

INSPECTION REPORT

GORDANO SCHOOL

Portishead, Bristol

LEA area: North Somerset

Unique reference number: 131374

Headteacher: Mr Robert Sommers

Reporting inspector: Mrs Gulshan Kayembe
2901

Dates of inspection: 25 to 29 November 2002

Inspection number: 250017

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: St Mary's Road
Portishead
Bristol

Postcode: BS20 7QR

Telephone number: 01275 842606

Fax number: 01275 817420

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Paul Gray

Date of previous inspection: 1 - 5 December 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2901	Gulshan Kayembe	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? The school's results and achievements How well are the pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
9472	John Edmond	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
28199	Peter Lawley	Team inspector	English	
			English as an additional language	
			Drama in the sixth form	
30553	Richard Fuller	Team inspector	Mathematics	
1249	Joe Edge	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
			Biology in the sixth form	
			Physics in the sixth form	
11190	Winifred Burke	Team inspector	Educational inclusion	
			Design and technology	
			Design and technology in the sixth form	
10392	Donaleen Ratcliff	Team inspector	Geography	
			Geography in the sixth form	
15372	Patricia Walker	Team inspector	English in the sixth form	
17522	Nigel Stiles	Team inspector	Modern foreign language	
			French in the sixth form	
8131	Charlotte Goodhill	Team inspector	Modern foreign language	

23080	Robert Isaac	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
			Information and communication technology in the sixth form	
18912	Catherine Large	Team inspector	Religious education	
8622	Heather Housden	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to the pupils?
10209	Vincent Gormally	Team inspector	Art and design	
			Art in the sixth form	
23308	John Morrell	Team inspector	Music	
15576	David Nebesnuick	Team inspector	History in the sixth form	
			Business education in the sixth form	
20999	Mark Evans	Team inspector	Psychology in the sixth form	
31329	Katie Barratt	Team inspector	History	
			Citizenship	
6620	Barry Juxon	Team inspector	Mathematics in the sixth form	
22691	Ray Woodhouse	Team inspector	Science	

The inspection contractor was:

Open Book Inspections
6 East Point
High Street
Seal
Sevenoaks
TN15 0EG

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

There are currently 1537 students aged 11-18 on roll, making this a much larger than average secondary school. The school has technology college status. There has been steady growth in numbers since the last inspection and the school is oversubscribed as it was at the time of the last inspection. Overall, there are slightly more boys. The difference is most marked in Year 10 where there are almost a third more boys than girls. The school's intake is fully comprehensive and students of all backgrounds are represented. However, the overall socio-economic circumstances of students are better than average. This is reflected in the below average proportion of students eligible for a free school meal. Attainment on entry is above average overall though there are some variations from year to year. The proportion of students with special educational needs, including the proportion with a statement, is below average. Very few students are from minority ethnic groups and even fewer have English as an additional language. Almost all are fluent and none is a beginner in English.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school, which provides a high quality education for its students. Standards of work are well above average by Years 9 and 11, and this is reflected in the well above average performance in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations. The quality of teaching is very good and students make very good progress in lessons. Outstanding leadership by the headteacher inspires staff and promotes high expectations amongst all. The views of parents and students are accorded high status and the school is highly geared towards meeting their needs. This is a key to its success. The school ethos is very positive and students' personal development very good. Overall, the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Leadership and management are very good overall.
- Governors fulfil their responsibilities very well and provide very good support to the school.
- Students' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are very good.
- Teaching and learning are of a high standard.
- Students achieve consistently high standards and attainment is well above average by Years 9 and 11.
- Staff development is very well planned and managed.
- Provision for social and moral development is very good.
- Links with parents are very good.

What could be improved

- Provision for information and communication technology (ICT).
- Accommodation.
- Provision for students with special educational needs.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was inspected last in 1997. This is the school's third inspection. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Results in National Curriculum tests and examinations have improved at a very good rate and the school has been given a

government achievement award for this improvement. The positive features of the school highlighted in the last inspection have either been maintained or further improved. There has been very good improvement in the quality of the teaching. The key issues identified in the last report have been mostly very well tackled. Punctuality to lessons has improved to as good a level as possible given the vast expanse of the site. Monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school are now good. The school provides a wider range of courses in Years 10 to 11 and in the sixth form, where three vocational courses have been introduced. However, requirements for ICT are still not fully met in Years 7 to 11 or for religious education in the sixth form, though they are fully met lower down the school. The school still does not meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship. Overall, given the quality of education provided, the strong commitment to improvement and the outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher and governors, the school's capacity to improve further is very good.

STANDARDS

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

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

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

*No national data is available for A-levels for 2002 to make comparisons.

Overall standards of attainment are well above average by the ends of Years 9 and 11. This is reflected in the well above average results of National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 and GCSE examinations in 2001 and 2002. The school met its 2002 targets for performance in these tests and examinations. The school's overall performance at GCSE was above that of similar schools and the proportions of students gaining five or more GCSEs in the range of grades A* to C and A* to G were well above those in similar schools. Performance was well above the average of similar schools in National Curriculum tests in English and above average in science and mathematics tests. GCSE results in English, mathematics and science were well above average in 2001 and 2002. Results in geography at GCSE are very high and results are consistently well above average in drama, design and technology and psychology.

Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment and their progress through Years 7 to 11 is consistently good. Inspection evidence indicates that in English, standards of work are well above average by Years 9 and 11. Standards of work in mathematics are above average by Years 9 and 11 and in science they are above average by Year 9 and well above by Year 11. Standards of work in ICT are above average by Year 9 but only average by Year 11 due to lack of specialist lessons in ICT and fully developed systems of assessment in subjects across the curriculum. Whilst use of ICT in most subjects is good, in some it needs further development.

Attainment in the sixth form is currently above average overall and reflects the improving trend seen in the A-level results. The 2001 results were average overall and 2002 results

were better, though no national data is available to make comparison. Sixth form students make good progress in relation to their prior attainment.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students are enthusiastic about school and happy to be there.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. In almost half the lessons behaviour observed was very good or excellent and in the vast majority it was at least good.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Students are polite and sensitive to the needs of others. They show interest in the world around them and in the different views and beliefs of others. In lessons, they work well collaboratively. Relationships are very good.
Attendance	Very good. Punctuality to school is very good and to lessons it is as good as it can be given the nature of the school site.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The overall quality of teaching is very good. It is at least good in all subjects in the main school with very good or excellent teaching in almost all. There is good match of work to students' needs and expectations are high, often very high. Literacy and numeracy are well taught. The quality of teaching is good in English, mathematics and science in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 to 11. Where teaching is merely satisfactory or, on the rare occasions where it is unsatisfactory, slow pace, weaker classroom management and management of students are usually key factors. In the great majority of lessons, work is well structured and often presented in a very stimulating and interesting manner so that students are instantly engaged. Teachers' subject knowledge is of a very high standard and used well to help students understand key ideas and subject-related material. Students are encouraged to work on their own and show very good application to work. They have very good learning skills. For example, they are adept at finding information, working collaboratively and solving problems.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. There is good breadth and range in the subjects offered. However requirements are not fully met for ICT in Years 7 to 11 and in religious education in the sixth form. Provision for personal and social education and citizenship is very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory overall. Learning support staff provide good care and support. Teaching, when students are withdrawn for specialist work, is often very good. Teaching in subjects is usually good though work is not always adapted to meet these students' needs. Assessment systems are underdeveloped and curricular support needs to be better targeted.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good overall. There are no beginners in English but two students who started last year are now reasonably fluent and make similar progress to the rest.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. It is very good for social and moral development. Provision for spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. The school could provide more opportunities for students to develop their understanding of the cultural diversity of British society as well as about their own cultural traditions, especially for older students.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good care is provided. The house system is a particular strength of the school. Overall, assessment is good, though use of assessment to inform planning is more variable.

The partnership with parents is very good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and is very well supported by the senior management team. Deputy headteachers are clear about their roles. A clear and unified approach to key goals is known and shared by all staff. A strong emphasis on the school's 'core business' of teaching and learning permeates the school community.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. Governors have excellent knowledge and understanding of the school and its work. They have very effective strategies to identify and tackle any weaknesses. Governors are aware of the areas in which they are not meeting statutory requirements and are working to address them.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Very good in relation to the work of the senior management team but a little inconsistent within departments and faculties. Examination results are analysed well. However, subject departments do not always use the sharpest tools for analysis.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. Finance is very well targeted towards clearly identified priorities. The available accommodation, staffing and learning resources are used well to promote high standards of work.

Provision for accommodation is unsatisfactory in areas such as science, design and technology and music. Many of the school buildings are old and in need of repair and redecoration but the school's financial resources are not sufficient to maintain all to a high standard. The availability of staffing and learning resources is satisfactory overall. Staff development is very good. Good account is taken of the principles of best value in order to enable students achieve their best.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What some parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That their children like school and are making good progress. • That the teaching is good. • That the school has high expectations. • That the school is well led. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on their children's progress. • Closer working relationships with parents. • Amount of homework set for students.

The overall views of parents are very positive and reflect the very good relationships and partnership between the school and parents. The evidence from inspection fully supports parents' positive views. There is some evidence that students in Year 11 can have coursework from several subjects at the same time, which places pressure on their time. Largely, however, the homework provided is good in amount and quality. Some parents' views, that the school does not work closely enough with them or does not provide sufficient information about children's progress, are not justified. However, what may be an issue, and frustrates some parents, is the difficulty of being able to see all staff at parents' subject evenings.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There is a large sixth form with 271 students. It has grown in size over the last few years. There are slightly more girls than boys. The bulk of students come from Gordano School and a small proportion come from other schools. The vast majority of students are of white UK heritage, though there is a very small proportion from minority ethnic groups. Entry requirements for the sixth form to study advanced level courses are five or more GCSEs at grades C or above, though this is flexibly applied in some cases. For the intermediate level course in leisure and tourism, there is no specific academic requirement, but a positive attitude is needed. The retention rate is good and a very high proportion of those who qualify to stay do so. Over 60 per cent of the Year 11 students stay on into the sixth form. The bulk of the students from the last Year 12 stayed on into Year 13. The school offers a wide range of AS and A-level courses and vocational courses in ICT, business studies and leisure and tourism. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is broadly average. There are currently no students with a statement of special educational need but there is one student with identified special educational needs who is at the school action stage.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is good. Students make good progress in academic study and in their personal development so that they emerge at the end of their courses as well educated and mature and responsible young adults. Current standards are above average. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall, with much of it being very good and excellent which inspires students, engages their interest and promotes high standards of work. The sixth form is very well led and well managed. It successfully meets the needs of students and is cost effective.

Strengths

- Leadership successfully promotes high standards and sets a clear direction for development.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Standards of achievement are good.
- The personal development of students, including their capacity to take responsibility for their work, and independent research skills are very good.
- A wide range of courses is provided.
- A very positive ethos encourages very good relationships and a very good learning environment.

What could be improved

- Meeting of requirements for religious education.
- Quality of provision in art, biology and French in order to raise it to the high quality of other subjects.

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	Good. Standards of work are above average, and this is reflected in the good A-level results. Students achieve well. Teaching is good. Too few girls choose mathematics, however.
Biology	Satisfactory. Progress is satisfactory for the increasing numbers of low and high-attaining students. Standards are below national averages. Teachers are enthusiastic and expert so the interest and concentration of students are very good. The directions to students about how to improve are not always clear enough.
Physics	Very good. Standards are above national averages and students make good progress. Good teaching elicits strong interest and intellectual effort from the students. Low-attaining students make satisfactory progress but are sometimes uncertain about how to reach their target grades.
Design and technology	Very good. Though numbers are small, the students achieve well and reach high standards of work.
Business Studies	Very good. Students achieve very well given their prior attainment and standards are in line with national averages. The quality of teaching and learning is also very good.
ICT	Good. The quality of teaching and learning is usually good and occasionally excellent. As a result, standards are above average and students make good progress. Resources are good.
Art	Satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Students make satisfactory progress and current standards are broadly average. They readily explore new ideas and are imaginative. However, some aspects of the curriculum need to be further developed.
Drama	Very good. Students make very good progress and reach above average standards. These are rising because teachers use their subject expertise very well to improve students' theoretical understanding and practical performance skills. There is insufficient access to specialist equipment.
Geography	Very good. Standards are well above average and have been sustained over time as reflected in the well above average results at A-level. Good teaching and learning enable all students to make good progress over time.
History	Good. Standards attained are well above average and students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. A-level results were well above average in 2001 and 2002 results were similar. Teaching and learning are good. Students respond well in lessons.
Psychology	Very good. Standards are well above average. 2001 results were well above average. A-level results in 2002 dipped due to low performance of a small group of students. AS level results were well above average.

	Teaching is very good and students respond with enthusiasm, and make very good progress.
English literature	Very good. The quality of teaching is very good overall. Students make very good progress and standards of work are well above average. A-level results are very high.
French	Satisfactory. Standards are in line with national averages reflecting recent results in examinations. Teaching and learning are satisfactory but teaching lacks the dynamism seen in Years 7 to 11. Numbers studying French are low.

Lessons were also sampled in the following subjects: accounts, careers, chemistry, critical thinking, economics, English language, ICT Key Skills, leisure and tourism, music, personal and social education, physical education, sociology, religious education. Teaching and learning were largely good in these lessons, and often very good or excellent. Students' achievement in relation to their prior attainment is consistently good in these subjects.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	There is good guidance and support for students especially by the head of sixth form and the heads of Years 12 and 13. Careers provision is good. In most subjects, teachers monitor students' progress well and provide regular and detailed feedback to students on how they can improve their work. However, in some subjects, the monitoring of progress could be more rigorous and marking more diagnostic.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The overall quality of leadership is very good. There is a very clear direction for future development and a very good focus on high standards of achievement. Though there is some good monitoring and evaluation of the work of the sixth form, this is not the case in all subject areas. Management is good overall.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What some students feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are happy in the sixth form. • They have good relationships with teachers. • There is a positive atmosphere. • They feel well supported with their studies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Careers advice. • The school does not treat them as young adults.

The inspection evidence agrees with the positive views of students. With respect to advice on careers, the school had already identified that students wanted to know more about career opportunities after higher education. A new sixth form careers' co-ordinator is now in post to meet these needs. Discussions with students and other inspection evidence indicate that they are treated as young adults and given much responsibility for their work in and around the school. Only when some do not respond as responsibly as they should are they treated less like adults. Students spoken to regard this as fair. Inspection evidence indicates that students have good opportunities to voice their views through the sixth form and school councils and through questionnaires administered by the school.

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

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Attainment on entry to the school is above average, but not significantly so. Based on National Curriculum tests taken by students in primary school at the end of Year 6 in English, mathematics and science, there are variations from year to year. For example, the results of those currently in Year 9, were closer to average than in other years. Students make good progress and reach well above average standards by Years 9 and 11. This is reflected in the results of National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 and GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11. Comparisons with schools nationally are very good and indicate well above average performance in these tests and examinations. Comparisons against similar schools are favourable.
2. In the most recent tests for Year 9 students in 2002, results were well above average in English, mathematics and science. In English, results were well above the average of those in similar schools. In mathematics and science, results were above the average of similar schools. Overall improvement since the last inspection has been very good and the school trend has been better than the trend of improvement nationally. Girls are tending to perform better than boys, particularly in mathematics where the gap between boys and girls is widening.
3. GCSE results in 2002 were also well above the national average and the average of similar schools. A high proportion of students gained five or more GCSEs at grades in the A* to C range. The average points score was also high, and well above average. Students with special educational needs performed well. However, girls outperformed boys by a wider margin than girls nationally. The trend of improvement since the last inspection has been very good and, again, better than the trend nationally. However, the gap between girls and boys has been widening in the same period.
4. Inspection evidence indicates that in English, standards of work are well above average by Years 9 and 11. Standards of work in mathematics are above average by Years 9 and 11 and in science are above average by Year 9 and well above by Year 11. Literacy and numeracy standards are high and literacy and numeracy skills are well used across subjects of the curriculum. Standards of work in ICT are above average by Year 9 and average by Year 11 despite lack of sufficient use in some subjects and there being little specialist provision in Years 10 and 11. ICT standards are good amongst the group of students who are taking a short GCSE course after school.
5. Standards are consistently above average or well above average across most subjects by Years 9 and 11 and achievement is good throughout the school, often very good. Standards in geography are particularly high and the proportion of students gaining a grade A* or A in GCSE examinations has been excellent over the last few years. Standards in psychology in Years 10 and 11 are also excellent. Four students gained grades that were amongst the top 25 in the country and two were in the top four. Only in music in Year 9, ICT in Year 11 for students not taking an accredited course in ICT and religious education by Year 10 are standards of work only in line with national expectations as opposed to above. However, progress is good in music, where students begin with relatively low standards and varied experiences from primary school. In religious education, students are taking the course one year early, having started it in Year 9, and hence progress is good. However, in ICT, insufficient use of ICT across some subjects in Years 10 and 11, lack of effective assessment in cross-

curricular use coupled with a lack of ICT specialist lessons, or the availability of an accredited course for more students, mean that standards are not as high as they could be.

6. The small proportion of students from minority ethnic groups reach similar standards to the rest. There are too few to carry out formal analysis of their attainment and progress, but individual monitoring and monitoring over time show that there is no emerging pattern of lower or different achievement rates amongst these students. They are well integrated into school life and achieve as well as others. The two students who arrived as beginners in English have made good progress in learning it and are now operating reasonably well across the curriculum in English.
7. The overall progress made by students with learning difficulties is good. For example, most teachers across the range of subjects use a good variety of approaches and match work well to students' needs. The specialist support of members of the learning support department is effective, in terms of ensuring both academic progress and making sure students improve their capacity to cope with their learning difficulties. The GCSE outcomes of the students identified as having learning difficulties, in the most recent year, are good in terms of progress from their attainment in National Curriculum tests, two years earlier.

Sixth form

8. Standards in the sixth form are above average and indicate a continuing trend of improvement from the most recent A-level examination results. Students achieve well compared to their prior attainment, which is broadly average. In 2001, A-level results were in line with the national average, though better for boys than girls. Results were particularly good in A-level examinations in accounts, geography, history, and psychology, where results were well above national averages. In English literature, they were very high. In a small number of subjects, results were well below average. This is not a regular pattern in most of these subjects. Inevitably with small numbers and variations in prior attainment from year to year, there are variations in the results of individual subjects from year to year, but in accounts, geography, history, mathematics, psychology and physics, results tend to be consistently above or well above average.
9. The 2002 A-level results indicate a good pass rate in all subjects except accounts, which has a good track record, but in 2002 numbers taking accounts were small and the prior attainment of students taking the subject was low. There were few subjects where any students failed to gain a pass grade in 2002 and many in which the proportion of A/B grades was high, including: economics, English language and English literature (very high in both), French (though numbers were small), geography, history, music and physics.
10. AS level results were good in 2001 and 2002 results were similar. Students achieve well at AS level and many continue to the second year of study in order to complete the A-level course.
11. Inspection evidence indicates that current standards of work are high in most subjects, and reflect the results of recent examinations. Standards in the subjects inspected in depth are above average in most cases and are well above average in English literature, geography, history and psychology. In art and design, biology and French, standards are broadly in line with national norms. In most subjects inspected in depth, there is good value-added in the students' performance and the standards that they reach. This was evident in the quality of their work, which showed good improvement over the

course so far. In business studies, ICT, drama, geography, psychology and English literature, students achieve very well and make very good progress over time. Able students and lower attainers, including any with special educational needs, make equally good progress overall. The very few from minority ethnic groups show high standards of work and achieve as well as their peers. Good standards of work were seen in most of the sampled subjects and students also make good progress over time in these.

12. The school has made good progress in improving standards of attainment and progress of students since the previous inspection.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

13. The school has made very good progress since the last inspection and further improved upon the generally good standards of behaviour and attitudes noted in the previous inspection report. Students really enjoy coming to school. Attitudes to learning are very good both in the main school and in the sixth form, as are concentration levels, especially when teachers have high expectations. Negative attitudes only obtain amongst a very few alienated students, usually in Years 10 and 11, and in only a tiny proportion of lessons, where the teaching lacked stimulation. Students show a high level of interest in school life and they appreciate the very good provision of extra-curricular activities, for which the take-up is high, particularly in sports and music.
14. Behaviour in the school is of very high quality overall. It is good or better in the great majority of lessons and in a significant number it is very good or excellent, especially in Years 10 to 11. High standards of teaching and behaviour make a major contribution to learning. Students work sensibly and co-operate very well and the very small number from minority ethnic groups are well integrated into the class. Where the teaching is inspirational, students show a high level of interest and involvement. High expectations of good behaviour produce the desired outcome. Many examples of very good or excellent application, with students working very hard and concentrating very well were seen in all subjects. Many teachers generate a sense of urgency and pace in lessons, to which students react positively. Students want to improve their work and they take pride in the finished product. Most students have the capacity to work independently and to persevere, though in one or two lessons there was an undercurrent of chatter. Unsatisfactory behaviour was noted in a tiny minority of lessons, spread fairly equally across all age groups. Behaviour during assemblies and registration periods is very good.
15. Students are courteous and helpful around the school. They behave sensibly when arriving at, and leaving, school and when they move between lessons on the rather narrow staircases in some blocks and when queuing for lunch. Students generally respect property, and have a clear understanding of the impact of their actions on others. No graffiti were seen, but students still drop too much litter, as they did at the time of the last inspection.
16. The level of exclusions at the time of the last inspection was average. Current exclusion rates (27 fixed-term and one permanent) are now lower than this and also lower than those in most comparable schools. There are no repeat offenders. Those excluded are very successfully re-integrated after a very short period. The school maintains proper records of exclusions.
17. Relationships among students and between students and staff are very good and there is minimal evidence of bullying. The school impresses on new students the need to

consider others, and students react positively, with sensitive and co-operative attitudes noted amongst many. Though students are not exposed to a wide range of ideas about values and beliefs different from their own, they are receptive to them and respect others' feelings, values and beliefs. Students relate very positively to each other and work very well together in lessons. These very good personal qualities mean that they readily engage in debates and discussions and are mature, often beyond their years, in their responses to one another. Students listen with interest and respect to one another as well as to their teachers. Teachers frequently provide opportunities for group work and discussion because students participate in these activities with enthusiasm and demonstrate a responsible attitude. Students react politely when addressed, and are friendly and helpful to visitors, opening doors for others. All this makes for a very tolerant, happy and supportive society.

