular tasks. Individual teachers take responsibility for monitoring individual students' progress. They take note of their assessment results and alter their lesson plans accordingly. This approach is supported by weekly planning meetings which provide an excellent opportunity to share good practice. Recently these meetings have focused on sorting out the new AVCE assessment requirements. Less consideration has been given to how to get all students to give long, more reflective answers to questions, or how to include more practical exercises to improve understanding of team-building techniques. Opportunities to involve local businesses are fairly limited.
103. Many classes, which take place in different parts of the school, are in small ICT rooms. Whilst this makes it easy to use computers, it limits the range of teaching methods, and also restricts other students' access to computers. The accommodation is unsatisfactory. With no specialist rooms, the right classroom layout and displays for vocational work cannot be set up. All the courses are very ably managed by the head of department. He ensures that department plans are thorough and provides excellent leadership. This subject is part of a larger ICT/business cluster, but given the rapid growth of business courses, this is not satisfactory. The distinctive contribution of business courses is therefore not recognised, which is reflected in the unsatisfactory accommodation. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

ICT was examined in depth.

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

Strengths

- Teachers' very good planning and very supportive relationships with students.
- An intensive after-school course leading to a valuable ICT technician qualification.
- Students make consistently good and often very good progress.
- Teachers are very well organised and track students' progress very effectively.

Areas for improvement

- Some marking does not provide targets for improvement.
- Timetable arrangements which mean some lessons take place in rooms without computers.

104. A-level results were average in 2001. Although the percentage attaining A/B grades was low, all students passed. With limited ICT skills at the beginning of the course, they had achieved well. Results in 2002 were similar, with a slightly higher percentage of A/B grades. Almost 50 students took AS-level in 2002 and a significant number exceeded their predicted grades. Most attained grades C to E. Present standards are average but better in Year 12 because about three-quarters of these students completed the first GCSE ICT the school offered. They were taught well and have started the AS-level course with good experience of spreadsheets and databases. Students make consistently good progress, and often it is very good, particularly in Year 13 project work.

105. Year 12 students grasp theory on information systems well, and can explain clearly how macros are used. They give pertinent examples of linked databases and understand the principles of backward compatibility in data transfer well. In a very good lesson students practised linking shared objects and effectively applied the relevant theory. In a few lessons computers are not available, which severely limits development of students' communication key skills as they cannot improve their literacy by drafting and wordprocessing answers to short examination questions.
106. Year 13 students have a good understanding of how ICT legislation can be enforced through firms' audit trails and spot checks. Their projects are based on a good range of real local ICT users. Most apply the design process in their projects, but a few lower attaining students find it difficult to design relational databases, especially if they have not followed the GCSE course. About 20 students, some of whom are particularly talented ICT users, are making good progress following an intensive and valuable course which leads to an ICT technician qualification. This is taught after school on two days a week.
107. Teaching and learning overall are very good, because teachers have very good subject knowledge. They have experience of industrial and commercial work, so they explain the practical implications of programs particularly well. Students are most enthusiastic and interested and teachers generate very good relationships with them and support them well. Work is marked promptly with helpful comments, although these do not always include targets for improvement. Teachers track and monitor students' overall progress against predicted grades very well so that any underachievement is identified promptly.
108. In an excellent Year 13 lesson where students completed their weekly record of how their projects had developed, they critically identified their own strengths and weaknesses. The teacher guided them individually to set realistic targets for the next stage. All the Year 13 projects are generating databases linked to local business uses, for example a driving school (mechanics, cars and prices), a hairdresser (stock and customer appointments) or a catering firm. In a Year 12 lesson, which was good overall, the teacher provided students with excellent, industry-related knowledge, but did not give them enough leeway to choose their own ways of working and to research and draft their own information in groups. There were no computers available for the group presentations.
109. Leadership and management are excellent because the five teachers work very well together and design new and interesting materials which are geared to students' needs. A few students extend their knowledge and understanding of ICT, and their social skills, by helping younger students in Saturday masterclasses. Plans for the future are very good but, as this subject is becoming so popular, they depend on there being more computers and greater timetable flexibility. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

No subjects are offered in this curriculum area.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No subjects are offered in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA STUDIES

Art, drama and media studies were examined in depth. Photography (AS-level only) and dance, were sampled. It was not possible to see any A-level music lessons during the inspection.