18. The house councils and their school representatives give students an important voice in school and house affairs. Both staff and students take the council's activities very seriously. Students have a large number of opportunities to take on other responsibilities round the school, for example by acting as receptionists, sports representatives or supervising a house area. They carry out their duties diligently. The school provides very good opportunities for students to contribute to the school and wider community, such as the 'buddy' mentoring system for older students to help younger ones with a problem, or giving up break for a music rehearsal. In particular the school is very strong in its work for charity which attracts heavy student participation.

Attendance

19. At the time of the last inspection, attendance was very good with an absence level of only 6.9 per cent, but punctuality to lessons was a key issue. Students' attendance in 2000/2001 was still well above the national average, and in 2001/2002 absence was still at 6.9 per cent. Unauthorised absence at 0.4 per cent in 2000/2001 was below the national average. In the last year this improved, as it halved to 0.2 per cent. All year groups' attendance exceeded 90 per cent, and all but Year 11 attained around 95 per cent during the first half of the current term. Truancy from lessons is negligible, as students know that staff take a register each time. Very high levels of attendance make a major contribution to the attainment and progress of all students. The legal requirements for recording and reporting attendance are met in the main school.
20. Lessons start on time first thing in the morning and after breaks. Students in the main school are on time at the start of the day, and display a responsible attitude to punctuality, with few being late. Given the distances between classrooms, there is not a punctuality problem in transferring between lessons.

Sixth form

21. Attitudes are very good. Students are enthusiastic about their work and enjoy coming to the school. They have a desire to develop to their full potential. They are confident, articulate and are fully involved in the life of the school. Sixth-form students make a positive contribution to the school community and present very good role models to younger ones. They carry out a range of duties diligently, such as day-to-day duties, accepting responsibility in the school's house system and in a range of sporting, musical and drama activities as well as acting as representatives on the sixth-form council. They assist form and subject staff lower down in the school as well as acting as very good ambassadors for the school in community activities.

22. Students form excellent relationships amongst themselves, with staff and other adults. The very few from minority ethnic groups are well integrated into sixth form life and have formed secure relationships with their peers. Students' personal development is very good. They develop very mature and responsible attitudes and are supportive of younger students. A high proportion of students participate in extra-curricular activities. Most students develop very good independent learning skills in and out of lessons. They show a very positive approach to learning and have a sound attendance record. They are punctual to lessons and use their non-lesson time productively. A sizeable majority appreciate the opportunities available to them and are proud of their school.
23. Registration in the sixth form is less reliable than in the main school as Year 13 students are allowed home study leave and, if coming to school after registration time is over, are supposed to register themselves. They do not always do this. Though students are punctual to lessons, they are not always punctual to school and there are always some who arrive late for assemblies or tutorial periods. For example, ten students were late to the Year 12 tutorial period on the last day of the inspection.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

24. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good. It is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 to 11. In about four fifths of lessons, the quality of teaching is good or better. In over a third of lessons it is very good. In most subjects, the overall quality of teaching is good and often very good or excellent. It is very good in art and design, design and technology, personal and social education and religious education. The quality of learning matches the quality of teaching and is very good overall. The very good teaching makes a significant impact on the standards students achieve and is a very good improvement on the overall good quality of teaching seen at the time of the last inspection.
25. Teachers' expectations are high and this means they plan challenging work which stretches students. Work is generally well matched to individual needs. Able students are stretched well with demanding work which makes them think for themselves. Lower-attainers are effectively supported so that they encounter success even when work is difficult. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and it is used very effectively to help students understand important ideas relating to the subject they are studying. High order skills such as problem solving, researching and analysing information, both quantitative and qualitative, are well taught. Hence students are usually confident learners who can work independently and use their own initiative very effectively to advance their own learning.
26. In the few lessons where teaching is less than satisfactory, the management of students is not strong enough. Pace and challenge often tend to be rather pedestrian in these instances. These lessons, and some lessons which were no better than satisfactory, tend to lack more adventurous methods. In the best lessons, teaching is inspirational and tasks are very interesting. On the whole, teachers make good use of a wide range of teaching methods and provide ample opportunities for students to work in pairs and small groups. In many subjects, for example, students prepare presentations for one another, often using ICT to produce them. The vast majority of lessons are well structured with interesting starter activities to engage students' attention.
27. In most subjects, good attention is given to the development of literacy skills and, in all subjects, teachers place good emphasis on developing students' knowledge and understanding of subject specific vocabulary. In many subjects, teachers provide good opportunities for extended writing, though in some, such as science, there is

inconsistent focus on the quality of extended writing. The progress units for the Key Stage 3 literacy strategy are very effectively taught to a small group of students in lessons that take place before school. Effective use of numeracy is made in subjects where its use is necessary, but numeracy skills are rarely developed or extended by subject teachers. They largely tend to make use of what students have learned in mathematics' lessons rather than build on this learning further. Good use is made of ICT by teachers in their teaching. Many make use of electronic presentations to enliven lessons. Students are also given good opportunities to use ICT to enhance their learning in many subjects. However, in art and design, music and religious education the opportunities for teachers and students to use ICT are limited.

28. The quality of teaching and learning for students with special educational needs is good and it is often very good when they are withdrawn for specialist tuition or support. In many lessons, across the range of subjects, teachers use a good variety of approaches and match work well to students' needs. As a result, learning and progress by students with learning difficulties in subjects are generally good. For example, learning support staff are deployed well. Mostly teachers make sure these staff have a good insight into the lessons so that they provide support in active and appropriate ways. However, not all lessons provide different work or amended work for students with special educational needs and they sometimes struggle with the tasks set. This is the case in some science lessons. Though there are no students at the early stages of learning English as an additional language, the two who came as beginners a year ago are still treated with sensitivity by their subject teachers. They are provided with good support in the lessons where they continue to need it to extend their English language learning further.
29. Teaching methods and strategies have been actively employed to support the progress and learning of boys. For example, in some subjects, such as English and geography, seating arrangements are organised to help maximise boys' learning. Resources are carefully chosen and used so that they will have as much appeal for boys as girls, for example, boy-friendly literature in English. Computers are deliberately used for teaching and learning as they often provide a strong motivating factor for boys. However, whatever teaching strategies the school tries, they tend to have as much positive impact on the girls as the boys. Hence, not only does the gap between the performance of boys and girls not become narrower but, in some instances, it has become wider.
30. Homework is of good quality though older students find that they receive too much at a time when they are also managing coursework. Marking is often of good quality with a high quality feedback in written responses of teachers. Hence students know what to do to improve their work further. Comments are particularly helpful in art and design, design and technology and modern foreign languages. However, sometimes, marking is too cursory and not enough information is provided to students on how they can improve their work. Marking is generally consistent within departments though not always in mathematics and religious education.

Sixth form

31. The overall quality of teaching is very good in the sixth form. Learning matches the quality of teaching closely. Teaching and learning are good in biology, geography, history, ICT, mathematics and physics. They are very good in business studies, design and technology, drama, English literature and psychology. In art and French, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. In French, the dynamic teaching seen in the lower school is not replicated in the sixth form and hence does not enthuse students enough. Teaching in the subjects that were sampled is consistently good or very good. Teachers plan and prepare lessons with great diligence and, in most, there is good match in the work

planned to the students' needs. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and is well used to develop highly conceptual material in a way that students can not only access but also actively engage with. For example, in design and technology, teachers encourage students to be critical thinkers who not only find information for themselves but also evaluate its usefulness. Content is very well structured and often presentations by teachers are of high quality; this was particularly the case in physics. Discussions in lessons are lively and students are given good opportunities to develop their skills of independent learning. Particularly in subjects such as business education, design and technology, leisure and tourism, students are given well developed project work and case studies from which to work and these not only help them to develop their knowledge and understanding of the subject, but also to develop their skills in managing and organising their own work and their capacity to work in teams. Computers are used frequently and students have many opportunities to access ICT to help them learn. Very good teaching in the ICT key skills course helps to promote students' ICT skills well.

32. In most lessons, there is a very good level of challenge and students of all abilities are stretched well. Pace is brisk and much ground is covered within the lesson time. Students work with commitment and in most lessons willingly put intellectual and creative effort into their studies. They spark each other off well and feed off the enthusiasm and love of subject that their teachers very evidently have. However, in biology there is scope for helping students to be more independent. Although in art, students are adventurous in their choice of project, they do not always have the skills to work unaided and produce work that is as creative as they would like it to be.
33. Key features of the teaching are the wide range of styles and the variety of methods that teachers use. These features prompt students to appreciate the quality of teaching they receive and enable them to experience a wide range of opportunities for learning. For example, students often have opportunities to engage in group or pair work, to produce presentations for one another, to engage in debates and to carry out independent research. However, sometimes, teachers could do more to ensure that students take an active role in lessons. Occasionally, teachers talk for too long in a lesson giving students little time to participate more actively, but this happens on rare occasions. Nevertheless, the generally good opportunities for discussion, debate, written work and research make a very valuable contribution to developing students' key skills in communication. In many subjects, students have opportunities to collect information of a numeric nature or which requires numerical analysis. Such activities promote numeracy skills well, especially in business-related subjects, design and technology, ICT, the sciences and the social sciences.
34. There is good, on-going assessment of students' work in most subjects and they receive good advice on how to improve through the marking of their written work. In some subjects, however, there is insufficient feedback to students. For example, in biology and physics, lower-attainers do not receive as much information and advice about their work as they could in order to help them meet their targets. Marking in history needs to be more consistent and, in geography, there is a need to push some students to improve their written work.
35. Homework is used effectively to support learning and students are given good pointers by teachers on additional study, including resources such as books and websites, in order to broaden their knowledge base. Very good relationships are another positive feature of teaching and learning and encourage students to seek help from their teachers if they are confused or unclear about any aspect of the subject.

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

36. Overall, the curricular provision for students in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 to 11 is good and good progress has been made since the last report. Since the school has gained technology college status, arrangements for the teaching of ICT have improved considerably although statutory requirements for ICT in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 to 11 still do not fully meet requirements. Option choices are more flexible in Years 10 to 11. There is now good provision for the minority of students for whom a full complement of GCSEs is not appropriate and alternative accreditation is being developed. Statutory requirements for the teaching of religious education for older students are fully met by a short GCSE course which starts in Year 9 and is completed by the end of Year 10. However, unsatisfactory features of the timetable, such as a poor spread of lessons over two weeks in some subject areas, remain. The requirement to hold daily acts of worship is not met.
37. In Years 7 to 9, apart from core subjects, the curriculum is enhanced by the addition of drama and a second modern foreign language from Year 9 for able students. Students study either French or German in Years 7 to 9, and able students study Spanish from Year 8 onwards. Curriculum provision in Years 10 to 11 meets the needs and aspirations of almost all students appropriately. A wide choice of GCSE subjects is available covering the arts, humanities, technology and science areas. Provision for gifted and talented students is good. For example, chemistry, physics and biology are available as separate examination subjects and there are 'Master Classes' in English, mathematics and science.
38. Curriculum provision for students with special educational needs is satisfactory. It is a balance of strengths and weaknesses. The provisions required by the statements of special educational need are almost all met. Some provision, from external agencies, is not secure. The school is firm and persistent in reminding these external providers about their obligations. In-class support is directed, with due care, to specific students in specific lessons. The work of learning support staff is good overall, often very good, because the staff are active, alert, and knowledgeable about how to improve learning. A particular strength is that this support is given without stifling students' capacities for independent learning.
39. Provision during withdrawal sessions from main school lessons into classes in the learning support department is effective, and gives a very good range of opportunities. Literacy support leads to good progress for selected students, and is especially well structured for Year 7. Small group sessions, mostly for students in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10, enable students to reflect on how to cope with some of the stresses of school life. Provision for Years 10 and 11 includes a good range of alternative accreditation, managed by learning support staff. The range includes Entry Level Certificates in English, other certificates such as for number skills, and life skills accreditation using the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN). Students working towards alternative accreditation also participate in link courses such as carpentry and hairdressing at the local college. The more general support for coursework for a few students in Years 10 and 11 is mostly satisfactory, though sometimes provision relies on an ad hoc response to what students bring along to the sessions. The main weakness in provision, for all years, is that small group support is too often allocated to students disapplying from modern foreign language provision, rather than given to students to meet clearly identified needs. This is especially wrong for students in Years 7, 8 and 9, who also lose their entitlement to foreign language study.

40. The effectiveness of the literacy strategy is good. The school has worked hard to implement the Key Stage 3 strand of the literacy strategy and developed very good materials for cross-curricular use. The programme has been very well led by one of the senior team. The implementation of the numeracy strand of the strategy is satisfactory though lagging behind the literacy strand. It is well implemented in mathematics lessons but less evident in subjects across the curriculum.
41. Provision of extra-curricular activities is very good. Over 26 different weekly scheduled activities are available to enhance, reinforce and extend learning opportunities in areas such as drama, music and sport. Clubs are available in activities such as Latin, chess and art. A wide range of enrichment activities such as drama productions, foreign exchanges and visits to the theatre further enhances learning. An important and enjoyable part of the year for students in Years 7 to 9 is the annual activities week in the summer, when the timetable is suspended in favour of various residential visits, activities and visits to places of educational interest. For example, Year 7 students go youth hostelling, Year 8 students go on residential trips to France or Germany and Year 9 students participate in outdoor and creative activities. Fieldwork for science and geography takes place during this time also. Work experience for Year 10 students is helpfully planned to coincide with the activities week.
42. Provision for personal and social education is very good. The programme is very well planned and well delivered by a group of dedicated teachers. It makes a very good contribution to students' personal development and covers requirements for sex and drugs education. Careers education is also effectively delivered through this programme. The provision for careers is good, well planned and thoughtfully delivered. Work experience is well integrated into the careers education programme and makes a significant contribution to students' understanding of the world of work. A very good start has been made on the new requirement to teach citizenship in Years 7 to 11 and high quality schemes of work are in place.
43. The community makes a good contribution to students' learning. For example, there are good links with local firms in design and technology, business studies and English, in addition to links established by work experience placements. Outside speakers, such as the police, speak on safety, councillors on local planning and youth workers on activities available in the area.
44. The school has good relationships with partner institutions. Effective use of transition funds is being made in English, mathematics and science to observe and share good feeder-school practice and to disseminate this across the school. As a result 'Bridging' units of work are being developed in mathematics. There is effective pastoral management of students at time of transfer from Year 6 to the school.
45. The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Students' moral and social development is very good and their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory. Spiritual development occurs mainly through a few well prepared and delivered year assemblies, religious education and some English lessons. These assemblies create good opportunities for students to reflect on the nature of life and the existence of a supreme being. Leaders make good use of modern technology to make presentations to year groups. Students are used well to present evocative readings of poetry which provoke profound thinking about society and misconceptions and misunderstandings of others and the world around us. Year 11 students were asked to consider whether their greatest fear was death or wars and how they would cope in that situation. Year 9 students received the message that the greatest gift is life

itself and they considered this concept in a spiritual way by focusing on their early life. However, house assemblies provide very little opportunity for reflection or spirituality and the school does not meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of corporate worship.

46. Students' moral development is very good. Teachers act as very good role models in their attitudes and professionalism. Year 11 students are given good opportunities to consider moral issues such as the amount of pocket money they receive and the length of time they spend watching television (they were given the opportunity to think about whether the time and money could be better used in a different way). Sixth form students discuss problems of drugs, prostitution and homelessness. An excellent contribution to moral development was made in History where students were asked to discuss civil rights and Martin Luther King's speech 'I have a dream'. Activities organised by the house system provide very good opportunities for consideration of moral issues; students raise considerable sums of money and debate which charities should benefit; a sixth-form Rag Week is organised for charity purposes. Personal, social and health education courses encourage moral decisions about human rights, sex and drug education, crime and the law. Moral and social issues are the backbone of religious education courses in Years 7 to 10.
47. Social development is very good. This is seen in a wide range of subjects, for example science, music, English, modern languages, where students are given regular opportunities to work together in small groups in class and take part in extra-curricular activities, for example the production of 'Grease' which involved a very large cast. The residential week for Year 7 and the speech which each student in Year 8 makes on a topic of his/her own choice contribute significantly to students' social development. Elections for House Council, the sixth formers who show prospective candidates for teaching posts round the school and the large numbers of students who act as guides at Open Evenings confirm the very good range of social development opportunities available. Personal and social education and citizenship make a very good contribution to students' moral and social development.
48. Students' cultural development is satisfactory. They are encouraged to share experiences and build up respect for the values and beliefs of others when they study poetry from various cultures in English and in religious education. In modern foreign languages, students see foreigners as real people and students discuss issues such as cultural comparisons between America and Iraq. Students learn to appreciate music from other cultures. Some English texts are chosen for study because of their cultural setting, for example relating to racism, sexism, class prejudice. The school has a multicultural policy and students learn about the role Bristol played in the American slave trade movement. In geography the fair trade game provides a good opportunity for reflection on international issues. However, becoming more aware of the multicultural nature of British society does not yet play a sufficient part in students' cultural development. Many subjects provide useful opportunities for students to become knowledgeable about their own cultural traditions and heritage. Students have opportunities to learn about English and European artists and study classical music and classical as well as modern western literature. However, there is scope for widening the depth of cultural experiences through visits to museums, concerts and the theatre.

Sixth form

49. The curriculum provides well for the needs of students and effectively complements other local provision. It is well tailored to the school's aims and students are well advised about the courses on offer at the school as well as other local provision so that they can make informed choices. A wide range of courses is available to meet the

needs and aspirations of potential students. In addition to the 'traditional' sixth-form courses, other subjects available include sociology, psychology, media studies, economics, accounts, critical thinking, leisure and tourism and business studies. The choice is wider than at the time of the last inspection in 1997. Since then, vocational courses in business studies have been expanded and an intermediate GNVQ course in leisure and tourism has been introduced. An AVCE in ICT has also been introduced recently. Insufficient opportunity is, however, provided for students to cover religious education topics in line with the statutory requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. An annual conference is organised at Wells Cathedral. This is a good, reflective experience for students and makes a positive contribution to their knowledge and understanding of religious education. However, even with some coverage of religious education topics in personal and social education and assemblies, there is insufficient coverage and the school is not meeting statutory requirements for religious education in the sixth form.

50. The school made a well-reasoned decision to provide an accredited key skills course in ICT for all sixth form students, other than those taking the AVCE ICT course. This decision was based on the consideration that students' ICT skills were of variable quality because their prior experience lower down the school had also been variable. This key skills course effectively meets the needs of students and provides them with useful skills which they can, and do, then apply to other areas of the curriculum. There is, as yet, no availability of key skills provision in communication or numeracy. However, most students' skills in these areas are good and for many students they are very good. In the GNVQ course in leisure and tourism, there is appropriate provision for key skills in communication, number and ICT.
51. A good programme of enrichment studies and the personal and social education programme enhance the sixth-form curriculum. The programme is comprehensive and well organised. Speakers on a wide range of issues provide students with the opportunity to listen to, and discuss, issues which widen their awareness and contribute very effectively towards their personal development and understanding of citizenship. Students speak well of this provision. Good quality careers education is also provided through the programme for personal and social education. There are regular visits and trips as well as visitors to the school, all of which enhance students' learning and enrich their curricular experiences. However, cultural experiences could be broadened by further visits to concerts and the theatre. In modern foreign languages, there are biennial residential trips to France and Germany. However, very few students organise trips to appropriate countries abroad to enhance their modern foreign language learning, though a small number have organised work experience abroad.
52. The provision for special educational needs is good, though rarely needed. The school recently had a student with hearing impairment and hired a full-time support assistant to support him on all courses. Teaching staff are given full details of any sixth form students who require additional support, currently there is only one, and their progress is carefully monitored.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

53. The school provides a very good level of care to its students and progress since the previous inspection has been good. There is a very welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Pastoral care in the main school is delivered very effectively through a house and tutor group structure, overseen by heads of house. The house system is well suited to a large school, as it ensures that senior pastoral staff have fewer students to supervise. In order to maintain continuity of student care and to develop closer

relationships with parents, tutors usually progress with their groups right up to Year 11. This works very well to the benefit of students. Very close links, both pastoral and academic, with the primary schools help Year 7 students settle in quickly. Very high standards of support and guidance to students and of provision for their welfare make a very positive contribution to educational standards and help students to feel happy and secure. Pastoral staff know their students very well and students confidently turn to them or other members of staff for help. The high quality of co-operation and liaison between all staff on pastoral matters is an important feature of the school. Students appreciate greatly both the academic and personal help given. Year 7 students, in particular, feel well looked after and their parents welcome the school's comprehensive arrangements for their induction. Students' personal development is also well supported through the tutor periods, which are mostly effective. However, students' time is wasted in a few, usually when tutors are monitoring some students' journals whilst others are left to chat amongst themselves. The Friday morning extended tutor period is used well and makes an effective contribution to students' personal development. The afternoon registration period, however, is not always an effective use of time. Students' personal development is actively promoted by the well-regarded programme for personal and social education. The first-rate arrangements for transfer to higher and further education or for training for employment ensure that students move on with confidence.

54. The school continues to comply fully with child protection guidelines. Liaison arrangements with external agencies, including the social services and the police, are very good, though there is some concern about the recently reduced hours the nurse can devote to the school.
55. The learning support department gives very effective care for the learning and welfare of students with learning difficulties. The support in lessons meets specific needs well. Students with learning difficulties rely on the open and helpful way staff of the learning support department respond to whatever a student may ask. Students make frequent use of this support because the department is set up in a central position, at the heart of the school.
56. The school is working hard to comply with legal requirements for health and safety, but there is still much to be done. It has a good, up-to-date health and safety policy and concerns about health and safety are quickly brought to the notice of appropriate staff. However, the co-ordinator is untrained, and formal inspections are not frequent enough, for example only about 60 per cent of the premises have been formally inspected in the past year. Governors are not involved enough in promoting and monitoring health and safety. There are very sensible and effective procedures covering fire evacuation, playground supervision, and the provision for medical care and first aid. Sick students have a medical room where they can lie down. All students questioned know the evacuation procedure in the event of fire. However, some fire exits were blocked during the inspection, fire evacuation notices and emergency exit signs are inadequate and the evacuation of the modern foreign languages classrooms has not been attempted with one staircase blocked off. Geography resources could fall on people in the school hall below. Measures to separate vehicles and pedestrians are just about satisfactory, as home-going students are well supervised. Physical education equipment and electrical appliances have not been completely tested in the last year. Risk assessment procedures are in place and are well monitored in several key departments, but not all risks have been assessed yet. There are three areas of concern in the design and technology department and the kilns in the art and design area are not sufficiently isolated. There is very little litter near the school buildings, though there is too much round the perimeter. One or two concerns, which were brought to the school's

attention, for example the hole on the approach to one of the house entrances, were dealt with immediately and another major area of concern, the dangerous unevenness of paving slabs, is to be rectified shortly.

57. The school operates very effective measures for monitoring and improving attendance. Procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour work very well and students consider they are fairly treated. The staff's high expectations of good behaviour are fully realised and promote an orderly and cheerful atmosphere throughout the school. The procedures for coping with bullying and oppressive behaviour are very good and students and their parents are happy that inappropriate behaviour is dealt with rapidly and effectively.
58. No major problems in assessment were recorded at the previous inspection. This situation still obtains today, except in physical education. There is a very good whole school assessment policy, backed up by departmental policies. The quality of central computerised record-keeping is high and the school knows the actual and projected levels of attainment for each student. In addition, effort grades are kept for younger students, progress is reviewed in annual assessment interviews, new targets are set, and the information is properly communicated to parents.
59. The quality of departmental assessment procedures is good overall, though with wide variations between subjects. Procedures for assessing attainment and progress are very good in modern foreign languages, English and drama, good in most other subjects, but unsatisfactory in physical education and special educational needs. Assessment is very well used to aid curricular planning in modern foreign languages, English and drama, and well used in science, art and design and technology. Its use in mathematics is unsatisfactory and in physical education poor. In music, new assessment systems are just now being put into place and so have not yet yielded information to inform future planning and improvement. Attainment is reported against National Curriculum levels or predicted GCSE grades. The procedures for monitoring and supporting academic progress are again very good in modern foreign languages, English and drama, and good in science, art and design and technology. They are not adequate in special educational needs.
60. The procedures for identifying students with learning difficulties are satisfactory, using standard literacy screening and information from previous schools. Useful improvements are underway to seek more detail and precision for this diagnostic phase, and to extend the range by seeking more information about difficulties over numeracy, and about emotional and behavioural needs. Pastoral and tutor staff are suitably involved in this work.
61. At present, not enough is done to evaluate and manage the extent of progress made by students with special educational needs over time, principally the lack of review of decisions about the level of additional or different intervention that the school is to offer. The learning support staff identify well which students need support to get them through external tests and examinations, and then give them very good support. The school produces individual education plans (IEPs) for some of the students with learning difficulties. Most targets in IEPs are too vague, however, and many IEPs are unclear about what strategies are to be used to meet the learning difficulties identified. Recent IEPs are of good quality, though they do not yet cover enough students. Subject leaders and their staff know what learning difficulties students have. Though the IEPs are not well adapted to allow teachers to plan how to meet the needs of these students, even so, most subject teachers make good adaptations of their own so that overall progress by students with learning difficulties in subjects is good. At present, students

themselves make minimal reference to the targets in IEPs as tools to support their learning. For each student with a statement of special educational need, the school is keeping up-to-date with the annual review procedures. The reports provided for the reviews lack precise detail of the extent of progress, and do not give a secure basis for future IEPs.

Sixth form

Assessment

62. The school's assessment of students' academic progress is good and contributes to their good achievement.
63. GCSE results and predictions based on a commercial value added scheme are constructively used to set target grades for students. Teachers have information on the ability of the groups they teach and they use it well to plan lessons and match work to students' needs. The levels to which students are working are reviewed termly and are shared with students and reported to parents. The system is used well to set targets in subjects and by the school overall. Most teachers and tutors use this information effectively to guide students in their progress and to quickly spot students who have problems with their work. Greater attention is needed, however, in some subjects to the provision of feedback to students or, in some cases, closer monitoring of progress.
64. Results of examinations are carefully analysed and evaluated. However, not all departments make use of the best tools, such as the DfES autumn package, to analyse performance.

Advice, support and guidance

65. The school has good procedures for ensuring students' safety and welfare. Visiting speakers talk to students about a range of issues including, substance abuse, HIV/Aids and sex education, so that they gain an informed perspective on the critical and sensitive issues which arise in current society. Pastoral support is very effective and students appreciate the many points of contact with staff, pastoral and academic.
66. The advice and support provided for students are very good. Year 11 students and their parents are able to attend an annual evening meeting and a sixth-form conference to find out about the opportunities available post-16. They are able to talk to teachers about courses and their suitability for individual subjects. Sample lessons are provided in subjects. Full and useful documentation is provided about courses.
67. Up-to-date careers information is available. The school intentionally guides students to make informed choices and encourages them to carry out research into higher education opportunities and careers. It is not a 'you should do this' approach. Options from which potential sixth-form students choose subjects for study in the sixth form are drawn up on the basis of student choice. A considerable number of students spoken to by inspectors were appreciative of the quality of information and guidance provided. This is a good provision, although some of the students who completed the questionnaire felt that more should be done for them. Students receive good help when completing applications for a university place and are guided very well on how to prepare for interviews. The school has very good links with local institutions offering higher education.

68. There is an effective programme of induction into the sixth form. There are opportunities at the end of Year 11 for students to join sixth form lessons in order to get a taste of education at this level. Students consider that they are given a great deal of help settling into the sixth form and are appreciative of the way in which tutors and subject teachers are always accessible to assist them.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

69. Parents' overall views of the school are very positive and better than at the time of the last inspection. They confirm that their children enjoy coming to school and consider that they make good progress. Respondents to the questionnaire feel that behaviour in the school is good, and the few parents at the meeting confirmed this view. Parents see the teaching as good, with high standards in most subjects, though those at the meeting expressed concern about the use of supply teachers in mathematics. They feel comfortable about approaching the school, which works closely with them. Staff are very approachable and are good role models, who help their children to become mature and responsible. Parents recognise that the school both expects their children to achieve their best and effectively helps them to mature and make progress. The school promotes a caring attitude and high personal values, though a few respondents to the questionnaire did not see the school as working closely with parents. Parents consider the school to be well led and managed, and those at the meeting commented favourably on the way the school uses its limited budget. Parents are very pleased with the interesting range of extra-curricular activities, and those at the meeting singled out the sixth form as providing very good opportunities, especially in music. A small minority of respondents wondered whether their children were getting the right amount of homework. Those at the meeting considered that the amount was generally about right, though they expressed the view that there may not be enough in Year 10 and too much in Year 11. The inspection results confirm the parents' very positive views about the school, but do not support the views of the minority who do not feel well informed about their children's progress or reckon that the school does not work closely enough with them.
70. The school's partnership with parents is very effective. The school regularly consults parents on its performance and on their views about educational provision, and takes their comments into account, when making its plans. It expects them to be actively involved in supporting their children's work and homework. The school provides parents with valuable information evenings on matters of educational interest, including a rolling programme of faculty presentations. It regularly invites a well known outside speaker to advise parents as to how they can help their children to succeed in learning. These events are very well supported by parents, as are the parents' consultation meetings on progress. Pastoral staff, especially the heads of house, actively encourage informal contact by parents, particularly if their children are experiencing problems. The school strengthens its links with parents by inviting them to a wide range of musical and dramatic productions, sporting events and other activities, including the students' talent contest. The school's links with the parents of sixth formers are close and feedback to them is very good.
71. The overall quality of information provided for parents is very good. The tone of the school's documentation is businesslike and the contents are informative. The prospectus and governors' report to parents are comprehensive, but neither yet fully meets statutory requirements, which was the case at the time of the previous inspection. The regular weekly newsletter effectively keeps parents in touch with specific school events and requirements. These publications are also included in a useful Internet website, which also contains other relevant school information.

72. The annual reports on students' progress meet statutory requirements and the quality of both their presentation and content is very good. This is a very good improvement from the time of the previous inspection when reports did not meet requirements and the quality of teachers' comments was variable. Most evaluate students' performance clearly, and staff are reasonably consistent in setting out what students know, can do and understand and in evaluating strengths and weaknesses. A few teachers tend to duplicate the tick box information in words. Reports incorporate targets agreed with students and all make provision for parental comments before they are reviewed with parents. Parents of students with individual education plans or statements of special educational need are fully involved in the reviews of their children's progress.
73. The overall contribution of parents to their children's learning at school and at home is very good. Parents want their children to do well and most see that homework is done. Parents have the opportunity to keep themselves informed about their children's homework and to support day-to-day progress through the student journals, which most do well. Tutors are rigorous in checking that parents have signed the journals. Though no current parents help in the school or support sports fixtures or outings, The Gordano School Association, run by dedicated parents, holds frequent social and fund-raising events to raise money for the benefit of their children. It also provides social activities for students and parents and helps at school functions. There is a special fund called the Silver Jubilee Trust which is a charitable fund maintained through gifts and covenants from parents. The funds are used to support students in a range of educational activities, including supporting a gap year post-16. Students, or teachers on behalf of students, can apply for the funds. Overall, the school has made good progress in improving links with parents since the previous inspection.

Sixth Form

74. Sixth form students have positive views of the school and the vast majority are happy to be there and would recommend the sixth form to others. Most feel that the teaching is good and that they receive good advice and support from their teachers. The atmosphere in the sixth form is a particular strength for them as they feel the sixth form is warm and welcoming, there is a supportive environment and all students get on well with one another. Though some indicated in their responses to the questionnaire that the school did not treat them as adults, this was found not to be the case during the inspection. Discussions with students and sixth form staff indicate that students are given a very good level of responsibility within the school and for their own learning. Both staff and students agree that this means that students are treated more as adults than students. However, should these additional privileges be abused, then they are withdrawn. For example, where a student falls behind with work and begins to miss deadlines, parents are informed. Some students were also unhappy about aspects of careers education; however, the school has already addressed these.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

75. The overall leadership and management of the school are very good. The headteacher provides outstanding leadership and this is a key to the school's success. He is able to inspire and motivate staff to give their best. The headteacher's high expectations are not only clearly communicated to staff and students alike but are shared by all. The school development plan captures the tone and direction set by the headteacher and is very clearly focused on priorities that are right for the school. Through informed and caring leadership an atmosphere of mutual trust and support and a high level of professionalism has been created. Senior managers, staff and governors share

common goals and teamwork is excellent. Members of the senior management team provide very good leadership in their own right in their own areas of responsibility. The deputy headteachers have a clear overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses and where it is going and provide expert input into school development and improvement.

76. Delegation of responsibilities is very well managed at all levels. The headteacher meets regularly with members of the senior management team, both as a team and as individuals. This ensures that he is well briefed and senior staff are well supported should they need additional backing for their roles. Line management arrangements for middle managers are also very well developed and organised, and this makes a significant contribution to the overall very good quality of leadership and management of heads of faculty, heads of department, heads of house and others with responsibilities across the school. As a result, standards of attainment and of students' personal development are high.
77. Governors fulfil their responsibilities very well. They are very well informed and take an active interest in the work of the school. Committees are very well organised and developed so that the school's work is successfully monitored by them. Thus, governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and areas for development within the school. They are particularly sharp when it comes to identifying scope for improvement in students' performance and then seeking this improvement. Though some legal requirements are not met, the governors are aware of these and working towards fulfilling all requirements. There is a governor with responsibility for health and safety; however, this is an area in which the governing body as a whole is not sufficiently involved. Overall, the partnership between the school and the governing body is very good.
78. Monitoring and evaluation are very well developed, particularly in terms of the role of members of the senior management team, and action is taken swiftly but also shrewdly in order to bring about improvement. There is scope for some middle managers to be more involved in monitoring and evaluation activities and for individual teachers to analyse their own examination data. At whole school level, this is effectively carried out. Regular monitoring and evaluation ensure that there is very good consistency across the school in the implementation of policies, plans and school aims. Monitoring activities are very well used to manage change such as bringing in the next stage of the Key Stage 3 strand of the literacy and numeracy strategies. Here, analysis of students' work and discussions have identified progress in implementation and also areas where more input or effort is required.
79. Leadership and management of the learning support provision are good. The governors have sufficient oversight of provision. The policy has just been reviewed. The learning support department has effectively worked with senior staff to set up important initiatives recently, such as alternative accreditation for students in Years 10 to 11. Firm plans are well under way to consolidate existing strengths and to resolve key weaknesses in curriculum and assessment. Appropriate links are in place between the learning support department and subject leaders, though the impact from this work varies from good to adequate. As there are very few students who have English language learning needs, there is no separate co-ordinator for English as an additional language. These needs are effectively managed and co-ordinated by the head of the learning support team. Staff in the department are very expert and experienced, with a wide variety of relevant skills. There are plenty of well-used resources. Some of the ICT equipment is unreliable so that not enough use is made of important software. The departmental

accommodation is good: rooms are very well maintained, just about large enough, and centrally placed for ready access.

80. Performance management of teachers is well in place and positively viewed by teachers and senior staff. Staff development activities are thoughtfully provided and very well linked to the outcomes of performance management reviews and school priorities as identified in the school development plan. There is good support for new teachers, whether they are newly qualified or experienced but new to the school. Professional development activities are well evaluated for their usefulness and, where staff go off on individual courses or activities, the school ensures that key points from them are fed back to other relevant staff members.
81. Strategic use of resources is very good and the school bursar provides very good financial and business expertise to the school. The school uses financial and other resources very carefully. The ageing buildings demand considerable sums of money to maintain and further improve them. The school plans very carefully to obtain the best balance between funding maintenance and upkeep of the accommodation and funding other developments, such as the curriculum and ICT. There was a small deficit budget last financial year which arose as a result of unexpected changes in funding to the school. Very good financial planning and management ensured that this change did not affect the school more severely than was the case. This deficit will be cleared this year. The school is not well funded, though standard funding is enhanced through the technology college status, and it provides very good value for money. Good attention is paid to the principles of best value.
82. Resources of staffing, learning resources and accommodation are satisfactory overall. Teaching staff are well qualified for their roles and there are, overall, sufficient teachers to teach the curriculum on offer, including the National Curriculum. However, the use of a large number of non-specialist teachers for specialist courses in ICT has an adverse impact on the quality of delivery. There are sufficient numbers of non-teaching and support staff. Non-teaching staff such as technicians and special needs support staff provide very good support for teaching and learning. Administrative support is very efficient and their staff development is very well managed by the headteacher's personal assistant. Office staff are helpful to teachers and visitors alike, and reception staff provide a welcoming and helpful service to visitors, parents and students.
83. Overall, the accommodation is unsatisfactory due to its age and, in some parts, poor condition, though parts of the school buildings, such as the recently refurbished business education suite, are very good. Storage space is often not sufficient and accommodation in science and music is unsatisfactory. In art, use of non-specialist rooms can have an adverse impact on learning. There are also issues in accommodation in design and technology where all the workshops are in need of refurbishment.
84. The quantity and quality of learning resources are satisfactory overall, good in some areas such as ICT but unsatisfactory in others such as mathematics, music and science. Art and design, geography and music have limited access to ICT resources, which curtails the use of ICT by students in particular. The library, though small for a school of this size, is very well managed and used. The librarian organises and provides very good resources for teachers who book the library for a particular topic or lesson. There are very good, and very well used, ICT resources in the library; the book stock is ageing, however.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

85. The overall quality of leadership is very good. There is a very clear direction for future development and a very good focus on high standards of achievement. Though there is some good monitoring and evaluation of the sixth form, this is not consistently the case in all subject areas. For example, in biology, business education, psychology and French, there is scope for better sharing of good practice through developing greater use of lesson observation. There are a few inconsistencies in marking and monitoring of progress which require more rigorous monitoring and evaluation to correct, though on the whole marking is of good quality. Management of the sixth form is generally good. The care of students is effectively delegated to an experienced set of heads of year and the head of sixth form, who actively work with the sixth form tutors. They work well as a team and ensure that students are working effectively and that tutors and subject staff are monitoring effort and achievement well.
86. There are good systems and procedures in place, well geared towards the needs of older students. For example, there are good systems for alerting the House heads where students are falling behind with work or their attendance to lessons is declining. There is good co-ordination of areas of work such as careers education, the programme of personal and social education and assemblies so that they cater well to the needs of older students. The learning support department is effectively involved by sixth form staff where needs arise or where students enter the sixth form having had special educational needs lower down in the school.
87. The sixth form provides good value for money and is cost-effective. Very good attention is given to the principles of best value, such as consultation and challenge. Students are surveyed regularly about their views on various aspects of the school's work. For example, they were recently surveyed on their views about the teaching and learning they receive. Results of such surveys are used very well to inform and adjust practice. Sixth form courses and lessons often provide very good challenge to students, as do the targets set for sixth formers.

Resources

88. Resources are good overall. Most subjects are well resourced and resources in design and technology and ICT are very good. However, in drama, lack of sound, lighting and recording equipment has an adverse impact on learning and standards. In psychology, there is a shortage of ICT resources.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

89. In order to build on the school's current strengths and further improve provision and standards, the governors, headteacher and senior staff should:
- (1) Ensure that requirements for ICT are fully met and further develop the use of ICT across the curriculum by:
 - ensuring that all students in Years 7 to 9 receive their entitlement;
 - making sure that art and design and music possess sufficient ICT resources to meet the requirements of the National Curricula in these subjects;
 - improving the use of ICT in religious education and modern foreign languages;
 - working towards providing accredited courses in ICT in school time for Years 10 to 11;

- developing systems for monitoring and assessing students' skills in ICT in their use of computers in subjects, and using assessment information to inform curricular planning and improve students' attainment;
- improving the access to, and use of, ICT for students with special educational needs.

(Paragraphs 5, 27, 36, 79, 84, 116, 133, 146-150, 153, 156, 162, 169, 182)

- (2) Improve the school buildings and accommodation, including addressing the issues of health and safety:

- continuing with current plans to seek funding in partnership with the local education authority through private finance initiative;
- focusing improvements particularly on the areas of weakness such as science, design and technology and music;
- tackling the health and safety issues identified in design and technology, art and design and in the school grounds and buildings.

(Paragraphs 83, 113, 120, 133, 169, 178, 212)

- (3) Build on the current strengths in the provision for students with special educational needs in order to bring overall provision in line with the expectations of the revised code of practice by:

- ensuring that all students who need them have IEPs in place;
- improving the quality of IEPs so that targets are precise and sharp enough;
- effectively monitoring and evaluating the students' progress over time;
- ensuring that external providers, where identified, meet the requirements set down in statements of special educational need;
- allocating small group support more appropriate to all those who need it and not just those disapplied from modern foreign languages;
- reducing the numbers disapplied from studying a foreign language;
- developing further, in subjects, the use of different materials and activities to meet identified needs.

(Paragraphs 28, 38, 39, 59, 61, 109)

In addition to the key issues identified above the following minor issues should also be included in the school's action plan;

- Improve the quality of marking and use of assessment to inform planning in some subjects.

(Paragraphs 30, 58, 59, 104, 112, 133, 145, 177, 181)

- Extend, or further develop, the use of monitoring and evaluation in subjects.

(Paragraphs 78, 104, 112, 152, 178)

- Further develop opportunities for cultural development.

(Paragraphs 48, 142)

- Continue with developing and implementing strategies to further improve boys' attainment.

(Paragraphs 2, 3, 29)

Sixth form

- (1) Meet requirements for religious education by:

- providing sufficient time for religious education in the sixth form;

(Paragraphs 4, 9, 231)

(2) Improve provision in art and design, biology and French by:

- improving the quality of teaching and learning, making it more dynamic in French;
- in art, developing the curriculum so that it better meets students' needs and syllabus requirements;
- improving the monitoring and feedback to lower-attainers in biology;
- encouraging more students to visit French speaking countries.

(Paragraphs 11, 31, 32, 51, 191, 192, 222-224, 259-262)

In addition to the key issues identified above the following minor issues should also be included in the school's action plan;

- Tackle the minor assessment issues that appear in some subjects.

(Paragraphs 34, 63, 196, 238, 242)

- Extend, or further develop, the use of monitoring and evaluation in subjects.

(Paragraphs 85, 208, 248)

- Further develop opportunities for cultural development.