110. One student successfully attained an A grade at A-level and two passed AS-level **music** in 2002. Students are taught by the director of music and specialists in composition and performing. Years 12 and 13 students have lessons together. In 2002, 75 per cent of the 12 AS-level **dance** students attained grades A/B. Seven of these students are continuing to make very good progress in Year 13 as they are taught very well. Several of them have

ambitious plans for higher education in related areas. In the lesson seen the students made rapid progress mastering dance notation and managed to link this with musical and controlled performances.

111. **Photography** was introduced for AS-level in 2001; chosen by ten students, 90 per cent passed, 40 per cent with grades A/B. Present Year 12 students are attaining above average standards. Teaching is very good because it combines art and photography, creating an imaginative approach where students learn independently. Students show good levels of maturity, addressing interesting personal, social and cultural issues. Examples of such were seen in the 'autobiography' project based on students' personal insight. Standards of planning are inspiring because critical and contextual studies are coherently linked with practical activities. The course is well-constructed so all students retain interest and complete it. All make very good progress acquiring technical skills.

Art

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

Strengths

- Well above average attainment and very good achievement.
- Very good, enthusiastic teaching, expertise and leadership. Teachers provide students with valuable individual support. Their marking and assessment are excellent.
- Students' excellent attitudes and their success as independent learners.
- An excellent range of multicultural reference material to widen students' understanding of artists.

Areas for improvement

- The quality of ICT students can use.

112. Since 1999 A-level results have been consistently well above average with a high percentage of A/B grades. In 2002, half the students attained A grades. Vocational/AVCE art and design results have been above average for the last three years, with a high proportion of distinctions and merits; in 2002, 56 per cent of students attained A/B grades, under the new grading system. Average points scores in 2001 and 2002 were very high compared to average. All students achieve very well, having started the courses with mostly average GCSE results.
113. Present standards are well above average and progress is very good. AVCE art and design is not running at present, but several students have opted for AS-level photography. In Year 12, students draw and model from direct observation well and, using mixed media, develop their colour skills in a structured and systematic way. In Year 13, higher attaining students have a sophisticated understanding of what is needed in purposeful preparatory studies. Most students have a good technical knowledge and drawing and painting skills. Their ideas are stimulated by the high quality reference materials and examples of sketchbook work which teachers make available. As a result, average attaining Year 12 students, in their 'revealed' project, display growing confidence and technical skill drawing wrapped body-parts in the style of artists Fontana and Christo.
114. Students use a wide range of materials and enquiry approaches in their sketchbook work on artists' drawing, painting and three-dimensional techniques. They annotate their examples clearly, incorporating subject-specific vocabulary very well. Teachers give students helpful writing frames so they can focus on structure and content, for example describing paintings. Students' preparatory photography studies reveal connections between their own and artists' research and they express a personal view in their work. Students address interesting personal and social issues in their 'autobiography' work.

Many students independently visit galleries, use the sixth-form studio in their free time, and value sharing their developing expertise and insight with each other; teachers encourage them to analyse and evaluate sketchbooks against exam criteria together. Students use the Internet and digital camera well, but not enough other ICT applications.

115. Teaching and learning are very good. With very good expertise and experience, teachers know exactly how to prepare students for examinations by building on their individual strengths. High expectations and excellent relationships stimulate and motivate students through the two-year course. Teachers use very good resources to broaden students' knowledge of artists and experience of two- and three-dimensional materials. They create enjoyable activities which encourage students to solve problems, refine their techniques and learn from each other. Short, single lessons move fast because teachers are well organised, start the lessons with excellent discussions, and know how to pose questions that make students think.
116. Teachers' marking and assessment are excellent and they set rigorous targets for work to be completed. They show students how to evaluate their own work. Artist residencies, life drawing and sculpture workshops, exhibitions and regular visits to galleries extend students' knowledge most effectively and, in lessons, teachers build on these to improve drawing and research skills. These enrichment activities, and the well-balanced schemes of work, significantly raise students' awareness of spiritual and cultural elements within art.
117. Leadership and management are excellent. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The head of department monitors and evaluates performance rigorously and is fully aware that more ICT is needed for the art and photography courses and that AS-level grades could be pushed higher. The photography course is hampered by the considerable distance between the classroom and the darkroom.

Drama

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

Strengths

- Above average standards.
- Very good teaching. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and their enthusiasm contributes to students' very good progress.
- Students are highly motivated and their enjoyment helps them to learn very well.

Areas for improvement

- In discussion and debate, students' speech occasionally lacks fluency to describe what they have seen or to evaluate their work.

118. In 2001, all students attained AS-level with A to C grades and in 2002 nearly 75 per cent did. All students passed A-level, with 60 per cent A/B grades. Present standards are above average. Students start the course with sound knowledge because they had drama lessons in Years 7 to 9, and most of them took GCSE as well. This experience is developed intensively in the sixth form. Students know and apply a good range of dramatic

techniques and presentation strategies, and they use and apply technical language with ease.

119. Having read a number and variety of scripts, students have a good understanding of authors' intentions and how they achieve them. They prepare and devise their own presentations thoughtfully and purposefully. As well as tapping into their own knowledge and incorporating their teachers' advice, they constantly search for new interest and originality, with the result that they, and their audiences, enjoy their performances. In using scripted drama they seek first to understand and then to interpret and enhance the authors' intended effects. As a result of all these influences, practical work in both years is usually of very high quality.
120. Students' written work, however, while generally careful and thorough, is not as good. Students' writing tends to be informal and not as well controlled as their acting and directing. This is also a characteristic of how they speak when they evaluate and discuss work; their sentence structure and choice of words is casual (except in one or two outstanding cases). Describing a character in a play one student observed: 'He's, well, you know, kind of like, you know – sad'.
121. The way in which students progress and build upon their achievements, in lessons and over time, is very good. This includes students with special educational needs and a few with English as an additional language. All students enter the course with reasonable basic subject skills which they develop rapidly. Because they are highly motivated and are taught very well, their learning is very good. Teachers prepare lessons well, plan them very carefully and pace them very well, so that students know and understand what they are doing and why, and learn fast. During the inspection all teaching was good and it was outstanding in two lessons.
122. Teachers have structured the whole course so that students are very well guided along a clearly defined path of development and improvement. Teachers communicate their very good subject knowledge with considerable contagious enthusiasm, by participating themselves, engaging students, and encouraging freedom of expression when students evaluate their own and each other's work. In both years, drama classes are taught by two or more teachers, who plan and co-operate very well together, so that students receive the maximum benefit from several points of view and skills.
123. The head of dance and drama provides very good leadership to the three subject specialists. She has a very clear idea of students' needs. All the department's documentation provides very useful guidance. The teachers give students a rich and very well balanced range of experience and expertise, and their teaching is very good. Marking is careful, thorough, and developmental, as well as evaluative. The examination syllabus has been carefully chosen to suit students' aptitudes and to make best use of the teachers' skills.
124. Regular assessments and target setting, clearly linked to the course requirements and examination criteria, provide students with very good guidance as to where they should be going and how to get there. School performances, a significant number of theatre visits, including a three-day residential trip to Stratford-upon-Avon, and visits to the school by professional actors and groups, all combine to make students' learning interesting and exciting. The drama studio is well equipped and furnished, close to another useful space, but the drama hall which has to be used sometimes is stark with poor acoustics. The second drama room lacks the sound and lighting equipment found in the main one. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Media studies

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

Strengths

- A popular and successful course. Consistently very high results.
- Very good planning is backed up by excellent background materials prepared by the department.
- Teaching makes complex ideas and critical terms accessible.
- Excellent leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- Encourage students to make presentations clearly audible.