(Paragraph 51)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	174
	Sixth form	76
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		66

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7-11							
Number	13	46	77	33	5	0	0
Percentage	7	26	44	19	3	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	8	23	30	15	0	0	0
Percentage	11	30	39	20	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 - Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1266	271
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	79	–

Special educational needs	Y7 - Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	25	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	98	2

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	24
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	30

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.7
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	150	112	262

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	128	112	118
	Girls	107	92	94
	Total	235	204	212
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	88 (77)	78 (78)	81 (78)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	51 (42)	60 (55)	45 (46)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	117	121	121
	Girls	105	103	99
	Total	222	224	220
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (82)	85 (83)	85 (83)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	60 (44)	61 (55)	46 (49)
	National	25 (31)	45 (42)	33 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	109	123	232

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	71	103	105
	Girls	86	119	122
	Total	157	222	227
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	68 (64)	96 (97)	98 (98)
	National	49 (48)	89 (91)	95 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	46.2 (43.0)
	National	39.8 (39)

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

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

*Results in the tables below are for 2001 as national data for 2002 was not available.

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	45	39	84
	Average point score per candidate	16.5	13.9	15.3
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18.0	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	41	35	76	8	5	13
	Average point score per candidate	16.7	14.0	15.4	7.4	10.4	8.5
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

Ethnic background of pupils and students

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils and students on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1514	27	1
White – Irish	0	0	0
White – any other White background	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	0	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	0	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	0	0	0
Black or Black British – African	0	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	0	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	23	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	0	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	93.72
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.7

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	24
Total aggregate hours worked per week	649

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	88.9
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.2
Key Stage 4	22.6

Financial year	2001/2002
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	£
Total income	3914385.00
Total expenditure	3932469.48
Expenditure per pupil/student	2657
Balance brought forward from previous year	3025.00
Balance carried forward to next year	-18084.48

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	22.14
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	29.88

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1537
Number of questionnaires returned	473

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	53	6	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	35	58	3	1	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	24	63	5	1	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	61	13	1	2
The teaching is good.	24	67	4	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	18	51	18	3	10
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	44	47	7	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	49	48	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	21	53	16	2	9
The school is well led and managed.	39	54	2	0	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	32	58	4	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	40	49	6	0	4

Other issues raised by parents

Parents at the meeting raised concerns about the quality and the quantity of the accommodation.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

Overall, provision in English is **very good**

Strengths

- Results of National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations are well above average.
- Planning and content of lessons are very good and create the high expectations which promote a rapid rate of learning for all students, especially boys.
- There are very good procedures to inform students how well they are doing and exactly what they need to do in order to improve their work further.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Increase the level of expectation of behaviour and quality of writing from lower-attaining boys.

90. Students' performance in National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 is very good. The 2002 results in these tests were well above the national average and well above the results of similar schools. Results have improved considerably since the last inspection, particularly in terms of the increased proportion of those obtaining higher levels (Level 6 and above). Girls were further ahead than boys in comparison with the national picture for their gender. The gap between boys and girls had widened over several years, but reduced in the latest results. Standards have risen over three years and match those of mathematics and science.
91. GCSE English results have risen over time to a level well above national averages. Three quarters of students obtained a grade in the A* to C range in 2002. This proportion exceeds national trends by a wide margin. Again, girls performed better than boys and the difference in performance between boys and girls at the school was wider than the difference nationally. The same applies to GCSE English literature, where results were above average and over two thirds gained grades in the A* to C range.
92. From inspection evidence, standards of work by Year 9 are well above average and match those of the most recent results in National Curriculum tests. All students in Years 7 to 9, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in relation to their starting points and make good gains in their learning. Students discuss issues and ideas sensibly and thoughtfully. One group of Year 8 students responded very well to the excellent questioning and detailed prompting of their teacher. They debated enthusiastically the relative merits of various television comedies such as 'The Simpsons' and 'The Office', adeptly identifying and analysing relevant elements such as target audience and characterisation to explain their construction and appeal.
93. Students read an extensive range of fiction and poetry, with mature understanding and an ability to explain the surface features as well as the underlying meanings in novels. They write confidently in an extended range of forms including letters, scripts, book reviews and original poetry. They deploy well-constructed sentences, using the conventions of grammar with assurance. Nevertheless, boys' writing falls below the standards of girls'. At the same time, a minority of lower-attaining students have difficulty in spelling more complicated words, although all use a phonetically plausible form. Students with special educational needs make good progress, because they are

prompted well and encouraged with realistic but high expectations in class, taking advantage of suitably adapted materials where pertinent.

94. By Year 11, standards of work are very good, matching the latest GCSE results. Progress between Years 10 and 11 is very good. Girls continue to perform better than boys. Students read a range of poetry, novels and plays with fluency and understanding, explaining underlying themes and literal meaning as well as defining and applying technical terms such as 'metaphor' or 'onomatopoeia' accurately. In one lesson, for instance, lower-attaining students and those with special educational needs appreciated well the way in which Fiona Farrell's poem 'Charlotte O'Neil's Song' conveyed the lack of mutual respect underlying the relationship between mistress and servant in the nineteenth century. Their work on novels such as Harper Lee's 'To Kill a Mockingbird' demonstrates maturity of understanding as well as an ability to justify personal judgements independently with detailed reference to knowledge of the text. Although girls' attainment exceeds that of boys, teachers are successful in raising boys' standards by setting them assignments to stimulate their interest and curiosity. Newspapers, reporting tasks, and analyses of films have engaged boys' interest beneficially. Here, for example, students were well taught to identify detail of visual style used in 'The Matrix' as well as to explore its underlying messages concerning humanity's over reliance on technology.
95. There are a very few students who use English as an additional language and none in the early stages of acquisition. They make progress in line with their peers. The very few from minority ethnic groups achieve well and reach similar standards to their peers. Computers are used well by most students to lay out written work logically so that it is communicated well to the reader.
96. The quality of teaching is good overall, and was good or better in virtually all lessons seen. In one in six lessons, it was excellent. A good variety of methods and activities holds students' interest well while challenging them to work independently and think for themselves. Teachers question students skilfully, using very good subject knowledge with due sensitivity to the abilities and confidence of different individuals, including those with special educational needs. Written work is marked with perceptive and analytical comments so that students know why they have reached the levels they have by national standards, and what specifically they must do in order to improve further. As a result, attitudes and behaviour were very good or better in virtually all, and excellent in one in three, lessons seen. The only exceptions to this are where lower-attaining boys lack concentration because expectations of their work and behaviour are not high enough.
97. The faculty benefits from very good leadership. The standards of work produced by students are checked carefully and regularly, and teaching methods and content adjusted shrewdly, both to improve standards and to support those students who fall behind. As a result, overall standards of teaching have improved greatly since the last report and progress since the last inspection has been very good. As a consequence of the way teachers have worked together as a team to improve teaching methods, boys' performance has improved significantly, and girls too have continued to achieve beyond the standards expected of them given their starting points.

Literacy across the curriculum

98. Standards of literacy are above average across the age range. In geography, students' discussion and writing are well focused to extend and consolidate understanding. Mathematics, physical education, and design and technology teachers draw attention to key terms and ensure that the concepts underlying them are well understood. In modern foreign languages, students are taught well to understand and appreciate the structure of language, using grammatical terms accurately for description and analysis. There is much good quality discussion to clarify meaning and consolidate understanding, particularly in religious education, where teachers ensure that discussion is well structured and thorough. This is also the case in history where the quality of intellectual engagement with historical ideas and viewpoints and consideration of historical evidence are well developed through discussion and writing. For example, students are given good opportunities to discuss events and ideas in small groups, as well as to present them in formal debates, where they work collaboratively to evaluate each others' performance and knowledge. Hence, in history, students marshal their thought systematically before writing. In science, on the other hand, key technical vocabulary is displayed in classrooms but not referred to often enough, and the good examples of discussion observed are not followed through consistently in all lessons. In the same subject, written work is sometimes good when structure and presentation are emphasised well but, again, this is not done consistently. A working group has analysed students' needs systematically and produced a useful practical guide to assist teachers in class. The teaching of literacy across the subjects is checked and successful methods are shared well between teachers, underpinning the rise in standards since the last inspection.

MATHEMATICS

The overall provision for mathematics is **good**.

Strengths

- Results of National Curriculum tests and examinations are well above national averages.
- Good relationships between students and teachers facilitate a classroom environment conducive to purposeful learning.
- Students' progress is monitored rigorously by testing throughout their time at the school.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the quality of marking to support the learning of all students.
- Use monitoring to extend the best practices with respect to teaching and learning, including homework, to all teachers in the department.
- Strategically plan the use of numeracy in all subjects, and in mathematics use more examples of numeracy that are relevant to students.

99. Students' performance in National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 is good. The 2002 results of these tests were well above the average of all schools and above the average of similar schools. The proportion of students achieving the higher levels, Level 6 or above, is nearly a third more than is recorded nationally. Boys attain standards overall equivalent to being two terms ahead of students nationally. Girls do even better in this respect. Standards in GCSE examinations are also good. In 2002, the proportion of students gaining a grade in the A* to C range was well above the

national average and above the average of similar schools. This was an improvement on the results of 2001 which were above average. Virtually all students entered by the school, including those with special educational needs, gain a GCSE mathematics qualification above the lowest grade. Nevertheless, students attain less well in mathematics than in their other subjects overall. The high standards recorded at the last inspection have been maintained. Students come to the school with above average attainment. They achieve well in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 and progress in line with expectations to GCSE.

100. Inspection evidence indicates that by Year 9, standards of work are above national averages. Students make good progress between Years 7 and 9. The Year 9 work of higher-attaining students compares favourably with that of previous years. These students are particularly good at interpreting complex problems and finding a solution by successfully drawing upon a range of relevant techniques. They are very well versed at working independently and quickly. Students, generally, have good numeracy and algebraic skills. Spatial problems are analysed carefully: students understand transformations well and calculate areas and volumes accurately. Many use trigonometry effectively. Students are good at interpreting simple statistical diagrams and the most capable use laws of probability to determine outcomes, which they discuss with clarity. Students with special educational needs are making good progress.
101. Year 10 students build rapidly on the skills acquired in Years 7 to 9. Many enjoy success with more demanding topics. They solve simultaneous equations with relative ease, make effective use of matrices to describe transformations and interpret histograms with skill. Year 11 students working towards the highest GCSE standards are gaining confidence and consolidating well their good knowledge and understanding of mathematics by thoroughly reviewing essential techniques. However, many of the students following an Intermediate course are currently working below the standards required for GCSE grade C. As in previous years, lower-attaining students including those with special educational needs are making good progress and working in line with GCSE expectations. Students, overall, have responded well to an in-depth statistical investigation, supporting their mathematics competently with explanatory text. Progress through Years 10 to 11 is good overall though it is better for those currently in Year 10 than in Year 11.
102. The overall standard of teaching is good. Students are co-operative and often enthusiastic in their response. Some lessons involve very good and excellent teaching but others promote learning which is barely adequate. In just one lesson observed, learning was inadequate because the teacher misjudged students' competence in the topic. For some lessons, appropriate starting points were identified but led to undemanding work subsequently. An example was observed with lower-attaining Year 10 students who spent far too long on a repetitive task involving symmetry after a stimulating introduction. In contrast, another class was well motivated to represent statistical data in a pie chart, while also improving their numeracy skills throughout the lesson. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use this well to support students' learning. In most lessons, methods used are well matched to students' needs. Teachers showed appreciation of how students learn as they guided Year 11 revision lessons. Matching graphs to their relevant functions stimulated and challenged one class well. In another, capable students, including those with dyslexia, were given excellent guidance on how to interpret information and order it so a problem could be solved mathematically.

103. Students have good standards of numeracy when they join the school. Mathematics teachers develop these skills well but rarely apply them in a context relevant to other areas of the curriculum. They use fictitious data given in texts rather than primary data of direct interest to students. Opportunities to use data-handling techniques to analyse social, moral or cultural issues are not taken. A uniform system of periodical assessment tests is used for all students. The results, together with results of National Curriculum tests, are used well to monitor progress. Marking of most of students' work, however, varies considerably from being superficial, when errors go unnoticed, to detailed annotation. The latter informs students how to improve their work, enables teachers to modify their teaching to improve learning and provides students with a comprehensive set of examples to which they can refer. Similarly, homework successfully plays an integral part in extending students' learning for some classes. Purposeful homework and careful marking has enabled a class of Year 9 students to excel when analysing the probability of the occurrence of events.
104. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. Planning of the department's work is good but monitoring of it is inadequate. Mathematics teachers plan well at a management level and as a team sharing responsibilities. However, the inconsistencies in implementation of policies, such as for marking, are indicative of the need for rigorous monitoring, including more careful induction for teachers new to the school and closer liaison between teachers of classes doing similar work.
105. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The school has maintained high standards in tests and examinations. Improvements include the benefit of setting in all year groups. Graffiti is no longer a problem and interesting and imaginative displays of students' work, some using computer skills, enhance classrooms. Study is supported by up-to-date texts with associated materials, which are used well to prepare students for National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations.

Numeracy across the curriculum

106. There is still no whole school approach to the use of numeracy skills. Students have good standards of numeracy when they join the school, which mathematics teachers develop further, but rarely in the context of other subjects. In design and technology and geography, numeracy skills are applied appropriately throughout the courses. For example, students make estimates, weigh material accurately and statistically analyse nutritional requirements in food technology. For geography, techniques such as the construction of questionnaires and statistical representation of pedestrian counts prepare students well, for when they are older, to carry out fieldwork in Bristol. Numeracy skills are generally applied well in science and appropriate use is planned for in physical education. Year 8 students developed their appreciation of the importance of timing in comedy by numerical analysis of parts of a 'Fawlty Towers' script. Year 10 history students were observed using numeracy skills well to examine America's gross national product.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Results of National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations are well above average.
- The leadership and management of the science department are good.
- Teaching is good and planning very thorough.
- Students' attitudes to their work and their relationship with teachers are very positive.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the consistency in the application of departmental or school policies such as marking.
- Improve the currently unsatisfactory quality of accommodation and level of resources.

107. Students' standards in science on entry to the school are above national averages. In the National Curriculum tests in 2002 taken at the end of Year 9, results were well above the national average, and above those of students in similar schools. In the 2002 GCSE examination at the end of Year 11, results were also well above the national average, and well above those in similar schools. All students entered obtained a grade, with over two thirds gaining a grade in the A* to C range. The achievements of students throughout the school are good. Standards, from inspection evidence, are similar to those at the time of the last inspection. There are no significant differences between the results of boys and girls at the end of Year 9, but in the last two years boys have performed better at the end of Year 11. Results are in line with those in English and mathematics at the end of Year 9. By the end of Year 11, students tend to do better in science than in most of their other subjects.
108. In work seen during the inspection, both in lessons and in their books, students' standards are above average in Years 7 to 9, and well above average in Years 10 and 11. Students are provided with challenging work from early in Year 7, and are encouraged to take pride in the presentation of notes. They learn the value of well-labelled diagrams to represent scientific knowledge. The department gives a high priority to investigative work as a result of which standards in this area are high. For instance, in a very good Year 7 lesson, students successfully learnt how to measure the force of friction between two solid surfaces, and put forward good ideas when planning how they could find out how this varied according to the mass of an object. Students have good practical skills and skills of observation. By Year 9, they skilfully assemble electrical circuits and use ammeters accurately to measure the current in series and parallel circuits. Higher-attaining students successfully predict the impact of adding additional bulbs or batteries to their circuit. In a lower-attaining group, students worked out correctly the energy changes taking place when an electric bell rings, and when a match is struck. Students make good progress in learning the use of formulae in science. By Year 11, they have little difficulty in rearranging simple formulae such as $F = ma$ in order to calculate the acceleration of an object when its mass and the force acting on it are known. They are particularly good at remembering to include units in their answers.
109. Students' work shows steady improvement throughout the school, and their overall achievements are good. The encouragement they are given to use their initiative results in students thinking about their work, and in most classes therefore they ask for clarification when unsure, and readily volunteer to contribute to the lesson. In Year 8, students produced images using a pinhole camera. Their learning was very effectively

consolidated by a very good lesson summary in which each group of students was required to indicate to the rest of the class what they had learnt. All students listened carefully to their peers, and showed a mature attitude. This involvement in learning continues into Year 11, and pays dividends when students are revising for examinations. Year 11 students use computers well to enhance their presentations, and also develop concept maps to improve their understanding of the links between different topics. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall. Those with behavioural difficulties are very well managed by teachers so that they are well integrated into the class and do not hinder the learning of others. Students with learning difficulties, however, do not always receive sufficient support and this is why their progress is not always as good as that of other students. The very few students with English as an additional language make good progress and are supported effectively.

110. Teaching is good overall, with many very good features. The absence of a number of experienced teachers has been mostly overcome, but has affected the continuity in learning in a minority of classes. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject, and of how students learn. Their planning, including their liaison with the technicians, is very thorough, leading to a positive start to lessons, and clear objectives for learning are helpfully shared with students. The best examples of planning integrate different learning techniques into the lesson. These provide a range of opportunities for students to enhance their knowledge and understanding, as in a Year 11 revision lesson about the states of matter and heat transfer where practical activities, discussion and probing questioning were well used. Most lessons finish with a useful class discussion to reinforce what has been learnt. Relationships between teachers and students are very good, with mutual respect evident in classes. Furthermore, teachers' management of students is very skilful, and students are therefore confident about asking questions as well as responding to teachers' prompts. Homework is set regularly, but is rarely different for different groups even within mixed ability classes. As a result, it does not always provide sufficient challenge for all students.
111. Numeracy is used regularly in science lessons, but even in Year 11 some students lack confidence with calculations, and resort too readily to using a calculator. The development of literacy is satisfactory, but inconsistent across the department. In the best lessons, students are challenged to use their own words to describe their observations, and to express their understanding of scientific processes. When they do not receive sufficient practice, their writing lacks precision, as when attempting to define the greenhouse effect in a Year 9 lesson. There are satisfactory opportunities to use ICT to reinforce learning. In Year 7, for example, students consolidated their understanding of cells, tissue and organs by preparing a presentation using computers. Their computer skills are good. There is a suitable range of books in the library, but they are under-used.
112. The leadership and management of the science department are good. The head of department leads by example, and there is a good sense of teamwork between teachers and technicians. The curriculum is well planned and subject to regular review. A wide range of courses in Years 10 and 11 provide all students with the appropriate level of challenge. The monitoring of teaching by the head of department is increasing, but there have been insufficient opportunities as yet for all teachers to observe colleagues. As a result, there are still inconsistencies across the department in the use of policies such as those for marking work, and in the use of key words, lesson summaries, and students' self-assessment sheets.

113. Since the last inspection, the department has made good progress. Two laboratories have been refurbished, though accommodation remains unsatisfactory. There is a shortage of laboratories, and the main block needs a facelift. The level of resources, including those for modern technology, is also unsatisfactory. In spite of the deficiencies in resources and accommodation, standards have remained well above the national average. This is due to the quality of teaching, the effective organisation of the work of the department, and the very positive attitude which students develop towards their learning. There is good capacity for further improvement.

ART AND DESIGN

The overall provision for art and design is **very good**.

Strengths

- Students' performance in GCSE examinations is well above average.
- The quality of teaching is very good.
- Leadership and management are very good and effectively promote high standards of work.
- The school has Artsmark status.

Areas for improvement

- Improve provision for ICT and the accommodation.
- Reduce the size of classes as this has an adverse impact on learning.

114. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above average. In teacher assessments, students have gained a well above average percentage of Level 5 and above consistently in recent years. Girls generally attain higher standards than boys. The trend of attainment over time constitutes improvement since the last inspection.

115. At the end of Year 11, standards overall are well above average. Results in GCSE examinations have improved steadily over the last three years to a point where they compare favourably with all subjects within the school and represent an improvement since the last inspection. Girls consistently gain better results than boys, but both boys and girls gain an above average percentage of grades in the A* to C range.

116. In work seen during the inspection, standards in Year 9 are well above average and reflect the results of teacher assessments. Progress between Years 7 and 9 is good. Students show above average skills in drawing from observation. They interpret art historical material very expressively, using colour as a means of conveying feeling and emotion. Collage is exceptionally well used to give texture and a quality of broken colour in a composition. Three-dimensional work in clay is also very strong. Students show good skills in construction and use imagination well when pursuing a theme, such as in their work on a 'sea life' mug. Literacy is addressed very effectively in lessons and, in some instances, an entire session is devoted to the language of art, a good example being the analysis and comparison of the work of artists, such as Beryl Cook and LS Lowry, as a prelude to students' practical work in a related project. Numeracy plays little part in project work undertaken by students. Some measuring is necessary in pattern work and spatial relationships are assessed in drawing from observation. The involvement with artistic values brings a spiritual dimension to students' work and the need to share materials and equipment demands a moral acceptance of fairness. A comparative weakness is use of ICT, and minimal use is made of computers.

117. In Years 10 and 11, work seen confirms the well above average level of attainment in GCSE examinations. Students show very good drawing skills when drawing from

observation. They compose their drawings very well as complete works of art rather than simply as studies. Good use of imagination is a strong feature of students' work. They display very good capacity to explore a theme or topic creatively, overlaying it with their own personal artistic interpretation. Literacy continues to develop well as at the earlier stage and work is carefully presented. Numeracy is, again, only minimally brought to bear in work, and ICT remains an area in need of development.