125. Results have been very high compared to national averages since 1999. In 2001 all eight students passed A-level, half with grade B. In 2002 five out of eight students attained A/B grades and all passed. At AS-level all 16 students passed, almost three-quarters of them with grade C or above. This pattern of attainment continues and standards seen were well above average. Students read complex analytical texts very well. Just occasionally they need help with unfamiliar specialist terms. Once these are explained, students grasp these terms and apply them correctly. Students write very good essays as the teachers show them how to organise and structure their thoughts very well. Teachers cover the wide range of genres, topics and techniques specified by the syllabus skilfully and in depth. Students totally understand the theories which they apply to practical situations, for instance producing mock-ups of magazine covers.

126. Learning is very good. The readiness with which students collaborate means learning proceeds at a very good pace and all students make very good progress. They know that they can consult the teacher, but are not too dependent on this support. They think independently and only involve the teacher after wrestling vigorously with problems. Just occasionally, students' presentations are not clearly audible. The background materials teachers provide support learning because they are very well produced and students find they help them to focus their ideas.

127. Teaching is consistently very good. Teachers plan effectively, so that the units they teach are well balanced and complement each other; progress is logical and well structured. Teachers use their impressive knowledge to elaborate on the background texts helpfully. They explore the contemporary significance of media in modern life, so that students become fascinated by the powers of analysis they acquire. Clear explanations of context and conventions mean that students appreciate films made in the 1930s. Teachers frequently check that groups are focusing and moving forward and that individuals fully understand terms and concepts.

128. Good facilities, including access to ICT, are now available and used effectively. In one lesson, students planned how they would use a video camera to capture a scene for a crime movie and edit it, using computer technology. The library, particularly with its updated collection of cuttings, is a valuable asset. Leadership and management of the subject are excellent. The head of English gives clear guidance and direction, ably supported by a talented team. Members of the English department teach this subject and all of the very good principles and practice evident there are reflected in the media courses. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

HUMANITIES

History, geography, religious education and sociology were examined in depth. Psychology and critical thinking were sampled.

129. **Psychology** was introduced in 2001. The AS-level results in 2002 were encouraging, with almost 30 per cent A/B grades. The subject is very popular, with 47 AS-level and 15 A-level enthusiastic students, who are all making very good progress. Teaching and learning are very good. A very enthusiastic and capable teacher leads and manages the subject very well. However, it has proved difficult to manage the considerable number of non-specialist teachers within the department and, as this is clearly an increasingly popular subject, this issue needs to be addressed urgently. As well as more specialist staff the department needs more resources.
130. **Critical thinking** AS-level was taken by ten students in 2002 for the first time; one attained an A grade. Teaching was very good in the one lesson seen and a student commented on how rewarding she finds the course. The teacher skilfully steered students to see the errors in their logic and to explain why the right answers were right.

Geography

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

Strengths

- High quality, imaginative and well-resourced teaching.
- A varied and exciting enrichment programme.
- Outstanding, skilled and effective leadership and management.
- Very positive attitudes from students; they enjoy the subject and contribute well.
- Upward trend in standards.

Areas for improvement

- Lack of ICT provision in the geography teaching rooms and resource base.

131. Since the last inspection, standards have improved. In 2001, all the A-level students passed, 80 per cent with A/B grades, well above average. Of the nine students who took A-level in 2002, all passed and 56 per cent gained A/B grades. It is a tribute to the department that six of these students went on to study geography related courses. The AS-level examination results in 2002 were slightly disappointing in just one unit, and individual tutorials are already in place to remedy this. Geography is becoming increasingly popular in the sixth form.
132. Students achieve very well and standards are above average. In human and physical geography lessons, all students develop their knowledge and understanding by listening carefully and being guided skilfully in discussions. Year 13 students show their increasing maturity by making very clear, authoritative presentations and they question each other perceptively on complex topics, such as how economic activity is affected by weather and climate. They are also confident using the Internet, for example when Year 12 students analysed congestion charging in London. Written work is consistently neat and well organised. Students' mastery of a variety of graphical and statistical techniques and their regular use of ICT, makes a significant contribution to their understanding of key skills. Student views on the subject are very positive. 'Really interesting' is a representative comment, and for many it is their favourite subject. Students with special educational needs make very good progress.
133. Overall, teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are very well planned with a considerable variety of activities, including discussion in pairs and small groups, observation of videos and individual writing and presentations. Lessons start promptly, perhaps with a brief discussion on 'hazard of the week', and move forward at a brisk pace. Very well chosen case studies give a sense of place and reality. Year 12 students clearly