118. The GCSE syllabus chosen allows students to make continuous progress from Years 7 to 9 and to extend their skills and understanding progressively and seamlessly from the end of Year 9 to the end of Year 11. The overall progress made is good. Students with special educational needs also make good progress due to the nature of projects which allow for success at a wide range of levels. For the same reason, able students reach the very high standards they are capable of.
119. The quality of teaching is good generally. Work is planned carefully and supported by well-considered provision of appropriate learning resources. The aims of lessons are clearly set out and communicated to students. The teaching of three-dimensional design using ceramics is a strength and experimental work in colour is generated very effectively by the introduction of collage and mosaic. The quality of individual tuition is a further strength. This is sensitively modified to cater for differing student needs. Relationships between teacher and student are very good and provide a basis for the very good working atmosphere prevailing in studios during most lessons which, in turn, promotes very purposeful learning. Students are made aware of their progress by thorough assessment at each stage. An important feature of this is student self-assessment, which is formally recorded.
120. The leadership and management of the department are very good and very effective in improving standards. Teaching is monitored and schemes of work are reviewed regularly. The head of department is also heading the expressive arts faculty. In addition to these whole-school commitments the head of department plays a full and leading role in the teaching. Relationships within the department are very good. Teachers are supported by a very able technician. This secure and united team provides a very good foundation for students' learning. However, learning is adversely affected by oversize classes. These exceed the accepted norm for a practical subject by a significant margin. A further limitation is the inadequacy of accommodation necessitating the regular use of a non-specialist room. Despite these difficulties, the department makes an important contribution to the success of the school. The quality of displays around the school is outstanding as an influence on learning and upon the enjoyment of the school environment.
121. There has been good overall progress since the last inspection. Standards have been raised and two new teachers appointed. Short lessons no longer constitute a problem and there is now no evidence of poor attitudes in class.

CITIZENSHIP

Overall provision for citizenship is **very good**.

Strengths

- Leadership and management are very good.
- Standards of work are above average.
- Participation by students is very good and there are excellent opportunities for them to assume responsibility.

Areas for improvement

- Develop further the work on knowledge and understanding of political institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) and internationally.

122. The school is making good progress in implementing education for citizenship across the curriculum. Overall standards of work are above average and students make good progress in learning about citizenship due to the good quality of teaching they receive. Students with special educational needs also make good progress and are equally involved in citizenship related activities.
123. Provision is currently very effective within the personal and social education programme and the pastoral system. There is excellent planning to ensure that the curriculum addresses many aspects of the knowledge and understanding required by informed citizens and the personal skills needed to be effective citizens. Some subjects, particularly design and technology and art and design and humanities subjects, have begun to identify opportunities to link topics specifically to citizenship requirements. Assemblies contribute very well to wider global awareness and encourage active participation by students; for example, in one assembly there was a good Year 7 presentation on the distribution of the world's food.
124. Standards of students' knowledge are above average due to the explicit planning for areas of knowledge suitable for each year group. Year 7 students discuss the attributes of a good citizen and show good understanding of the need for personal development. Year 8 students in religious education thoughtfully identify the needs of a Muslim student and how these might be different from their own. Year 9 students show mature awareness of the needs of a young child, as seen in a Powerpoint presentation at assembly, and show a very good level of interest in current news items in tutorial periods. Year 10 students in geography show good understanding of global trade issues and, in history, a very good understanding of the threat to democracy in post-war USA from the fear of communism.
125. The school works hard and successfully to develop skills of enquiry and communication. Debate is a regular feature of the tutorial programme, seen in a Year 13 session on current issues regarding the funding of higher education. Opportunities for discussion and debate regularly feature in many subjects. Assemblies are planned to develop students' speaking skills as well as to encourage their personal confidence as seen, for example in a house assembly where older students presented their cases for the choice of a particular charity with confidence and commitment.
126. There are excellent opportunities for all students to develop their skills of participation and responsible commitment. These are a particular feature of the excellent planning which underpins the house system. There is an unusually wide range of responsibilities assumed by students in all years. They have job descriptions and a clear expectation of

accountability; they take responsibility, for example for charity work, liaising with canteen staff, and for fielding sports teams. Design and technology and music offer good opportunities through explicit emphasis on responsible use of recycled materials and respect for instruments.

127. Leadership and management are very good. Planning through the personal education programme and the house system is exemplary. Future improvements need to include more subject areas contributing to the knowledge and understanding of students of political institutions in the UK and internationally, which are currently weaker areas.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- Students make very good progress so that standards are above average by the end of Year 9 and are well above by the end of Year 11.
- The provision and students' progress in using ICT are excellent.
- The leadership and management of the department are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the poor material condition of the workshops.
- Extend the use of good assessment procedures in order to make them more effective.
- Make more use of opportunities for literacy within lessons and develop literacy displays.

128. Most students enter the school with some experience of this subject because of the good introductory activities provided by one of the technology teachers whilst students are still in the upper primary years. There is no baseline assessment for this subject but observation of Year 7 students, during the inspection, confirms that students have average knowledge, understanding and skill development when they begin at the school. Teacher assessments indicate that the majority of students reach at least the nationally expected level, Level 5, by the end of Year 9 and most students reach a higher level. In GCSE in 2002, students' overall performance at A* to C was well above average. The trend, over the past three years, for those students reaching the higher grades, is upwards. Girls achieve considerably better than boys. Though the proportion of grades in the A* to C range in graphics is high, there are fewer very high grades gained than there should be based on students' prior attainment. In other technology based examinations, results indicate good achievement.

129. The majority of students in Years 7 to 11 achieve well and their attitudes and behaviour are very good. Standards of work are above average by Year 9 and well above average by Year 11, confirming the results of teacher assessments and GCSE examinations. All students have equal opportunities to study food, textiles, graphics, resistant materials and electronics over Years 7 to 9 before specialising in Years 10 to 11. Students work well with a good variety of tools and materials. Learning was both challenging and fun for Year 8 as they made a moisture tester by successfully soldering components and completing a circuit. In a parallel Year 8 class, students made good progress in developing skills to forge metal and learning how to coat it in plastic in readiness for making a mirror stand. Design skills develop well and overall students' graphic capability is good. For example, students in Year 9 developed good designs for packaging for a pen that they had already manufactured. By Year 11, students have developed very good skills in research and analysis and demonstrate good creativity

when designing new products. Manufacturing skills are of a high order and students take care to finish their products to a high standard. Computer provision is excellent. As a result, students achieve very well in using computers for research, presentation and data analysis as well as for computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacture. For example, Year 11 students made very good use of ICT to design and produce nets which were often quite complex.

130. Students with special educational needs achieve well and are well supported by the booklets produced by teachers and used by Years 7 to 9 students. The very few with English as an additional language make good progress. Reasonably good attention is paid to literacy. Boys' needs have been carefully considered in the logical layout of texts and sequencing of activities. Although some key words are displayed in workshops, food and textiles rooms, this is less evident than is consistent with best practice. The literacy co-ordinator, within the subject, takes every opportunity to improve students' literacy but other teachers miss opportunities. In a Year 10 lesson students were not encouraged to make notes when watching a video. Ten minutes later these students could only remember a few key points about the industrial applications covered.
131. Very good arrangements are in place for some students who are disaffected or those who find that academic study is not their cup of tea. They benefit from a vocational course which enables them to work with chefs, both in a bakery and in the further education college. The variety and quality of food produced by these students for a children's party was very good and highlighted the students' good achievement.
132. The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good, and it was good or better in almost all lessons seen though unsatisfactory in one. Teachers' high expectations and the challenges they set ensure that students achieve well throughout the school. Very good support is provided to students as they work on their individual projects. An all-boy Year 10 group received excellent support from a knowledgeable electronics teacher and made excellent progress in understanding complex procedures. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and this is very well used to support learning. For instance, in a Year 11 food lesson, the teacher's own industrial experience resulted in students adopting similarly rigorous approaches to testing and modifying dishes for an airline catering service. Teachers use their own skills with tools and materials well to demonstrate new techniques to students. A very good team of both experienced and more recent entrants to the profession inspire students to invest mental, physical and creative energy in developing ideas, researching and refining designs before producing good quality products. These teachers work very well as a team and are in turn supported by an efficient group of technicians.
133. Excellent leadership and management have ensured that the faculty has made very good progress in addressing the issues raised by the previous inspection report. Assessment procedures are good and used well to set targets for improvement. There is however, no folder of exemplar work, marked according to National Curriculum criteria, for teachers to use when assessing the work of students in Years 7 to 9. This subject delivers control technology in Years 10 and 11 but does not currently contribute to assessment in ICT. All of the workshops are in need of refurbishment with broken steps, problems with flooding and windows in need of replacement. Minor health and safety issues, mentioned during the inspection, need addressing.

DRAMA

Strengths

- GCSE results are high.

- The quality of teaching is good.
- Leadership and management are good.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that students are given enough time for practical work in all lessons.

134. Overall, standards at GCSE are above the national average. A high proportion of students obtain higher grades, A* to C, exceeding the proportion nationally by a wide margin. In a small sample of lessons seen, standards matched national averages. Across the age range, students research historical backgrounds to practical projects and express and share their ideas lucidly in well-structured classroom discussions. They respond creatively to thought-provoking opportunities to experiment with and develop short scenes dealing with personal experience and social issues.

135. Teaching is good overall, because the subject is well led and co-ordinated. Leadership ensures good lesson planning and good systems to check how well students are doing, and to give them the advice they need to improve. In class, teachers coach and prompt individuals and groups of students well, as they engage in discussion and practical improvisation. They utilise a stimulating variety of practical improvisation techniques and acting methods, which hold students' interest well and generate great enthusiasm and commitment to the subject. In those lessons which are less successful, the balance between preliminary teacher briefing and time for practical work could be improved, to allow students to act and think independently.

GEOGRAPHY

Provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Results at GCSE are excellent, particularly the high level of A and A* grades gained.
- Teaching facilitates good and often very good learning on the part of all students.
- The leadership of the department is very good and provides clear focus on developments for the future.

Areas for improvement

- Apply more rigorously the geographical conventions relating to maps and diagrams.
- Improve the quantity and quality of written work.

136. Standards are well above national expectations at GCSE with a significant number of students at the highest grades of A* and A. This is very high when compared with national norms. Standards have risen since the last Inspection. Girls generally do better than boys but the most recent results show that the boys have caught up. Standards at the end of Year 9 are improved from the last inspection and are now above national expectations. There is no discernible difference between the attainment and overall progress of boys and girls at this stage. These standards are indicative of sustained progress from Years 7 to 11. Students achieve well in this subject compared to similar schools and compared to other subjects within the school.

137. Standards are well above average overall at the end of Year 11. Most students make rapid progress and their achievement is very good. This is evident in their written work, which shows not only good knowledge, use of a good range of skills but also the ability to evaluate information and to give reasoned explanations of links, for example between physical processes and human activities. However the amount of written work of some

older students is insufficient for revision purposes. Oral answers in lessons indicate good recall of prior work. Although lower-attaining students succeed in giving thoughtful explanations, these are not apparent in their written work. All students know and use a range of fieldwork techniques and combine these with their other skills including ICT skills, producing good and often very good GCSE coursework. The rigour applied to the drawing of maps and diagrams and the pride taken in the presentation of coursework are not always apparent in class work.

138. Standards are above average at the end of Year 9. Basic skills, for example in the use of atlases and other maps and ICT to locate places, identify physical and climatic differences and recognise features of urban and rural areas, are well consolidated in Year 7. These students collect primary data on fieldwork, do simple analysis and using 'virtual fieldwork' evaluate and make decisions about, for example, sites for a local leisure facility. Older students show an increasing awareness of the wider implications of man-made disasters such as oil pollution on coastlines and many students show good empathy in role play. Good progress is evident by Year 9. Most students formulate simple hypotheses well, for example about the impact of tourism on the lives of residents in Majorca, and effectively research and analyse secondary data using ICT. Most students give reasoned, if brief, oral and written explanations. The written work of lower-attaining students remains largely descriptive. Achievement overall is good, including for students with special educational needs and for the very few with English as an additional language. It is very good for a significant number of students.
139. Teaching is good, it is sometimes very good and many lessons have very good features. Teachers think carefully about outcomes; assessments are well designed to build up and test a range of skills in preparation for examination work. Good opportunities are provided for students to set their own learning objectives by evaluating what they already know and what they need to know more about. In the best lessons, these features result in a wide range of opportunities for learning. This includes group work to obtain information; independent work to think about and record it; the use of ICT for research and 'virtual fieldwork'. Students are encouraged to think about and express their feeling about the impact of man-made and natural disasters through role play and discuss the moral implications of human interference on ecosystems. Challenging questions probe understanding and keep students alert. Opportunities are given to individual students to show their knowledge and use their skills, albeit in a simpler way through the use of modified written tasks. Thoughtful seating plans allow lower-attaining students and those with specific behavioural difficulties to receive additional support from their peers. This works very well, they remain involved in tasks set and achieve well. The progress of all students is closely monitored. The use of starter games combines fun with learning and fosters positive relationships. The impact of this good practice is reduced when teachers absolve students of responsibility for their work by not insisting that work is finished, mistakes are corrected, missed work is done, that geographical conventions in mapwork and diagrams are rigorously applied and that presentation is important. In the minority of satisfactory lessons a minority of students were inconsiderate in their behaviour.
140. The dedication, hard work and clear commitment to improvement by the head of department have made this one of the most successful departments in the school. The promotion of the head of department and difficulties in recruiting a successor have resulted in her assuming a multiplicity of roles, which because of the efficient organisation already established has not impacted on standards. However, some good practice such as the monitoring of teaching and learning and the recording of student progress is temporarily in abeyance until the new head of department is in post. Assessment procedures are very good but the central database needs updating. The

department has good resources and accommodation is adequate but the work of students not taught in subject rooms is not celebrated. The use of ICT, which was an issue at the last inspection, is much improved and very good examples of use of ICT were observed during the inspection. Overall, there has been good progress since the last inspection.

HISTORY

Overall provision in history is **good**.

Strengths

- The leadership and management are very good.
- The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good.
- The department's contribution to the use of ICT is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Establish thorough assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9.
- Raise the attainment of boys at GCSE level.

141. GCSE results in 2002 show a pass rate at A* to C which is well above the national average and a rate that has improved significantly since 2001. The A* to G pass rate continues unchanged at 100 per cent, which is above the national average, while the A*-A pass rate is considerably above the national one. In 2002, boys achieved an A* to C pass rate, which was just under the national average for boys, while girls achieved at a level well above the average for girls.
142. Standards of work are above average overall by both Year 9 and Year 11. Achievement is good overall and very good for higher-attaining students across the school. In Year 7, for example, high-attainers have very good knowledge of medieval music and technology. In Year 9, able students use adult texts very effectively to research a variety of interpretations about General Haig's image and, in Year 11, higher-attaining students show detailed knowledge of the roles of Gorbachev and Reagan in the Cold War. Lower-attaining students in Year 9 research key events to a creditable standard, given their prior attainment, and contribute confidently to discussions such as women's changing roles in World War 1, while in Year 11 they offer sound reasons for the Cuban Missile Crisis. Students with special educational needs make good progress, for example students with Asperger's Syndrome were able to work productively with other students and demonstrate their good learning in discussion.
143. Teaching is good throughout the school. Lessons are planned well and many invite students to reflect upon their own learning; for example, a Year 11 revision lesson where students identified the best internet sites to match their knowledge and learning styles and a Year 10 lesson where searching questions enabled students to establish the key results from a debate on challenges to democracy in post-war USA. Teachers manage students very well and this enables them to settle quickly to work and to respond to the high expectations demanded by the tasks set. There is a rapid pace to learning as seen particularly in a Year 11 active revision lesson on the Cold War where questions were rapidly fired at students. Students are often given responsibility to carry out their own research and to debate controversial issues. Their positive response contributes well to their achievement; for example, the mature grasp by Year 8 students of local issues relating to the slave trade and Year 9 students who understood the reasons for the changing image of General Haig through their research work. The good relationships between teachers and students enable challenging tasks to be set, not

least an engaging end of lesson quiz where Year 7 students were asked to challenge their teacher's knowledge of medieval village life based on their own research.

144. Leadership and management are very good. Overall planning is good and curriculum planning is very good. For example, several studies in depth in Years 8 and 9 and the regular setting of enquiry questions successfully promote reasoned opinions and so also contribute well to citizenship education. A particularly good scheme of work for the GCSE unit on post-war USA contributes to students' numeracy through its study of statistics, which relate to growing affluence, and to their broader understanding of political change. There is very good contribution to students' skills in using ICT throughout the school, for example the use of photo editor in Year 7 work on the Bayeux Tapestry. Very good development of learning strategies promote both literacy and thinking skills. Provision for the spiritual and moral development is reflected soundly in Year 10 work on the ideas of Martin Luther King and attitudes to the earth held by North American Indians as studied in Year 9. Social development is very well planned through regular pair and group work.
145. Improvement since the last inspection is very good as there is no unsatisfactory teaching and considerable curricular development. Further work is needed to establish assessment procedures which are currently underdeveloped in Years 7 to 9, to raise the attainment of boys at GCSE and to more clearly plan for cultural development.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Specialist teaching is good with very good features.
- Most students are keen and well motivated.
- Computer resources have been significantly improved and are now very good.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that the requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met and enough time is allocated to teaching ICT.
- Develop systems for monitoring and evaluation including use of appropriate systems for monitoring and assessing students' progress in subjects across the curriculum.
- Reduce the number of ICT lessons taught by non-specialists.
- Improve the use of ICT in the learning support department and hence the progress made by students with special educational needs.

146. Although there is still much to do, the school has made considerable progress since the last inspection in improving provision.

147. Teachers' initial assessments show that the majority of students have average standards on entry to Year 7 but a significant minority are below average in their work on spreadsheets and databases. Overall standards are above national averages by the end of Year 9. The standards attained by a few students who study the GCSE short course in ICT in Year 10 after school are above average, but the majority who do not study the subject to GCSE level in Years 10 and 11 have average standards. Many students achieve well through Year 7 and 8 because they have good access to very good ICT resources. In Year 9, the majority achieve well but good achievement for the significant minority who do not have separate ICT lessons is less assured. Similarly, in Years 10 and 11, good achievement for the majority who do not study GCSE ICT is not assured though they largely make satisfactory progress. Girls tend to attain more highly than boys. Students with special educational needs make unsatisfactory progress because they have very limited access to ICT in the learning support area.

148. Students in Year 7 have a good understanding of the different functions of word-processing applications but are less confident in the use of databases and spreadsheets. In Year 8, students are articulate in explaining their choices and gain fluency in compiling presentations electronically. Students in Year 9 develop well their skills in literacy and numeracy through using word-processing and spreadsheet applications. They competently format text using a range of fonts, sizes and colours and arrange it in columns. Students develop their expertise with spreadsheets further, for example by embedding formulae to automatically calculate totals. They achieve good results in compiling presentations using Powerpoint. In Year 10, most students can change the presentation of text by using a range of word-processing functions. They can grab images and screenshots from Internet websites to paste and use in multimedia or publishing applications. They are skilled in accessing the school's internet website and obtain useful resources from the Internet to enhance their written work. The GCSE ICT students in Year 10 have been involved in an interesting and successful project to build a robotic vehicle with light-sensitive sensors. Year 11 students confirm that they use ICT in a range of subjects to good effect.

149. The quality of specialist teaching is usually good, some is very good or excellent. All teaching observed was satisfactory or better. However, 10 out of the 13 teachers who teach ICT are not ICT specialists, and this means that in some of their lessons subject knowledge is less secure than it should be. That said, some of these teachers show great enthusiasm for ICT and incorporate it well into their teaching of, for example, English or science, making sure that they keep their knowledge sufficiently up-to-date to provide challenge to students. When teaching and learning are good, it is because teachers know their material very well and communicate their aims clearly. The specialist teachers prepare very good resources and use them to very good effect in lessons. They explain concepts clearly, manage groups effectively, and maintain a good pace throughout. As a result, students usually learn rapidly. High-attainers reach good standards due to sharply focused teaching based on good assessment of their progress and needs. In the lessons where teaching is less effective, it is because teachers lack the confidence to demonstrate how to manipulate programs such as spreadsheets or presentation software and do not make enough use of the higher level facilities offered within them. In these lessons, students are not given enough opportunities to lead learning. In a few lessons, teachers do not allow enough time in plenary sessions to identify how much students have learned.
150. The curriculum does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum in Year 9 and Year 11. The ICT scheme of work for Years 7, 8 and 9 follows the government-approved scheme but 60 students in Year 9 are not able to study ICT in separate lessons because they study Spanish instead. Teaching time for ICT is much less than the nationally recommended time making it difficult to cover all aspects of the scheme of work. That said, there are good features of the curriculum and the school has very good plans which it has already partially implemented to improve it. The ICT Key Stage 3 strategy is being introduced into classes in the lower school and teachers report that it is already helping to raise standards. A pilot GCSE course is being taught in Year 10 in well-attended after-school sessions and all students in Years 10 and 11 are given the opportunity to gain an ICT qualification, although this is only in word-processing and use of spreadsheets. The school's intranet makes consistently good, regular use of fast, broadband access to the Internet and this is used to good effect in many lessons. The school's security systems to promote safe use of the Internet are good and students and their parents sign an ICT agreement with regard to their use of school computers. Teachers and technicians allow students to use computers regularly before school, at lunchtimes and after school. The procedures for assessing the quality of students' work in ICT are good, but other subjects make little contribution to assessment of students' ICT capability and this is unsatisfactory, particularly in Years 10 to 11. This term, teachers have started to track the performance of students carefully through initial assessments in each year, but analysis of standards achieved over time is in its infancy.
151. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The department was only formed this term and is developing rapidly with strong support from senior managers. The head of department was appointed 12 weeks ago and has set about the many tasks needed to improve provision with much vigour. She supports teachers very well when they use ICT in other subject areas and is given strong support by senior staff. The department has started to analyse its results over time at GCSE and A-level but not for Year 9. The ICT network manager and technicians provide valuable support to teachers and learners and effectively manage a much improved network. A learning support assistant provides good technical support in lessons.
152. The school provides a teacher to give technical and teaching support for ten partner primary schools. This is a significant and innovative initiative helping to raise standards

in those schools. The department has not yet given enough emphasis to monitoring and evaluation of standards and teaching. Overall, learning resources are very good because the school has placed a high priority on investing in ICT resources.

ICT across the curriculum

153. The overall contribution made by other subjects to the development of ICT skills is good. Standards in the use of ICT are above average or better in most subjects. Standards are well above average in business studies, design and technology and history. Standards in the use of ICT are above average in English, mathematics, science, geography, physical education and psychology. ICT standards are average in art and music, but below average in modern foreign languages, drama and religious education.
154. The school runs an ICT working group, which provides a useful forum for other subject departments to discuss developments and get guidance on using ICT further. The leadership of cross-curricular use of ICT is improving rapidly. The school has a clear vision for development of ICT, contained in the ICT Strategic Plan. Many of its plans are either already in place, such as the improvement of resources and in the number of technicians, or soon to happen, as with an increase in specialist teaching. Other plans are also being given a suitably high priority, such as for the introduction of a full GCSE course in ICT. Some initiatives are at the cutting edge of teaching, such as with the teaching of Latin to sixth formers by a private company via a video-conferencing link.
155. The support provided by the ICT department for teachers using ICT in other subjects is good. Subject usage of ICT is well monitored. All teachers have received nationally required ICT training, some of which they report was good but some of which was poor. A number of areas, such as English, business studies, the library and design and technology, have good ICT equipment dedicated for their use. The overall number of computers is sufficient for the teaching of ICT. Students also have the use of digital cameras and scanners for subjects such as art. Geography, science and physical education teachers make extensive use of Powerpoint presentations, and in many cases students understand subject related ideas better when teachers make effective use of electronic whiteboards.
156. There has been no formal audit of ICT usage around the school. The department has provided guidance on National Curriculum Levels in ICT but there are no formal assessment systems with which to monitor and improve the standards reached in ICT in other subjects. Lack of resources, such as the numbers of laptop computers and interactive whiteboards, hampers the use of ICT as an integral part of other lessons. Nevertheless, the provision for cross-curricular use of ICT has improved significantly since the time of the last inspection and the school is now well-placed to address the challenges which remain.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **good**.

Strengths

- The good quality of teaching engenders high standards up to Year 11.
- Strong leadership of the department creates a clear vision and expectations for teachers.
- Use of assessment data provides good evidence for setting students' targets.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the use of ICT so that it adequately supports modern foreign language learning.
- Increase the number of dual linguists, which has declined to a very small number in recent years.
- Make use of a wider range of resources.

157. At the end of Year 11, overall standards in French and German GCSE examinations are now above average. This represents a good improvement on standards since the last inspection, when they were satisfactory. In French, the results in the GCSE A*/A band are particularly good, as a higher proportion of students gain these grades than nationally. In both languages girls perform better than boys but in 2002 boys were particularly successful in German. These results are good compared with students in similar schools. They are broadly in line with the students' performance in other subjects in the same school. Spanish has been introduced as a third language, but students have not yet been studying it for long enough to take a GCSE.
158. Teachers assess a significantly higher proportion of students than nationally as achieving the nationally expected level (Level 5) at the end of Year 9. Work seen in both French and German during the inspection supports the view that students reach above average standards by the end of Year 9 and that achievement is good. The department's teaching philosophy develops students' willingness to speak from their first weeks in the school. They are encouraged to ask how to express a concept in the foreign language if they do not understand. Consequently they learn how to understand and talk with a basic range of tenses early in their career. By the end of Year 9, German students manipulate past, present and future tenses and understand reflexive verbs well. They work on modal verbs and higher-attaining students write a half-page story with a high degree of accuracy, using the future tense and the perfect with *haben* and *sein*. They have an excellent grasp of word order and subordinate clauses with *weil* and separable verbs. In French, students identify the main points in reading short passages and elicit specific details from the text. They write paragraphs on topics such as the weather and include a wide range of adverbs of time. There is not an obvious difference in performance in class between boys and girls. Students with special educational needs make good progress in their learning, especially when they receive extra adult help in the classroom, where they increase their range of vocabulary and structures. Students from minority ethnic groups and the very few with English as an additional language achieve as well as other students and make good progress.
159. Work seen up to Year 11 during the inspection confirms the high GCSE standards and students make good progress through Years 10 to 11. They develop well their skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing, and some very high quality work is completed. In Years 10 and 11, students develop greater accuracy over a wider topic area. It is rare to find students of this age coping with *'Je ne préférerais pas n'avoir des cours que le*

matin'. Students insert a wide range of French negatives into sentences. In German students write in different registers, for example, some students write about 'Sexism at Work'. Some of the word order is shaky, and vocabulary needs improvement, but this is a topic normally seen in Year 12. In both French and German, the better candidates show very good mastery of tenses. Several students with special educational needs do not study a foreign language in Years 10 and 11. Those that do, make good progress. Few students take two languages at GCSE.

160. Spanish has recently been introduced as a third foreign language to a small number of classes in Year 9 and above. All students are therefore at the early stages of learning. Their attainment is good and in some cases very good. The very good quality of teaching leads to very high pupil motivation and involvement. This is because the teacher has high expectations of achievement and behaviour, works at a very good pace and uses Spanish as the normal language of the classroom. Relationships within the classroom are excellent and there is no difference in level of attainment between boys and girls. The students work hard. They readily co-operate in oral work, where they work with good accuracy and enthusiasm. Students in Year 10 achieve good standards in their extended writing, where they write about themselves and their interests in considerable detail.
161. The quality of teaching and learning in the three languages is good overall. It is never less than satisfactory and a number of excellent and very good lessons were observed. Students' learning is enhanced by teachers' very good knowledge of the language in each of the languages they teach, by the very high usage of the language in the classroom and by the challenging expectations they have of students. Teachers use time well, and give students clear time frames for each activity. Homework is integrated into the good planning and serves to consolidate students' knowledge and understanding. The departmental philosophy to teach students to ask when they want to say something beyond the range they have been taught motivates them. This progresses their learning very effectively. However, not enough use is made of a wide enough range of resources. Teachers do not yet provide sufficient opportunities for students to use ICT, although one German class made very good use of the computer suite during the inspection. Students' good levels of interest and high motivation contribute to their good learning. The vast majority are willing speakers and active participants, co-operating well in pair and group work.
162. The leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department is very experienced and provides clear direction. A clear thinking philosophy promotes a cohesive team of staff who work well together. The use of assessment data is good in tracking students' progress and in providing sound information for setting individual and class targets. The good accommodation provides a pleasant suite for teaching: display space is used realistically to present a positive foreign language ethos. Although resources are adequate generally, there is insufficient software to support appropriate use of ICT in students' learning.
163. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The current single-gender grouping trial in Year 8 to determine the preferred learning styles of each group and the acquisition of some boy-friendly resources should help to improve standards further and contribute to the good departmental development plan.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The leadership and management of the new head of department are very good.
- A large, and increasing, number of students are taking part in extra-curricular activities.
- The AS-level music technology course is a very good addition to what the department has to offer students.

Areas for improvement

- Overcome the weaknesses in accommodation and provision of resources.
- Work towards increasing the number of students taking examination courses.

164. The provision for music has the potential to be very good or better once the new assessment policy and curriculum devised by the new head of music have been implemented.
165. Teacher assessments show that by the end of Year 9 in 2001 and 2002, the attainment of students was in line with national averages. In 2001, GCSE examination results were above average and 2002 results were significantly above the national average. Whilst the number of students taking the GCSE examination has fallen over the years, standards have risen. A revision of the GCSE options available has led to more students being able to take music at this level since 2001.
166. Although students arrive in Year 7 with a variety of musical experiences, the generally good teaching enables them to attain standards by the end of Year 9 which are in line with national expectations, and this signals good progress. Composition skills are developed well as students move through the school. For example, students in Year 7 develop their skills through composing and drawing graphic scores to produce imaginative compositions on 'Winter'. By the time they are in Year 9, students write lyrics and compose music for their own carols to a satisfactory standard. Performance skills are effective. Students in Year 8 made good progress in learning to play a carol and making their own arrangement of it.
167. Work seen in Years 10 to 11 shows that standards are in line with expectations for this stage in the course. Students in Year 10 are in the process of completing their second composition of the term and are preparing to write the accompanying commentary. They demonstrate appropriate skills in composition and performance. The skills, in both composition and performance, of students who receive instrumental tuition are good and better than those of students who are not learning to play an instrument. In the Year 11 lesson observed, students were working on the compositions for their examination portfolio. The standard of composition varied from those with a very good idea of structure and feel for the intended medium to more simple compositions which rely on unmodified repetition. The overall standard was in line with national expectations.
168. Teaching is overall good. Some lessons were very good. One of the lessons observed was unsatisfactory. In good or very good lessons, students' attitudes are good owing to the practical nature of the lessons and the interesting content. This enables them to enjoy their music making, particularly in group work where they concentrate well on the task in hand and collaborate well with the other members. Teachers' subject knowledge and experience of how good learning takes place make a valuable contribution to students' learning. Teachers enable students to discover experiences for themselves in lessons which are well planned, cater for the needs of all students, relate to previous learning, and expect high results. The length of lessons, 50 minutes, is preventing students from making better progress with their compositions as it limits the time available for performance and evaluation. Activities in many lessons contribute effectively to developing the students' literacy skills by using key words or writing the

lyrics for their own carols. Opportunities for students to achieve a higher standard of performance than they expected raise their self-esteem and contribute to their spiritual development. The emphasis on respect for other people, their views and property, and good manners helps to promote moral development. No time is allowed on the timetable for homework in Years 7 to 9 but it is set regularly in Years 10 to 11. Instrumental lessons for 160 students are provided by North Somerset Music Service. The teaching observed and the results of the teaching heard in the extra-curricular activities and lessons shows the high standard of this provision.

169. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. The computer room is too small for large classes and the lack of a specialist third teaching room involves staff teaching in distant rooms with no musical resources. Practical activities are not possible owing to the close proximity of other classes and this is having a negative effect on learning and students' behaviour. There are also insufficient practice rooms for group work during lessons. Resources are also unsatisfactory. There are insufficient computers to meet the needs of the National Curriculum, insufficient advanced keyboards, and the percussion equipment requires increasing, renewing or renovating.
170. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The new head of department, appointed in September of this year, in conjunction with the other members of the department is devising a more practically based curriculum which should address the ICT needs of students in Years 7 to 9. Also, more appropriate assessment procedures are being introduced which should help to monitor students' progress, aid target setting, and influence curriculum planning, all of which are currently underdeveloped. Regular monitoring and evaluation of teaching is to commence next term to raise the standards of students' learning in the less successful lessons. The head of department is committed to increasing the currently low number of students taking examination courses, and to the growth of extra-curricular activities with increased student involvement.

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL EDUCATION

The overall provision of personal and social education is **very good**.

Strengths

- The leadership and management of the area are very good.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is very good.
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Area for improvement

- Provide more rigour in some teaching in Years 7 to 9.

171. Standards in personal and social education are well above average in Years 10 and 11 and above average in Years 7 to 9. This is due to the very good schemes of work which match students' development needs well and stimulate their interest through enquiry questions, varied learning strategies and good student management. Year 9 students maturely discussed their knowledge of HIV/AIDS, making decisions in small groups about which information, provided on cards, was true and false. They could clearly relate their learning in science to transmission of infection through bodily fluids. Year 11 students are able to understand a wide range of reasons for people becoming refugees and can relate social issues and aspects of the law to consumption of alcohol.
172. Teaching ranges from good to excellent and is very good overall. In the best lessons enquiry questions are clearly established and a rapid pace is maintained together with a variety of oral and written tasks, for example when Year 11 students researched very

effectively into gaps in their knowledge of drugs. Good exploration of students' attitudes and knowledge was also seen in a Year 7 lesson on features of good citizenship and a Year 8 lesson which identified good and bad aspects of a small town. Learning in Years 7 to 9 is good overall. In a small minority of classes, learning could further improve with more rigorous activities that are better focused on students' learning needs and planned learning outcomes.

173. Leadership and management are very good. The curriculum covers all aspects of personal and social development thoroughly and sufficient teaching time is allocated. Careers education and preparation for the world of work is well established and work across the school on sex and relationships is sensitively presented. All lessons are planned well to meet the needs of the range of students and clear learning outcomes are identified. Good use is made of quality resources. There are helpful displays of information about local and national helplines which, together with the commitment of specialist teachers, help to foster a creative and thoughtful ethos.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching promotes high standards and teachers are highly committed.
- Extra-curricular provision is excellent. The school has 'Sportsmark' status.
- Standards of girls' work, behaviour and attitudes have risen sharply.
- Leadership of the department is strong.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that assessment procedures meet statutory requirements.
- Ensure that procedures for carrying out risk assessments are in place and fully implemented.

174. Standards of attainment are above average by the end of Year 9 and well above average by Year 11 for those students following an accredited course. This is reflected in the 2002 GCSE examination results, which were significantly above national averages. Results have improved year on year with most students meeting their target grades. By Year 11, most students in non-GCSE classes are attaining above average standards because over half of all students regularly play competitive sport both for school and local clubs. The house system is very effective in involving as many students as possible. In view of above average standards on entry, students make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9 and good progress in Years 10 and 11. The learning and achievement of students with special educational needs follows a similar pattern. The attainment of boys and girls is comparable. Standards in games such as rugby, hockey and cross-country are very good and unusually high numbers of students reach the very highest levels at both county and national level. For example, the indoor hockey team reached the national final in 2002. The school has 'Sportsmark' status for its outstanding contribution to promoting sport. Progress since the last inspection is good. In particular, standards of girls' work, attitudes and behaviour have risen sharply.

175. By Year 9, most students know how to warm up effectively, independently and with understanding. In games such as netball, rugby and football, most acquire good basic skills and techniques. Their knowledge of the rules and conventions of major games is complete. Higher-attaining students consistently use advanced tactics in a full game, such as 'binding' on to a player from a rugby line out. Lower-attaining girls, with little

prior experience of football, effectively transfer their knowledge of best use of space from hockey to football. Due to short lessons, opportunities to develop other skills, such as oral and evaluation skills are limited and sometimes missed.

176. In most lessons in Years 10 and 11, students successfully develop advanced skills, techniques and tactics. For example, in netball, girls worked on a variety of set centre passes which they used to good effect in the game. In a Year 10 badminton lesson, boys combined shots skilfully, positioned and re-positioned themselves effectively, and applied knowledge intelligently. The majority of students on examination courses are working at standards commensurate with the higher grades. Literacy skills are generally good.
177. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. Students make only satisfactory, rather than good, gains in Years 7 to 9, because learning lacks continuity due to shared teaching groups, poor spread of lessons and too many part-time teachers. Students' enthusiasm, desire to win, and willingness to play fair enhance learning. Careful teaching of basic skills significantly strengthens learning and enables students to advance satisfactorily on to higher level work. Planning of lessons is effective in better lessons where a variety of resources and teaching methods deepen, extend and reinforce understanding. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, anatomical technical words were reinforced by an exciting word game and good use was made of ICT presentation tools to summarise facts. Teaching is further strengthened by good organisation and management which ensure that students work safely, make best use of time and learn new work. Although informal assessment is good, this is not linked to formal assessment and students do not know what they have to do to reach a higher National Curriculum level. Inconsistencies of approach to the teaching of literacy, numeracy, planning and evaluating skills stem from lack of guidance in the schemes of work.
178. Leadership of the department is strong and has significantly improved since the time of the last inspection. However, since assessment procedures breach statutory requirements and risk assessments lack rigour, this suggests that priorities for improvement are not always correctly identified or monitored. All teachers are highly committed to standards achieved and extra-curricular provision is excellent. About one hundred competitive teams are run for both boys and girls. Changing facilities are unsatisfactory as they are cramped and run down. Those condemned as unfit for use are still in use, though new ones are to be built in January 2003. Otherwise, facilities are barely satisfactory for the needs of the school since there are insufficient indoor spaces in inclement weather.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching in GCSE and sixth form classes.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Identify more use of ICT and the needs of lower-attaining students in planning.
- Increase students' learning through first hand experiences by greater use of visits and

179. Examination results in recent years have been in line with national averages. They are based on a very small number of candidates entered for the full course GCSE. However, there has been a major shift in examination policy in the school and currently all students in Years 9 and 10 study the short course GCSE. First entry will be in 2003. Standards of work seen in Year 10 are in line with expectation at this stage of the course. The effect of starting the course in Year 9 has been to raise attainment to above expectation for the majority of students at this stage of Key Stage 3. In one Year 9 class, for example, most students are able to distinguish effectively between the Christian and Muslim perspectives on divorce. They relate key concepts in religious education well to their own experiences.
180. Most students make good progress throughout the school. There is no significant difference between the progress of boys and girls in oral work. The very few with English as an additional language also make good progress. Middle and lower-attaining boys make less progress in the extended written and evaluative tasks. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress when given support material. Higher-attaining students make good progress as they move through the GCSE course.
181. The quality of teaching ranges from satisfactory to very good and is very good overall. The majority of teaching in Years 7 and 8 is good. The majority of teaching in Years 9 and 10 is very good. In the best lessons, teachers set a brisk pace and engage students' interest with a good range of teaching methods. These involve students actively in their learning and help them to develop important skills in the subject. For example, students in a Year 7 class considered their personal feelings about music and then responded to music played in the context of worship. This enabled them to appreciate the need for different forms of communication in religion. Students are well taught about the beliefs and practices in a wide range of religions, particularly Christianity and Islam. A major strength of the teaching is that it encourages students to apply their learning to everyday life and to their own experience. Because management of students is very good and teachers have high expectations, the quality of learning is very good overall. In a small minority of classes in Year 7, non-specialist teachers are insecure with teaching material. Marking of class work is inconsistent in some Year 7 classes.
182. The curriculum fully meets the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus in Years 7 to 9 and time allocation is above average. Changes in examination policy in Years 10 to 11 mean that time allocations in Year 11 are not fully met, but the Short Course GCSE for all students fully meets the requirements. It has improved the quality of religious education for all students in Years 10 to 11 and significantly raised standards in Year 9. High quality schemes of work are being developed in order to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. There is very good progress in assessment and tasks are now linked to Attainment Levels in the Agreed Syllabus. This is having an impact on standards in the subject and students are beginning to have a clearer idea of their target levels and grades. Planning for the use of ICT is limited at present although students do produce some excellent work at home. Planning now needs to take more account of the learning needs of lower-attaining students. For all students, there is insufficient opportunity to learn about religion from first hand experiences, such as through visits to places of worship and visitors to school.
183. Management of the department is very good. There is a newly established team of specialists all of whom make a very good contribution to developments in the curriculum. Progress since the last inspection has been very good. All issues have

been or are being addressed, particularly since the recent appointment of new staff. Religious education makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and to citizenship.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Economics	1	100	73	0	22	1.00	1.94
Geography	1	100	74	0	6	3.00	1.18
Mathematics	1	100	62	0	15	2.00	1.51

GCE A level and GNVQ courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	13	100	96	23	46	5.85	6.57
Biology	14	86	88	21	34	4.14	5.25
Chemistry	12	83	90	42	43	5.83	5.90
Drama	8	100	99	38	38	6.75	6.59
Economics	6	100	89	17	36	5.33	5.52
English Language	15	80	91	7	30	2.93	5.27
English Literature	6	100	95	100	37	9.00	5.91
French	5	80	89	0	38	3.6	5.59
Full Design and Technology	8	100	91	25	30	5.50	5.38
Geography	25	100	92	52	38	7.04	5.74
German	4	100	91	50	40	5.50	5.81
History	11	100	88	64	35	7.27	5.45
Mathematics	17	94	87	47	43	6.12	5.80
Music	1	-	93	-	35	-	5.74
Psychology	18	94	90	39	30	6.56	5.16
Physics	11	100	88	55	40	6.18	5.67
Religious Studies	5	100	92	0	38	4.4	5.84
Sociology	7	71	86	14	35	3.14	5.32
Vocational studies (accounts)	5	100	76	17	26	6.33	4.36

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Leisure and tourism	10	100	81				

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

184. The courses offered by the school include: A and AS level mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics. The inspection focused on biology, physics and mathematics though chemistry was sampled. A-level results in chemistry were in line with national results in 2001 but improved in 2002, as all students gained at least a pass grade. The quality of teaching in the two chemistry lessons sampled was good overall. In one lesson, very good advice was given on website and other sources for researching further into theories about bonding. All students were very clear about the key concepts relating to bonding that had been discussed in the lesson.

185. The mathematics inspection covered AS mathematics and mathematics and further mathematics at A-level. These courses are divided into four areas: pure, mechanics, statistics and decision mathematics. Each area is divided into modules some of which are compulsory and others optional. Overall the curriculum is wide and varied and gives most students the opportunity to follow the courses of their choice.

Mathematics

Overall the quality of provision is **good**

Strengths

- A-level examination results are above average and this is reflected in the current standards which are also above average.
- Teaching is good and this leads to effective learning.
- Students have very good attitudes, they work diligently and are keen to do well.

Areas for Improvement

- Make more appropriate use of computers in lessons.
- Encourage more girls to opt for AS and A-level courses as too few do so currently.

186. The proportion of students choosing AS and A-level mathematics is below average and is declining. There is a minority of female students although they obtain better results at A-level than male students. A-level results in 2001 were above the national average and are similar to the results in the previous year. Results in 2002 were slightly lower for the higher A/B grades, although all students successfully obtained a grade A to E. Overall, results have improved since the last inspection.