enjoyed a personal account of Thailand and will not forget an extract from the film 'The Beach' shown to explain the sustainability of sand dunes. Teachers ask questions which probe students' understanding and expect answers that are full and well substantiated by factual knowledge. Praise is generous. Independent learning and confidence is promoted through individual work: at the same time as watching a video on population trends, each Year 13 student had to write an analysis, which was then read out to the rest of the group. Teachers' assessment of work is meticulous and they give students clear targets for improvement. Students have individual tutorials if they need additional guidance. Teachers frequently give very helpful hints on examination techniques, for example replacing time-consuming paragraphs with quicker annotated diagrams.

134. Students learn very well. They are attentive and work effectively in response to the teachers' enthusiasm, confident subject knowledge and high expectations. Relationships in the classroom are particularly good, purposefully developed by the residential fieldtrip early in the course. Their enjoyment and learning is enhanced by the broad range of extension activities on offer. Reference in lessons is made to fieldwork undertaken on both human and physical topics: at Camber Sands in relation to sand dunes and the London Transport Museum for congestion charging. Participation in masterclasses, lectures at Kingston University and national competitions like the World Wide Quiz, bring the subject to life and make learning fun.
135. The leadership and management of the subject are outstanding. The head of department also leads the entire humanities cluster. She organises everything efficiently, is committed to getting the best out of all students and her genuine enthusiasm is infectious. She monitors standards most effectively by observing lessons, checking students' notes and analysing results. The department willingly takes on new initiatives, recently introducing Geographical Information Systems, which provide statistical mapping through ICT. It is also keenly involved in training teachers. The geography section of the library is very good but access to computers is difficult. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

History

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

Strengths

- Students develop their skills for advanced level study rapidly in Year 12.
- Very good teaching. Teachers use their knowledge very well to enthuse and guide students. They generate a sense of shared purpose in lessons and excellent relationships.
- Excellent leadership and management and rigorous monitoring of students' progress.
- The subject's very important contribution to developing students' communication skills.

Areas for improvement

- The few A/B grades attained in recent years.
- Too little use of ICT and the Internet for research.

136. In recent years, A-level results have been close to average but few students have attained A/B grades. 2002 A-level results, however, show an upward trend as all students gained at least a D grade. AS-level results in 2002 were impressive, with 33 per cent A/B grades. Standards are above average. At present, there are 24 students in Year 12 and 16 taking A-level in Year 13. Students in Year 12 are already achieving very well. They analyse sources critically and use a wide range of evidence to support their conclusions. Their written work is also impressive and their folders contain some excellent work on sources related to the imposition of ship money in the 17th century. Most students also have a clear

understanding of how political, social, economic and cultural factors affect history. These historical skills are honed further in Year 13, where students articulate their ideas very well and take notes in many different ways. Their folders are very well organised and are a valuable source for reference and revision. Students write well developed essays by Year 13 and all of them make very good progress learning how to carry out research, for example in detailed project work on McCarthyism in the USA after World War Two.

137. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers are very confident in their subject expertise and plan very effective lessons which include a range of stimulating tasks. They set clear aims and objectives and revisit these at the end of lessons to reinforce students' understanding and learning. As a result, students make rapid progress, both in terms of their knowledge and understanding of the various topics and in terms of developing independent learning skills. This was demonstrated very well in a Year 12 lesson examining 17th century sources in detail, to test reliability. Students used model answers to produce a very mature and thoughtful discussion on source analysis.
138. Teachers have very high expectations and, in particular, by asking skilfully worded questions, they make sure that students develop high levels of analysis and evaluation. Students clearly enjoy this subject. There is, above all, a sense of shared purpose in lessons, so that students are keen to learn and voice their opinions with confidence. This was seen to very good effect in a Year 12 lesson when students engaged in stimulating group work by taking the part of different countries at the time of the Versailles Treaty. All students made very good progress developing both their historical understanding and communication skills.
139. Excellent subject leadership and management combines enthusiasm, experience and good humour. Teachers monitor students' progress rigorously, apply detailed marking schemes and give them clear advice about how to improve. Teachers use a wide and varied range of materials to make learning interesting and they successfully encourage students to read widely and in depth. The library has many relevant resources to help students to study and research independently. ICT and the Internet are beginning to make an impact on the department's work, but not enough yet. Students benefit considerably by attending conferences to listen to eminent historians. This subject also makes an important contribution to developing students' speaking and writing. Its popularity is increasing. Well considered plans are in place to raise the percentage of high grades. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Religious education