187. The standard of work of current students is above average and better than could be expected based on their GCSE examination results. Year 12 students have a good understanding of algebra and trigonometry and use this well to solve problems in applied mathematics. For example, in a Year 12 mechanics lesson, students used the sine and cosine formulae accurately to find the resultant of two non-parallel forces

which were not perpendicular. In a Year 12 statistics lesson, students' ability to use Venn diagrams enabled them to establish correctly the formulae for conditional probability. They were then able to solve a variety of probability problems successfully, re-arranging the formula when necessary. In the Year 12 further mathematics group, standards are high. Students have a good grasp of calculus and skilfully differentiate and integrate algebraic functions. In Year 13, students reach above average standards. For example, they are adept at solving polynomial equations using iterative techniques, and use Newton's Laws to good effect to solve problems involving ladders and friction. In both years, a particular strength is the logical way students organise and present their work. This helps them with revision and to prepare for examinations. Overall achievement in the sixth form is good and students make good progress in relation to their prior attainment. Higher and lower-attainers achieve equally well.

188. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers understand the subject well and know how to teach it effectively. Lessons are well pitched at the right level for students enabling them to build well on what they already know. By relating new topics to earlier work teachers assist students to consolidate and extend their understanding. For example, in a Year 13 statistics lesson, the teacher discussed and questioned students about earlier work on the normal and Poisson distributions. This prepared students to consider the conditions under which the normal distribution could be used in order to evaluate Poisson probabilities. Good learning took place and students were able to solve problems using this method. In most lessons, an appropriate balance of class teaching and independent learning helps students to consolidate their understanding before tackling more challenging questions. In all lessons, learning is enhanced by the very positive attitudes of students to their work and the good working atmosphere which prevails. In some lessons, use of the computer assists students' understanding, although occasionally it is used excessively and students' progress is reduced. Good and on-going assessment in lessons helps students to correct errors and tackle new work with confidence. Homework is used effectively to support learning.
189. The sixth form is led and managed effectively. Teachers meet frequently and collaborate well in the teaching of the modules. There is good monitoring of students and schemes of work are revised in the light of examination results. There are good quality books and resources for all courses. There has been good progress since the last inspection.

Biology

The quality of provision for biology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- An increasing number of students from a broad range of previous GCSE attainment opt to study biology.
- Teachers make sure students are interested and keen.
- There are accurate and well-used systems for measuring attainment.

Areas for improvement

- Provide greater help for all students, and especially low-attaining students, to ensure they meet their target grades.

190. The achievement and progress of students, in relation to their GCSE qualifications at the start of their courses, is satisfactory. Examination results for A-level, for 2001, were below national averages, and the unconfirmed results for 2002 are similar. In the three years before 2001, A-level results were in line with national averages. The drop in

results has been due to a very large increase, over the previous two years, in the numbers of students choosing AS level biology a high proportion of whom have then continued to the second year of A-level. This increase in numbers has been accompanied by a broadening of the range of prior attainment in A-level classes. Current provision is effectively meeting the needs and interests of students with a wide range of abilities. Almost all complete their chosen courses.

191. Current standards are in line with those of recent years and are below average. Some students in Year 13 gain full and secure understanding of topics largely because they are studying relevant material in depth. For example, their coursework on investigation of enzymes was clear and accurate over the technicalities of the investigative techniques used. It was also very thorough over the explanation of the scientific principles involved. Other Year 13 students are too careless about completing work so that they have gaps in knowledge and too often key ideas are not understood securely enough. Year 12 students on the AS course have made a satisfactory start and both high and low-attaining students work with reasonable care and consistency.
192. The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good. The very good levels of interest and concentration of students in lessons are a strong feature of their learning. Teachers are expert about biology, and share their enthusiasm about the subject with students, sometimes very well. Overall, teachers plan the methods and content of lessons well, including the use of a good variety of activities and resources. They provide suitable homework and pointers for extra study. Teachers judge students' potential well, and usually make sure students know what is expected of them. Making greater intellectual effort is an area for improvement in students' learning. Low-attainers do not always realise the importance of completing tasks. High-attaining students rely over-much on prompts by the teachers before they explore ideas in sufficient detail. Teachers differ markedly in how well they challenge students on these matters, and on the extent that they track progress during the lesson. The variation is most marked about how well they guide low-attaining students towards the target grades they have been set.
193. Staff have very good systems for accurate measurement of attainment. Teachers are using this data very well to amend and adapt their initial schemes of work for AS and A-level. Work is underway to complete these schemes. Students understand what grade they are expected to reach to the extent that some can self-assess. Staff work very well as a team. The new A-level curricula have been introduced effectively. Students take advantage of extensive opportunities for support over revision. They benefit from the week of field work study and the good range of other visits, such as the visits to local university facilities. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Physics

The quality of the provision for physics is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average, and students make very good progress.
- Many students start and complete physics courses, including a high proportion of female students.
- The teaching often expects a lot from students, and inspires them to do well.
- The curriculum is broad and interesting, including good provision for spiritual and moral issues.

Areas for improvement

- Give more feedback to low-attaining students about how to attain their target grades.

194. The standards attained at A-level were consistently above average for 2000 and 2001, and the unconfirmed results for 2002 are similarly high. The first cohort of AS level students was successful, with a high proportion attaining A and B grades. Students make good progress in the light of their previous GCSE grades. Since the introduction of the new AS and A-level system in 2000, numbers have increased substantially. This year 39 students started the AS course and a good proportion of them are female students. Almost all students complete their courses, and the proportion moving on from AS to continue with the A-level is good and improving.
195. Current work shows that the above average standard is maintained. Year 12 students on the AS course have gained substantial new knowledge and understanding during the first weeks of study. This is mainly because they take great care to complete work in good detail, including the harder elements. Year 13 students have a similar record of good progress. The best work is excellent, for example recent coursework on topics chosen by students such as: black holes, the physics of diamonds, and catapult physics. Students understood the fine detail of the underlying physics involved and provided thorough analysis of alternative theories. The work of relatively low-attaining students is equally thorough. The mathematical skills of the students are good enough to sustain top-grade physics and even students not taking A-level mathematics do well on AS and A-level physics.
196. Overall teaching and learning are good, ranging from very good to satisfactory. Most lessons are demanding so that students are well challenged and stretched. The best lessons excite and inspire interest. Hence, students are very effectively engaged and made to think hard. In a very good lesson, Year 13 students studied binary stars, and star brightness. They understood the principles, and then practised calculations, about velocity and distance. They also debated the fundamental question of the accuracy, or not, of our estimates of inter-stellar distances. Year 12 students gained a good grasp of the key skills needed to attain well in practical coursework, in large part because of the very good presentation and questioning of the teacher. The satisfactory teaching is less exciting but is fully effective in putting across key ideas clearly, so that students make steady gains in their knowledge and understanding. Teachers provide effective feedback to most students on how they can improve their work. However, feedback given to low-attaining students is sometimes not enough to help them understand clearly what they need to do to attain their target grades. Overall, teachers are expert about physics and about the needs of the examination system.

197. Accurate assessments are made of the standards of work and the information is used well, for example to monitor if students are attaining at least in line with their target grade. Students appreciate the help and support they are given, such as revision sessions and booster classes for mathematics. A major and unusual strength is that good numbers of girls choose physics. Staff provide good opportunities for students to consider the big moral and spiritual issues related to physics. The school has used financial resources well so that resources for learning have kept up with the growing numbers. There is ample use of ICT both as a tool for teaching and as part of the learning. Progress since the last inspection has been good and high standards of work have been effectively sustained.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

198. The school offers a design and technology course focused on product design and this was inspected in depth. No other courses are offered by the school within this curriculum area.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is excellent.
- The standards at AS level are above average.
- The cross-curricular enrichment opportunities for Year 13 students are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Improve standards in the upper grades at A-level.
- Widen the range of design and technology based courses offered in the sixth form.

199. All students entering the product design course of study have gained a higher grade at GCSE level. In the AS examination in 2002, nearly all students either met their target grade or improved on it considerably, thus indicating good value added during Year 12. Performance at the higher A-B grades at A-level level has been declining over the past three years. It was broadly average in 2001 but fell in 2002 with no students gaining a grade A or B, though all passed. Few female students take the subject at this level but those who do achieve as well as their male counterparts.

200. Evidence from inspection indicates that the downward trend has been halted and standards are again improving. Current standards are above average and students make good progress. High and low-attainers make equally good progress. Students have a good and detailed knowledge and understanding of a wide range of materials and processes used in product design. They give good consideration to ergonomics in their design work. Most demonstrate skill in practical use of tools and materials and have good skills in independent research. Students are able to collect and analyse relevant data and information to inform their project work and able students demonstrate very good analytical skills. Most have good drawing skills, especially able students. Some lower-attainers struggle with graphic work. One team of three higher-attaining male students, two of whom study product design, have, in their time outside lessons, moved beyond the conventional A-level assessment criteria and undertaken to solve a real world problem for which professional designers have failed to find an answer. Their strengths lie in their ability to work as a project team, as well as in their communication skills. They have learned a lot from this experience about how ideas grow and develop

as well as the possibility of disappointment even at an advanced stage of a new product design.

201. Teaching and learning in the lessons seen were excellent. A well-qualified and experienced team of teachers encourages students to grow and develop as critical thinkers who not only know how to find out information for themselves but also how to evaluate its usefulness for their particular line of enquiry. Projects are well matched to interest levels and students benefit from the different teachers' strengths in furniture and graphic design or electronics. The key skills of speaking, listening and debating are well developed as Year 12 students make interesting and good quality presentations to their teacher and peers on such topics as metal alloys and carbon fibres. The use of ICT enhances these performances. Year 13 students are encouraged to work more independently as they research web sites or accumulate photographic evidence in order to demonstrate to the examiner the range of sources used for their studies. Higher-attaining students offer very good support for less confident or skilful peers.
202. Self-evaluation is used well to help students reflect on their own strengths and areas for development. Improvement since the previous inspection report is good and standards of work have improved well. The range of courses on offer is limited; for example, there is no food or textiles technology course. Widening the range could encourage more students to opt for technology-based subjects.

BUSINESS

203. The school teaches business education AVCE as well as AS and A-levels in economics and accounts. The inspection focus was the AVCE business education course, but lessons in accounts and economics were also sampled. The quality of teaching and learning in the accounts and economics lessons was very good overall and all lessons seen were good or better. Some were excellent. Students achieve well in both economics and accounts in relation to their prior attainment and performance at A-level is usually in line with national norms.

Business education

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

Strengths

- Teachers have very secure subject knowledge and the planning and organisation of lessons is very effective.
- Students' attitudes are very good and their independent learning and study skills are very well developed.
- The subject is very well led and as a result the teachers work effectively together.
- Assessment is excellent. Students are fully aware of their own learning and achieve very well as a result.

Areas for improvement

- Monitor more frequently the teaching and learning to share best practice.
- Review the departmental development plan, in particular the implementation strategies.

204. The standard reached in the GNVQ advanced business examination in 2001 was at the national average. In the new AVCE examination in 2002 the standard was at the same level. All of the students gained an A to E grade in the double award and a reasonable proportion gained an A or B grade. In the single award all students gained a pass grade and a third gained the two highest grades. Taking into account the previous

qualifications of these students, this represents very good achievement. The numbers taking business education have been steadily growing in recent years and the new courses have been very successfully introduced with the existing standards being maintained.

205. The standards of written work of the current students are above average. In particular, the assessed assignments are of a high standard with evidence of rigorous research and a very good understanding of the nature of local business. These assignments have been well supported by excellent teacher assessment and the feedback comments are of a very high order. Students make very good progress through the two years. In Year 12, students are able to successfully design a booklet covering issues about the European Union for use within the Year 7 lessons in personal and social education. They confidently calculate efficiency and liquidity ratios and make effective use of these indicators to interpret the success of several companies. By Year 13, students work very effectively with computers to produce their own business plan and market analysis. These students work with considerable focus and concentration. They are able to organise their own work very well and to maintain a challenging pace to achieve their learning objectives. Lower-attainers achieve as well as high-attainers.
206. Students learn very well because the teaching is very good overall and some is excellent. The best lessons have rapid pace, a high level of challenge and a wide range of learning opportunities. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and sound business experience, which they impart very effectively to students. The planning and organisation of the lessons are meticulous and the expectations of the students are very high. The students respond very well to these and demonstrate well-developed skills of researching business organisations and of the ability to analyse and evaluate their own work. The initiative for learning firmly rests with the students and they welcome this approach. As a result, they are confident and independent learners. There is a very high level of enthusiasm for the subject and relationships and attitudes are very positive.
207. The links with local companies are very good and several companies give active support with students' course work. This commercial involvement adds a great deal to the relevance of the learning and is greatly appreciated by students. Assignments are very well prepared by teachers and form an important part of the overall success of the department. Monitoring and assessment of student work are exemplary and students are given very strong support in the improvement and development of their portfolios.
208. Since the last inspection, the department has made very good progress and is currently very well led. Teamwork is very good and the new business suite provides a highly effective learning environment, particularly with immediate and easy access to computers. There are examples of excellent teaching and learning that should be shared throughout the department by developing a planned and organised programme of lesson observations. The schemes of work have been well developed and provide a sound basis for planning the courses. The business development plan is clear and comprehensive, but needs to give more emphasis on how some of the developments will be implemented. Overall, the department has very many strengths that have promoted a highly successful record of student achievement and examination success.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

209. Students study a vocational advanced level (AVCE) course in ICT. Those who do not opt to study this course take a nationally accredited ICT key skills course. Both the AVCE and the key skills courses have only recently been introduced so there are no past examination results. The AVCE course was inspected in depth and the key skills

course was sampled. The quality of teaching and learning in the ICT key skills course is very good. The standard of work for many students is high and they make good progress in developing their skills in using a variety of applications programs as well as programming using visual basic. In one very good Year 12 lesson, students developed sound skills in mail-merging a word-processed document with data collated in a spreadsheet. In an excellent Year 13 lesson, good use was made of spreadsheets to carry out mathematical calculations. Students put in with ease formulae to calculate random numbers and knew the formulae required to produce integers. Key skills in ICT are used well in subjects across the curriculum.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- Standards of work are usually at least above average and sometimes well above average.
- Teaching and learning are usually good and occasionally excellent.
- Leadership is good.
- Assessment is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Bring the standard of accommodation in the one room which is cramped to the level of the rest.

210. Standards are above average in Years 12 and 13. All students achieve well through Years 12 and 13 and make good progress in developing their technical ICT skill as well as their depth of knowledge of a wide variety of applications software. For example, Year 13 students have successfully created some complex spreadsheets, and a range of intricate, interlinked databases. Some students develop a sound knowledge of basic programming, such as in visual basic, and web design and learn quickly how to use electronic mail to good effect. Many students use commercial presentation programs to compile high quality multimedia presentations not just in ICT lessons but also in a range of other subjects as well as school assemblies. Sixth form students are adept at searching the Internet for information and have good practical skills in working with hardware. For example, those in Year 13 have re-built personal computers as part of their coursework.

211. Teaching and learning is usually good and occasionally excellent. There is a good partnership in learning between teachers and students. Teachers are knowledgeable and students respect this and want to learn more because the subject matter is made relevant to them. Students use their ICT skills well in a range of other subjects, for example in business studies where it is a vital element of the course. Students are also starting to use electronic mail to exchange documents with teachers and this is helping not just in the administration of their homework but also in learning a vital and relevant office skill. Teachers ensure that students improve their literacy well through their accumulation of a good technical vocabulary. Teachers' assessment of work in lessons is very good and students know how well they are doing and are encouraged to think for themselves. They make considerable intellectual efforts to improve their work.

212. Leadership is good. Monitoring or evaluation of standards and students' progress is good. Curriculum planning is good and assessment is very good. Computer resources are good. Network management is very good. The overall accommodation

is satisfactory overall but one of the ICT rooms is rather small and becomes easily cramped, limiting its usefulness.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

213. The school provides AS and A-level courses in physical education. In addition there is a one-year Intermediate GNVQ course in leisure and tourism. The school also provides recreational physical education for sixth form students and a Community Youth Leaders Award. None of these courses was inspected in depth. However, lessons were sampled in all these areas. Three sixth form physical education lessons were observed: one theory A-level lesson, one AS practical lesson and one recreational physical education lesson. In addition, a Community Youth Leaders' Award session in Year 12 was observed, led by the Community Sports' co-ordinator who is based in the school three days a week. The quality of teaching and learning was good. For example, A-level students confidently and knowledgeably presented ideas on leadership theories based on their experience as club team members.
214. In physical education, examination results at AS level in 2002 were average and indications are that standards in Year 12 are above average. Students' practical work is of a high standard and most students play either at county or national level in their respective sport. Students' written work is also good on the AS course and average on the A-level course.
215. A significant number of students in the sixth form continue to play for school teams. A hockey match of the highest calibre was seen where students displayed outstanding attacking and defensive play. Students played powerfully, skilfully and accurately. Opportunities to develop initiative and a sense of responsibility to the community are effectively promoted by the Community Sport Leaders' Award.
216. Guidance onto courses in the sixth form is good. Almost all students gained higher grade passes at GCSE and all have realistic chances of obtaining good grades in their advanced studies.
217. The quality of teaching and learning in the two leisure and tourism lessons observed was good. Key features were the very good focus on developing students' skills in independent learning and their excellent application to their work. Students were enthusiastic about the course and demonstrated good attainment and achievement. All were clear about the tasks they were doing and had good knowledge of aspects of subject such as marketing and promotion of leisure services.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

218. No subjects are offered by the school under this area of the curriculum.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

219. The focus for this inspection was on art and drama, but music was also sampled. Standards in music in Years 12 to 13 are broadly average, though sometimes above. Students in Year 12 prepare either for the AS music technology or AS music examinations, and some proceed onto the A-level music course in Year 13. Some students commence studying the AS music technology course in Year 13. The number of students taking the A-level examinations is small at present with two students in both year groups. Standards in the summer 2002 examination were high with both students achieving A to C grades. Teaching in music is generally good although some lessons

require more pace and challenge, and more opportunities given for students to take responsibility for their own learning.

220. The AS music technology course has been introduced since the last inspection, starting in September 2002, and has attracted 11 students. The teachers' expertise in the subject is very good and this enables students to quickly absorb computer and recording techniques and appropriate musical knowledge. Accommodation is excellent with sufficient resources for each student already in school or on order. There are frequent opportunities for independent study offering students facilities to meet the targets set for the next lesson.

Art

The overall provision for art is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The attitude and commitment of the students are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the curriculum in order to better meet students' needs and the challenges of the new AS and A level syllabuses.
- Extend the space for storage of sixth form work.

221. The department provides a broad-based art syllabus with a wide choice of project options at AS and A-level. A minority of students have been accepted on the course without a GCSE in art. Students profess a variety of reasons for embarking on the course and, in some instances, they do not intend to go beyond AS level. This variation is reflected in results at AS level. Results at A-level in 2001 were below average and those of 2002 were similar but, as with AS results, with wide variation. Whilst almost all students passed the examinations in both 2001 and 2002, relatively few gained the higher grades A/B. These results represent satisfactory achievement in relation to the GCSE grades gained by the students before they started the course.
222. From work seen, attainment is broadly in line with national averages at both AS and A-level. A positive feature of the work is the adventurous approach of students in their choice of project. There is a high level of interest in the work of contemporary artists and students take on challenging projects ranging from three-dimensional constructions in reflective materials to large-scale expressionist painting in multiple panels. Students seek an intellectual basis for their work in many cases and are prepared to discuss it in depth. Written work in notebooks is of a good standard and there is good use of ICT in isolated cases. The standard of design and composition work is about average overall. When working on sculpture, students show that they are able to model forms effectively and experiment with materials such as wire to help them manipulate the shape and form of their pieces. However, a comparative weakness is the students' inability, at times, to explain the development of their ideas.
223. The teaching is satisfactory in a situation where students are keen to take much responsibility for their own progress. Teachers are committed and versatile in their supervision of wide ranging work. For example, in one Year 13 lesson, the teacher gave useful advice to students on sculpture, painting and drawing. Pace of lessons is satisfactory and useful discussions are led by teachers. However, occasionally, an opportunity is missed to make specific and important teaching points. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on observational drawing, there was wide ranging discussion on the problems of depicting the form of a draped figure. However, the teacher could have

said more about the relationship between line and form as students encountered difficulty with capturing these effectively in their drawings.

224. The emerging situation in the new AS and A level syllabuses is a challenge to both students and teachers alike. The transition from GCSE to AS level, in particular, demands constant and careful thought in devising a curriculum which affords continuing student freedom of expression alongside assured progress. Currently, whilst students are willing to explore ideas and to work with considerable independence, some aspects of the curriculum offered do not sufficiently support the development of certain skills so that they can work with greater success on their own. There are some problems in the provision of storage for large-scale work and students feel the pressure of time, particularly at AS level. Students' attitudes, however, are very good. They enjoy the sixth form work and show serious and purposeful endeavour.

Drama

The overall provision in drama is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards of theoretical knowledge acquired by students are very good and such knowledge is well informed by their use of skills in performance.
- Teaching is very good and subject knowledge of stagecraft and dramatic literature is used well to prompt students and draw out their understanding.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are excellent.
- Leadership is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the availability of sound, lighting and recording equipment.

225. The drama and theatre studies course enables students to do very well. The 2001 A-level results were in line with national averages and the 2002 results were similar. Overall, these results represent very good achievement for the students concerned and are much better than expected based on their GCSE results. The results are also an improvement on those reported in the last inspection. For example, between 1999 and 2001, the proportion gaining the higher grades A/B at A-level has almost doubled. There are high standards of attainment in both years and the standards of work seen in lessons are a further improvement on those indicated by the most recent A-level results.