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

Strengths

- Above average standards.
- Very good progress because of demanding teaching based on excellent subject knowledge, delivered with enthusiasm and at a cracking pace.
- Excellent leadership.

Areas for improvement

- Lack of computers in the classrooms means that students cannot carry out on the spot Internet research.

140. Numbers choosing this subject have increased this year, with 17 students in Year 12 and 11 in Year 13. In 2002 no students took A-level but 14 passed AS-level, five with higher than predicted grades, and one, with the lowest GCSE average points score, attained the only grade B. Current standards are above average. Year 12 students have a very good

knowledge and insight into Islam because they are so eager to learn and teaching is inspirational. Their appreciation of different ways to interpret, analyse and consider the theological purpose of texts, is above that expected for students of their age. Year 13 students have a very good grasp of the themes found in the fourth gospel and an amazingly good understanding of Sufism.

141. Students make very good progress because of the very good teaching they experience. In a Year 12 lesson, students rapidly widened their knowledge and understanding of the post Hijrah events to the execution of the Qureyzah, because the teacher's excellent subject knowledge enthralled them. In a Year 13 lesson, students learned a great deal about the Logos becoming flesh and they understood the detailed implications of this. They appreciated, with considerable insight, that the gospel according to St John may have been written to counter the heresy of Gnosticism.
142. Teaching is consistently very good, and sometimes excellent. It has improved significantly since the last inspection. It is based on excellent subject knowledge, delivered at a cracking pace, which enthuses students to learn. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson on the relationship between the Jews and the Muslims in the battles of Badr, Uhud and the Trench. In another Year 12 lesson, even a rather dull section of the syllabus, about detailed text analysis, was brought alive and made interesting because of the creative and imaginative way in which it was taught. In a Year 13 lesson, all students, including those with English as an additional language, made very good progress because the teacher knows each student's needs and very effectively encourages and praises them, thus building their confidence and self-esteem. Students are quite happy to ask questions, which, however demanding, the teacher can respond to easily, giving deep and relevant answers. In such an atmosphere students' learning takes off; it is very good. Lessons are rigorous but fun, with students and teacher learning together.
143. Leadership is excellent as the head of department inspires other teachers to deliver the highest quality teaching possible. Management is also excellent as teachers monitor and observe each other happily and constructively to share the best practice and ideas. With no computers in the classrooms, students cannot carry out on the spot Internet research. Just occasionally this holds back development of particular issues. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- Consistently above average or better results and high standards.
- Very good teaching, particularly questioning, gives students confidence. They thoroughly enjoy this subject.
- Excellent leadership and management.
- An important contribution to students' communication and number skills.

Areas for improvement

- ICT and the Internet are not used enough.
- The number of visiting speakers is fairly low.

144. A-level results have been above, or well above average, since 1999. In 2002, 40 per cent of students attained A/B grades although AS-level results were not so strong. At present, there are 44 AS-level students and 15 A-level students. The subject is increasingly popular. Standards are above average. Year 12 students develop a very good understanding of different sociological theories and methodology. They learn how to

handle data effectively and develop research and study skills that can support high examination results. Written work suggests that most can, at this early stage, analyse theories. Students have produced detailed notes on differing sociological perspectives on education.

145. Some lower attaining students, and those new to the subject, sometimes struggle with the new terminology, but teachers give them good advice by checking their work in detail and they provide an excellent induction booklet on the subject. As a result, all students make very good progress. In Year 13, students' research skills develop further. Their written work is of a high standard. Their essays show a very good understanding of theoretical approaches and relevant research, for example in some detailed and well-argued essays on Marxist theories of crime and deviance.
146. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use this very well to incorporate and explain valuable information to students, who make very good progress. Teachers plan lessons very well and expect high standards. Students ask questions confidently and participate fully. In a Year 13 lesson, debating and reflecting on factors affecting choices of research methods, the discussion was impressive in its depth and maturity. Teachers use skilful questioning to check and reinforce new material and target them so that all students contribute in class. Lessons are suffused with pace, rigour and interesting resources. Above all, there is a sense of enjoyment, underpinned by excellent relationships. Students are enthused and work hard. In groups, Year 12 students worked extremely enthusiastically and productively when they examined the reasons why boys and girls achieve differently at school.
147. The head of department provides excellent leadership and management. Teachers assess students' homework and coursework thoroughly, with detailed marking and constructive feedback on how to improve. A very wide range of books and journals, particularly in the library, successfully help students to study and learn independently. Teachers encourage all students to use ICT and the Internet but further development is needed. Students attend conferences on relevant topics but the number of visiting speakers is fairly low. The subject makes a very important contribution to the development of students' communication, citizenship and number skills. This is a very popular and successful area of sixth-form provision. High quality teaching, students' enthusiasm and strong and dedicated leadership, are the main hallmarks of the department's success. This subject was not offered at the time of the last inspection but has become well established since its introduction.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English and French were inspected in depth. Spanish was sampled.

148. No student sat **Spanish** A-Level in 2001 but seven took it in 2002, with 50 per cent attaining A/B grades. Six students took AS-level in 2002, with better results than those obtained in 2001, which were average. Two lessons were observed and teaching was at least satisfactory. All four students who took A-level **Chinese** in 2002 attained A/B grades.

English

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

Strengths

- Inspirational leadership supported by dedicated teamwork. Teachers and students have outstanding relationships.
- Very good planning backed up by high quality resources.
- Well above average standards and very good progress made by almost all students.

Areas for improvement

- Lower attaining students occasionally spoil their writing with weak grammar and spelling.
- Students do not always speak clearly and audibly. A few do not contribute enough in lessons.

149. In 2001 all 20 students passed A-level and the average points score was above average; it was well above average in 2000. Almost twice as many students took A-level in 2002, only one did not pass and just over a third attained A/B grades. Students start the course with GCSEs ranging from A* to C. In 2002 over 40 students took AS-level and all passed with just over one in five attaining A/B grades. Most students who retook GCSE English passed. Present standards are well above average.
150. In class, students spoke well, discussing two interpretations of a scene from *Hamlet* and have a very good understanding of themes and characters in *The Glass Menagerie*. On the other hand some students, at an early stage of studying *Othello*, were hesitant to express any initial views about the character of Iago. Their very good knowledge of plays and poems is linked to their meticulous annotation of texts, so they easily find relevant references and quotations, which they insert in their essays. Their essays are well structured and answer questions thoroughly, usually with clear and coherent language. A few lower attaining students spoil their essays with syntax and spelling errors. Students present their coursework well.
151. Most students make very good progress and over time their achievement is better than expected. Students learn very effectively, especially when they work in small groups where they all take part, share ideas and listen carefully. Occasionally, when addressing the class, students do not speak clearly and audibly and therefore fail to state their case boldly. Students learn rapidly because they often read ahead before lessons and so are ready to engage in discussion. Teachers' excellent planning means that learning is structured, with one step clearly leading to the next, consolidating knowledge, building skills and developing confidence. The residential conferences towards the end of Years 12 and 13 are a tremendous boost to students' command of this subject.
152. Teaching is very good with significantly excellent elements. Teachers combine attention to detail with setting texts within a wider context, which helps students to grasp implications and understand the conventions of the period. Teachers develop and use interesting, varied approaches which engage students' attention, for example gathering several of Iago's speeches together, so students could glean an impression of him before they read *Othello*. Teachers judge well when to let dialogue flow and when to intervene to refocus, often by skilfully asking probing questions. Teachers generate an atmosphere of respect combined with high expectations which involves students and makes them feel valued; relationships are excellent. Students edit and write contributions for the professionally printed poetry anthology, *Red All Over*, and act as reading buddies with younger students.
153. Under the inspirational leadership of the head of department, the vibrant teaching conveys the teachers' passion for the subject. Innovative teaching strategies and thorough planning are backed up with high quality background notes and guidance for students, to which all teachers contribute. They scrutinise results, data and examiners' reports for clues about how best to move forward and set ambitious targets. Teachers sharing A-level and AS-level groups often reflect together, which is good practice, and helps students to learn very well. The creative partnership with teacher training institutions has led to many successful appointments. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