226. In the first year of the course, standards of work are high. Students make very good progress, advancing rapidly in their understanding of dramatic texts and the interpretative demands of performance to an audience. They analyse each others' work with subtlety and insight, and apply what they have learned positively. One group working together on an adaptation of Franz Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' used space and body language confidently, expressively and co-operatively to create a compelling dramatic episode. Accompanying speech and vocalisation were self-assured and animated. They have a good grasp of the relationship between text and performance skills to bring it to life on the stage, evident both in their practical work in the drama studio and in their written assignments.

227. By the Year 13, standards are above the national average for the subject overall and progress continues to be very good. Students identify well the key elements of acting style, costume, voice, and movement in a professional production they had seen together, and adapt elements well from this into their own acting. They collaborate well

to evaluate each other's practical work. For example, one group analysed their own presentation to fourteen-year-old students in the school, checking audience reactions and the extent to which their planned piece realised its aims. They understand and explain well the character, social background and satirical nature of historical pieces, for instance when discussing John Gay's 'The Beggars' Opera' to pick out the salient features of the social setting and principal characters. This is also reflected in their energetic and thoughtful practical work, which demonstrates good vocal inflection and control, as well as rapid progress in understanding the performance demands of particular physical styles of interpretation. Adequate library and Internet facilities are well used by students for background research. However, lack of lighting, sound and recording equipment limits the further development of performance work which is well within the students' potential. In both years, students' response is excellent and they apply themselves with total commitment and high levels of physical and intellectual energy. These qualities underpin the very good progress they make. Lower and high-attaining students make equally good progress.

228. The quality of teaching is very good. It is informed by very good subject knowledge of dramatic literature, acting technique and stagecraft. These are used well to set high expectations of students' response, and to draw out their interest and enthusiasm. Teaching skilfully directs students to learn from professional presentations they have seen, texts studied and simple resources such as costumes and properties to help them build their own performances. Teaching is also characterised by very good coaching and prompting of students as they engage in practical work.
229. Drama and theatre studies teaching is very well led. Teaching is very good because it is backed up by useful working documents, lesson plans, and very good procedures to inform students how well they are doing and what they need to do in order to improve. In consequence, standards are continuing to rise.

HUMANITIES

230. Courses taught in the humanities area include AS and A-levels in: critical thinking, geography, history, psychology, religious education and sociology. The inspection focused in depth on history, geography and psychology, and lessons in the other three subjects were sampled.
231. The school does not fully meet statutory requirements for religious education in the sixth form for those who do not follow an accredited course in this subject and not enough teaching time is provided for it. There is nevertheless some good quality provision for religious education through an annual day conference for all students at Wells Cathedral and input into the personal and social education programme.
232. In sociology, the 2002 A-level results were much better than those of 2001 which were well below average. However, the range of abilities of students who choose to take sociology is very wide. Value added analysis indicates that students achieve well given their prior attainment, and this was the case in 2001 as well despite results being below average overall. Higher-attaining students make the best progress. Teaching and learning are good and teaching focuses well on students' learning needs. Questioning is good and probes students' understanding well. Current standards of work at AS level are good.
233. The critical thinking course has only recently been introduced. A very good lesson in critical thinking was observed. High quality teaching provided students with very good coaching on how to construct the case for their side of a debate on how children with

hearing impairment should be educated. Through well-structured activities they made very good progress in learning how to analyse and use supporting evidence to strengthen their case.

234. Current standards of work in the AS and A-level courses in religious education are in line with national averages and show an improvement on previous results which were below. There are candidates working to the highest grades and there is increasing interest in the subject. Teaching is very good and students display a mature and confident approach.

Geography

The overall provision in geography is **very good**

Strengths

- Well above average standards have been sustained over time.
- The quality of coursework is very good.
- Good teaching promotes good learning.

Areas for improvement

- Promote students' wider reading of the subject to deepen and broaden their learning.
- Improve students' application of skills and geographical conventions to maps and diagrams and encourage greater pride in everyday written work.

235. The 2001 A-level results were well above average and 2002 results were very similar. Over half the students attain the highest grades and all students pass the exam. The results of both male and female students fluctuate at the highest grades, those of females more so than those of males. The most recent results show female students attaining above females nationally and male students in line with males nationally. This is a substantial improvement for female students and a drop for the males. Students do very well in this subject compared to their prior attainment and very well compared to other subjects in the school. The most recent A level results, the first with a large cohort taking the examination, are very good with significant number of students at grades A to C. All students gained at least a pass grade. These results provide a sound base for the completion of A-level studies. Nearly all AS students continue to A-level and this is a positive endorsement of the very good quality of provision.

236. Standards at the end of Year 13 are well above average. The achievement of most students is very good and the majority make significant progress over time. The in-depth written work of most students indicates a broad view and good analytical skills as exemplified in their research reports. They have a good understanding of the interdependence of natural processes and human activities, though they are less secure in their understanding of the economic and political implications of global trade. Not all students extend their knowledge and understanding through undirected reading and research. The coursework of the majority of students is very good, that of some is outstanding. Research by most students is extensive using fieldwork, ICT as well as other, more conventional sources. Higher-attaining students are more selective in their choice of data and their critical evaluation of this is exceptional. For some students, research work presents real challenge and they rise to it with some determination. The rigour and effort applied to coursework and the pride taken to present it well is not consistently replicated in class work and homework.

237. Standards at the end of Year 12 are above average and achievement is very good. Written work shows that most students have made the transition from GCSE well and

the majority are beginning to think about the information to write about it in some depth, using technical explanations of, for example, flood hydrographs and fluctuations of river velocities. Students gradually develop an awareness of the extent of enquiry involved in coming to conclusions about the efficacy of projects such as river engineering to control floods. Most students make effective links between economic and social change and urban renewal. Some use their prior knowledge of these aspects well. Most students use ICT for directed research but few do so to supplement information provided for them. The application of geographical skills is not consistently applied to class work and homework.

238. Teaching is good overall, hence promoting good learning. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are familiar with the demands of this course. They provide very good guidance through detailed marking which highlights students' strengths and weaknesses. Teachers give good advice as to improvement and about examination techniques but a significant number of students, although appreciative, ignore it and make little effort to correct errors and omissions. This should be followed up more rigorously. Teachers' planning provides opportunities to use ICT which students use effectively to communicate their finding or views through electronic presentations. This and the use of 'virtual fieldwork' have broadened the scope of learning activities. Teachers enable students to share and consolidate their learning through group discussion and paired work. In this way they ensure the acquisition of geographical knowledge and the development of key skills. A number of students provide well considered and extended oral answers but a significant number, including some of the highest-attainers, do not replicate these in written work and teachers do not insist that they do so. The work provided for most students is challenging but not always for the highest attaining. Teachers need to give this more thought.

239. The commitment of the former head of department to improvements such as the new examination course to include AS level, opportunities for the use of ICT and the hard work of all the teachers involved has resulted in the maintenance of high standards over time. The department is efficiently managed with students being provided with adequate and relevant resources. The head of department works with all teachers to ensure progress and maintains an appropriate overview of practice and procedures for monitoring and assessment.

History

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

Strengths

- Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and are enthusiastic historians.
- Student attitudes and relationships in the classroom are very good.
- Well above average standards have been achieved in recent years and this is reflected in the very good quality of coursework.
- The numbers taking history have grown and the retention rate is very high.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure the consistency of marking throughout the department.
- Develop the assessment strategy to include student self-assessment.
- Strengthen longer term development planning.

240. Standards in the 2001 AS and A-level examinations were very good and well above the national average. Very similar results were attained in 2002 even though numbers

taking the subject doubled. Two thirds of candidates gained a grade A or B in both years, well above the national figure for 2001, and every student obtained a pass grade in each year. Retention is very high with almost all AS level students continuing their study into the second year. Taking into account their starting points, students achieve well in history. Standards of work seen during the inspection are consistent with the well above standards in AS and A-level examinations.

241. Year 12 students show maturity and insight in analysing the issues facing Mussolini in 1922. For example, they worked effectively in pairs sorting and sifting the evidence to produce accurate analysis of the situation in Italy in 1922. Year 13 students accurately interpret a range of pictorial and written sources. For example, they produced a good range of evidence to support varying interpretations of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Their successful exchange of ideas points to a mature grasp of historical issues as well as very good knowledge and understanding of the period covering Stalin's Soviet Union. There is good progress in the acquisition of historical skills from Year 12 to 13.
242. Students learn well because the teaching is good, and some of it is very good. Teachers are very secure in their subject knowledge and readily share their infectious enthusiasm about the subject with students. Thus, students have a very high commitment to the subject and several go on to study history at university. Teachers promote very positive relationships within the groups and students work very well together. Very good examples of highly effective question-and-answer sessions were observed, relying very much on skilful teacher interventions and encouragement. Lesson planning is good and teachers provide a good range of activities that encourage effective student reflection and analysis. By Year 13, students are confident learners who articulately debate complex historical issues. Essays are marked thoroughly, though the marking scheme is not consistent throughout the department. There is a need for teachers to share systematically the best practice on how to guide students to improve their work. Students have a good idea of the grade to which they are working; however, there is little opportunity for self-assessment. Currently, although all coursework is word-processed, not all essays are and this does not allow students to go back and improve their work after marking. The high quality of much of the coursework is a strength within the department; the research is very thorough with footnotes and extensive bibliographies. This indicates that the students have developed strong research skills.
243. The new AS and A-level courses have been carefully and successfully introduced so that high standards have been maintained. The range of modules is wide and provides a challenging and rewarding learning experience for the students. Opportunities to use ICT have improved since the last inspection and computers are effectively used for presentations and individual research projects. There is a good range of additional reading matter to encourage wider reading and these opportunities contribute to the very good results achieved. There has been good improvement since the last inspection; however, longer term development planning was identified in the last report and this is still an area for improvement. The departmental development plan needs to give a clear indication of how further improvements to the teaching and learning strategies will be achieved. The leadership and management of the department are good because the team is very enthusiastic and effective in promoting high standards. The capacity to succeed is strong and the head of department actively encourages a good team spirit within the department.

Psychology

Overall, the psychology provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards of attainment are well above average and have been high for many years.
- Teaching is very good. The teachers' subject knowledge and enthusiasm have a very positive impact on students' learning.
- The students enjoy psychology and, as a result, work hard, concentrate well and think creatively about the subject.
- The residential trip organised each year to London is a real strength of the department.
- Leadership of the subject is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Improve the access to ICT as this is not as easy as it could be.
- Make better use of questioning in some instances in order to involve all students actively.
- Provide greater opportunities for the teachers to observe one another and share best practice.

244. Psychology is a popular and very well established subject. It has been part of the school curriculum for over 25 years. Standards have improved further since the last inspection. Overall, A-level results are well above average. In 2000 and 2001, a high proportion of students gained the higher grades of A/B. In 2002, there was a dip in overall grades due to a small group of students with lower prior attainment at AS level. Analysis of data demonstrates that this group did less well than expected in all their A-level subjects, not just in psychology. Results in the newer AS level course are also very good and the 2002 AS level results were a significant improvement on those of 2001. A good proportion of students gained the higher grades and a very high proportion gained a grade A. There is no significant difference in the attainment of male and female students, as demonstrated by examination and course work.
245. Standards, based on inspection evidence, are well above average and students' progress is much better than expected based on their prior attainment. Students' work demonstrates good understanding of social psychology, amongst other aspects of psychology. They have very good understanding of aggression, anti-social behaviour, inter-group conflict, prejudice and attribution theory. In lessons, students showed good understanding of how personality may be at the root of prejudice. They work confidently on an F-scale sample and discuss it openly afterwards. Students demonstrate good understanding of vocabulary such as ethnocentrism, scape-goating and projection. When working on a practical investigation into para-psychological phenomena, Year 13 students showed mature insight into the importance of dealing with confounding variables in this type of investigation. They also showed very good knowledge of the biological reasons for human relationships, as well as proximity, complementarity and reciprocity. Nearly all students in both year groups present their written work neatly and in a way which will support their pre-examination revision.
246. Teaching is very good. The teachers have different styles, but all those seen have excellent relationships with the students and use a good range of appropriate teaching methods. The highest standards of learning and of behaviour are expected of students. The learning objectives of lessons are recorded and shared with the class, though sometimes this could be done more overtly and repeated at the end of a lesson to underline the progress made. Work progresses at a brisk pace and the teachers' very good subject knowledge supports equally rapid learning by students. All teachers know their students well, and match work very well to their needs. For example, students less confident with the statistical aspects of psychology are given good hands-on experimental experience to make their learning more practical. Students respond very

well, working productively and demonstrating interest in, and commitment to, lessons. Occasionally, teachers could do more to ensure that all students are involved in the lesson by asking specific questions of all, rather than relying on the answers of the more confident students.

247. The residential trip organised each year is a real strength of the department. Students visit the Science Museum and the Natural History Museum, and in fact the department has been involved in the development of resources with the former, where they follow a series of well planned activities. The experience is a very positive one, which has direct benefits in terms of the knowledge of the students, but also indirect impact in increasing enthusiasm and commitment to the subject.
248. Leadership of the subject is very good. The head of department has a very wide knowledge of the subject and has ensured that all psychology teachers are involved in the formal examining of the subject outside of the school, as he is. This is excellent grounding for their work within the school and the students benefit from it. Despite the department being a friendly and co-operative one, the teachers have limited opportunities to observe one another, which limits the amount of sharing of good ideas and teaching methods that can happen. Textbook and video resources are satisfactory but ICT resources are more limited and lack of dedicated machines for psychology sometimes hinders spontaneous research.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

249. Three separate A-level courses are offered by the English department: English language, English literature, and media studies, which is a recently introduced subject. The focus of the inspection was on English literature. A-level results in English language were well below average in 2001 but the 2002 results improved significantly and a high proportion of students were awarded grades A and B. In 2002, no student attained a grade lower than D. In the one English language lesson seen the teaching was very good, resulting in very good progress being made by students.
250. The school offers German and French at AS and A-level. The focus of this inspection was on French. At A-level the school has maintained a good pass rate in German but overall numbers are too small to make valid comparisons, especially at the higher grades of A/B, with results nationally. GCSE Spanish has recently been added to the courses available to sixth form students. Teaching in the Spanish lesson observed was good and students made good progress as a result of good planning, good use of time and appropriately challenging tasks. Students successfully broadened their vocabulary and knowledge of linguistic structures in Spanish.

English

The quality of provision in A-level English Literature is **very good**

Strengths

- Teaching is consistently very good with many excellent features.
- Students make good progress and attain high standards.
- The leadership and management of the department are excellent.
- Meeting the needs of students is a consistently high priority, which underpins the work of the department.

Areas for improvement

- None.

251. In 2001 the A-level results of students in English literature were very high when compared with results nationally. All students gained a grade A or B. The 2002 results were also very good though not quite as high as those of 2001. A very high proportion attained the highest grades, A/B, and none gained a grade lower than D. Over the past four years there has been an overall considerable increase in the percentage of students attaining the higher grades, with a particularly high performance in 2001. However, the small number of students who took the examination in that year makes direct comparisons with other years invalid. The attainment of male and female students is very similar.
252. Attainment at AS level at the end of Year 12 in 2002 was high. Nearly all candidates attained grades in the range A to C while almost two thirds attained one of the two highest grades. The lowest grade of any student was a D. These students are now on course to attain similarly high grades in their A-level examinations in 2003.
253. Inspection evidence confirms that attainment in English literature is well above the national average. This represents a considerable improvement since the previous inspection when attainment was judged to be in line with national expectations.
254. Students start the course in Year 12 with attainment in their English GCSEs which is well above average and they achieve well during the two years of the A-level course. They make particularly good progress in the close analysis and interpretation of a wide range of demanding texts. They develop great confidence in their understanding and interpretation of major writers. For example, students reading 'Hamlet' for the first time showed themselves to be very aware of the precise purpose of Shakespeare's use of language and offered clear explanations of his characterisation, based on close independent textual analysis. Students also make good progress in their understanding of how knowledge of the context in which their texts were written has a close influence on their understanding of the author's themes and intentions. They develop very effectively the skills necessary to research, plan and structure major written assignments, using a wide range of source material, including the work of well-known literary critics. Students make good progress in their use of ICT skills to research additional background material.
255. The overall quality of teaching is very good. In all lessons seen, the teaching was at least good and most lessons were excellent. This represents a considerable improvement since the previous inspection when teaching was good and reflects the emphasis within the department on raising the standards of teaching in order to boost achievement. In nearly all lessons, teachers are explicit about their high expectations of students' commitment and achievement. Their very good subject knowledge gives great confidence to students and ensures that lessons provide rich and varied experiences. Teachers plan their lessons exceptionally well in order to meet their students' identified needs. They plan a wide range of activities and assignments which support students' learning and students respond by putting considerable intellectual and

creative effort into work. For example, Year 12 students studying the demanding poetry of Philip Larkin made excellent progress in understanding the effect of the poet's lifestyle on his writing through planning in-depth radio interviews with him. They confidently handled the very wide and eclectic range of source material which had been provided for them. Teachers make skilful use of discussion to challenge students' thinking by exposing them to the ideas of others. Students engage in discussion with enthusiasm and skill to revise and refine their thinking, and are very receptive to new ideas.

256. The leadership and management of the subject are excellent. There is a clear commitment to meeting students' needs and actively supporting their learning. Students who appear to be in danger of failing to realise their full potential are identified at an early stage and given additional support. It is department policy to seek students' opinions and to make clear to them what they can expect from their English courses, both in terms of the content and requirements of the courses and also what they can expect to gain from them in terms of interest and personal development. This is very good practice. There are recently developed or updated schemes of work for all A-level topics and a wide range of activities and resources to support these are accessible to all teachers. In this way, very good practice is shared throughout the department. Procedures for assessment are good and are applied consistently. Good use is made of value added information to set target grades for all students and to track their progress. Students are also set targets, within the marking, to improve their performance in specific areas. Students are provided with very good opportunities for enrichment of their study of English through participation in a range of cultural activities and good advantage is taken of the facilities available for this in the immediate and wider vicinity. There is a particularly good opportunity for students to participate in a residential weekend devoted to creative writing and a striking staff and student poetry anthology has been produced as a result of this.

French

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

Strengths

- Teachers' very good linguistic knowledge and oral and written skills provide good opportunities for students' language development.

Areas for improvement

- Encourage more students to choose to study French in the sixth form.
- Motivate and encourage more students to improve their French through visits to France.
- Extend the dynamic teaching in the lower school to Years 12 and 13, and so fire the students with enthusiasm.

257. Over the last four years, low numbers of students have been entered for A-level French. Results have varied, but have shown, until recently, a declining trend when compared with the national average for all schools. Small numbers make reliable comparisons against national averages difficult to achieve. Since the last inspection, about a quarter of the students entered for the A level have gained the higher grades A/B. Though this is overall below average, the proportion of A grades gained over the same period of time has been above average but there have been few B grades. The overall results for 2001 were well below the national average. However, the 2002 results were much better, though numbers were low again. All three students gained grades between A and C in 2002.

258. The evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files during the inspection shows that standards are average. Although the proportion of male students is very low, there is not a significant difference in performance between males and females.
259. Attainment in Year 13 is satisfactory, and students are heavily dependent on the teachers and do not contribute satisfactorily to their own learning. Most rely too heavily on reference materials and are reluctant to progress beyond basic language in order to access higher grades at A-level. Most show little evidence of further background reading or of appropriate progression from their very good GCSE grades. A minority speak French with enthusiasm, but the majority are far from fluent. Students' knowledge of vocabulary, genders and grammatical understanding is insecure. Overall, progress is satisfactory but could be better.
260. Attainment in Year 12 is more secure and is broadly average and students make satisfactory progress. Although their oral work is not yet fluent and they display insecure knowledge of language, they make appropriate use of a range of tenses and they give opinions supported by reasons. They are learning to express their opinions succinctly. Their written language work reflects relative fluency rather than grammatically accurate structures. Students display considerable interest and motivation; for example, they create adverbs from adjectives and explain in French the rules for creating adverbs from adjectives. Students respond well to being taught in French. They are less forthcoming when the teaching is more pedestrian but they persevere and enjoy comparing the words of a song heard on tape with the written word.
261. Teaching overall is satisfactory. Some lessons are very good and this was particularly the case in one lesson where the teacher made very good use of French as the normal means of communication in the lesson. This resulted in high quality learning. Where teachers have high expectations, students work well, are well motivated and give of their best. Some teachers provide students with very good examples of the use of French, both orally and in writing. They provide both clearly structured and open-ended work leading to a good range of learning opportunities and sound prospects for individual development. Teachers mark work in considerable detail and provide constructive feedback so that students know what to do to improve. They regularly set appropriate homework which enables students to consolidate their learning. Good advice and guidance is provided for students on essay writing and on coursework. Teachers ensure that students are well prepared for the Culture and Society element of A-level papers. However, teachers provide too few opportunities in school for students to use ICT to support their work.
262. Students' attitudes to learning are varied. Most in Year 12 show interest and enthusiasm, listening to advice which they accept and follow. They respect the good pace set when the teaching is very good and enjoy co-operating. Students exude an aura of wanting to learn and develop their skills. However, students in Year 13 show much less enthusiasm for, and interest in, the language. The attitude of the majority does not facilitate good teaching or the acquisition and development of complex and exciting language. They make the minimum input and take very little responsibility for their own learning.
263. Although teachers tend to teach only French or German in the sixth form, the introduction of Spanish recently provides some teaching experience of two languages. The leadership has not yet been successful in increasing the motivation, research and output of the majority of the current Year 13 French students. However, there is a clear departmental ethos which aims to optimise the teaching and learning across the languages. The department has made a critical analysis of the examination results and

acknowledges the need for improvement in A-level French results if they are to replicate the GCSE results, or if students are to achieve a comparable result at A-level to the one they achieved at GCSE. It is currently considering ways to enhance the sixth form French curriculum and improve students' confidence and competence in the language.