French

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

Strengths

- Very good, lively teaching. The hardworking teachers give students good levels of support.
- Most students are keen and work well together.
- Improved standards despite considerable staff changes. Numbers are increasing in Year 12.
- The department is now well led and managed effectively. Informal and formal assessment of students' progress is very good.

Areas for improvement

- No programme of observations for teachers to share best practice.
- Teachers do not all correct inaccuracies in the same way.
- Poor acoustics in several classrooms.
- Too little ICT used.

154. The two students who took A-level in 2001 passed, as did the eight students who took it in 2002, with two A and one B grade. All seven students passed AS-level in 2002 with a good proportion attaining higher grades. These results compare favourably with the modest results attained in 2001. Present standards are about the same as they were during the previous inspection but student numbers are beginning to increase. Year 12 students have the potential to achieve high A-level grades as they attained very good GCSE grades. This is very creditable considering the many staff changes in recent years; it reflects the work of this increasingly strong department.

155. Standards of work are average. Students listen and understand French well and respond to questions quite confidently. In one lesson in the language laboratory, students quickly understood and acquired some specialist vocabulary, using complex tenses to rank appliances according to their desirability. However, when they venture beyond prepared materials, basic grammar weaknesses appear. Teachers are making a concerted effort to remedy them, but do not always stress enough how vital it is to avoid rudimentary mistakes in advanced work. Students' written work is reasonably accurate.

156. Year 12 students, only two months into the course, are making good headway. In one grammar revision lesson they coped well with the present perfect although some struggled to remember the past participle of a few less familiar irregular verbs. Thanks to well organised and systematic teaching, their memories were probed and prompted so that their knowledge was revived and consolidated. This emphasis on grammar makes a good contribution to students' literacy.

157. Teaching is good overall. It was very good in two lessons seen during the inspection. Students enjoy lessons, make good progress and learn well. However, achievement over time is less strong because students still make a number of basic errors and a few are reluctant to initiate discussions in French, despite teachers speaking French extensively and fluently. The native French teachers particularly know the problem areas in French for English speakers. This gives their teaching a clear focus which helps students to overcome specific difficulties. Students respond well to the lively and enthusiastic teaching. They concentrate, give of their best and help and encourage each other. Lessons generally proceed at a fast pace so that no time is lost.

158. Teachers know their students very well and take every opportunity to monitor their progress in class, particularly when they are doing paired and group work. Students also help and encourage each other. All this creates a productive, collaborative atmosphere which encourages learning. Teachers give oral feedback immediately, which is thorough and often encouraging. They mark errors conscientiously, and frequently add comments showing students where they can improve, but they do not all do this in the same way.

Students appreciate the ready availability of high quality support in and outside the classroom. However, work remains to be done to get students more accustomed to, and confident in, speaking naturally in French. The foreign language assistant is making a worthwhile contribution in this area. Students also work well independently. They use the Internet for personal research.

159. The team spirit teachers have forged during the last couple of years is a strength. The problems of constant change and unclear responsibility for leadership and management have finally been resolved. The languages department is now well led and managed effectively. Teachers have not yet observed each other to share good practice and reinforce recent improvements. They use their excellent assessment data well, to set individual targets and, for example, to decide to change examination boards. The language laboratory is not state of the art but its sound quality is good. In other rooms, outside noise makes listening and comprehension difficult. The teachers are determined to use enjoyable modern technology, such as computer assisted language learning, more. The reality of learning French is supported by trips and exchanges to France as well as TV, video and Internet resources. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.