

INSPECTION REPORT

CLACTON COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Clacton-on-Sea

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115360

Principal: Mr John Clay

Reporting inspector: Dr Kenneth C Thomas
3390

Dates of inspection: 28 October – 1 November 2002

Inspection number: 251315

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:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Walton Road Clacton-on-Sea Essex
Postcode:	CO15 6DZ
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Bert Foster
Date of previous inspection:	1 December 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3390	Kenneth Thomas	Registered inspector	Psychology (sixth form)	What sort of school is it? How high are standards? a) The school's results and achievements How well are students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
14214	Gillian Smith	Lay inspector		How high are standards? b) Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
10905	Alan Brewerton	Team inspector	Science Biology (sixth form)	
11838	Derek Cronin	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
19414	Janet Flisher	Team inspector	Drama (main school and sixth form) Media studies (sixth form)	
4372	Ralph Fordham	Team inspector	Religious education	
10060	David Gutmann	Team inspector	Business education (sixth form) Health and social care (sixth form)	
32199	Ellen Hill	Team inspector	Mathematics	
15051	Lynne Kauffman	Team inspector	Design and technology	
11548	David Lee	Team inspector	Educational inclusion Mathematics (sixth form)	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?

31688	Brian McGonalge	Team inspector	Art	
8052	Kenneth McKenzie	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Information and communication technology (sixth form)	
19152	Richard Merryfield	Team inspector	History	
23308	John Morrell	Team inspector	Citizenship Music	
30563	Jacqueline Pentlow	Team inspector	Physical education	
18950	Carmen Rodney	Team inspector	English as an additional language English English (sixth form)	
11300	Barry Smith	Team inspector	Special educational needs Geography	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Clacton County High School is an 11-18 mixed comprehensive school with roughly equal numbers of boys and girls. The school is larger than other secondary schools and the number of pupils (1644) has risen by almost 17 per cent since the last inspection. With the exception of Year 8, which is an unusually large year group, there is a broadly equal distribution of pupils across Years 7 to 11. The sixth form (191 students) is about the same size as other sixth forms. Females outnumber males in the sixth form by about 23 per cent. Standards of attainment on entry in Year 7, although covering the full attainment range, have been below average overall. However, standards on entry have been rising and in 2002 approached average. The proportion of pupils on the school's register of special educational needs, at 16 per cent is about average, although the proportion with statements (1.7 per cent) is below. Many of the pupils with the highest level of need have specific learning difficulties (dyslexia), or moderate learning difficulties, emotional or behavioural difficulty or autism. Fewer than three per cent of pupils have other than white United Kingdom backgrounds. These pupils have mainly Asian British backgrounds. Thirty-eight pupils are from homes where English is an additional language and none is in the early stages of learning English.

The school community has changed slightly since the time of the last inspection. Over recent years there has been a significant inward migration into Clacton, mainly from North and East London. Because of this pupil mobility is a feature of the school. About 20 per cent of pupils in Year 11 entered the school later than Year 7. Although most pupils are drawn from owner-occupier estates reasonably close to the school, a significant number come from other areas of the town and surrounding villages. About 27 per cent of Year 7 are from outside the school's defined boundaries. Within these areas there are pockets of serious social disadvantage. Nevertheless, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, at 17.1 per cent, is broadly in line with the national average. There has been a comparatively high turnover of staff in the last two years, reflecting recruitment difficulties in the area and the increasing size of the school. The school participates in several local initiatives, including the Clacton and Harwich education action zone, and was given Arts College status in 2001.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Clacton High School is a good and improving school. Leadership and management are very good and this is reflected in the good quality of education the school provides. Responsibilities for social inclusion are taken seriously and staff work hard to ensure that all pupils can participate in all the school offers. Teaching and learning are good, with much that is very good and some that is excellent. Standards of attainment at the ages of 14 and 16 are close to national averages and represent satisfactory and often good achievement among all groups of pupils. Although standards at the age of 19 are below average, overall, they also represent satisfactory and often good achievement by students. Resources are very well managed and the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Effective school leadership has secured a strong commitment to improvement and a coherent approach to raising standards through involvement in local and national projects.
- Teaching is good: teachers are knowledgeable and plan lessons well so pupils learn effectively.
- Performing arts college status brings many benefits to pupils' learning experiences and the wider community.
- The broad range of courses in Years 10 and 11, together with a good range of extra-curricular activities, provides well for pupils' diverse abilities and talents, particularly in the expressive arts.
- Special educational needs provision is very good.
- Leadership, management and teamwork in the English department provide a model of good practice in the school.
- Effective oversight from the governing body and very good financial control and planning are ensuring that the school makes the best use of its resources.

What could be improved

- Provision for religious education.
- The co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation of personal and citizenship education (PACE).
- Planned opportunities to support pupils' spiritual development across the curriculum.
- The consistency with which subject leaders and co-ordinators monitor and evaluate teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility.
- Aspects of the accommodation.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Good progress has been made since the last inspection in 1997. The school is characterized by a high commitment to improvement and this is reflected in the range of initiatives that have been taken in order to improve learning opportunities. In September 2001 the school achieved Performing Arts College status and work in the performing arts provides a model of excellence for all areas of the curriculum. A vigorous response was made to the key issues identified in the last report. Systematic action has been taken to raise standards through rigorous monitoring and evaluation and there is now greater consistency in teaching, with more that is good or better. Excellent and innovative curriculum links with the primary schools together with the effective implementation of the Key Stage 3 strategy are helping to raise standards throughout Years 7 to 9. Overall, National Curriculum test results have improved in line with results nationally, while those in English have improved markedly. Provision for higher attaining pupils has been improved and the range of courses offered both in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form has been widened to meet the needs of pupils and students more fully. The teaching week has been restructured to provide greater flexibility and better meet the differing needs of subjects. Although the time allocated for religious education has been increased in Years 7 to 9, it is still inadequate in Years 10 and 11, and is not provided in the sixth form. Planned opportunities for pupils' spiritual development across all subjects remains an issue to be tackled, as does the provision of a daily act of worship. The leadership and management structures provide the school with very good capacity for continued improvement.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	C	D	D	C
A-levels/AS levels	D	D	D	

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

In the 2001 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining five subjects at the higher grades (A* to C) was average, but the overall results were below average. However, the GCSE results do not fully reflect standards at the end of Year 11. This is because 30 pupils follow a more vocationally orientated programme that although leading to a nationally accredited award does not contribute to the GCSE average points score. When this is taken into account the school's average points score is closer to the national average. The percentage of pupils obtaining A* to C grades in English, mathematics and science were below average in 2001. Although remaining below the 2001 national average, the 2002 results in English rose while those in mathematics and science were about the same. In each of these three core subjects, and for GCSE results overall, performance was average in relation to similar schools; achievement is consistent with expectations from the end of Year 9 to GCSE. Although the overall results of the Year 9 National Curriculum tests have been rising over recent years they fell in 2001 to be well below average. However, as a result of the initiatives taken to raise standards in Years 7 to 9, they rose to average in 2002. Results in English rose sharply to be

above average in comparison with all schools and well above in comparison with similar schools. Results in mathematics were below average in comparison with all schools and average in comparison with similar schools. Although results in science were well below average in comparison with all and similar schools, an administrative error led to a significant minority of pupils being entered for an inappropriate test paper and this had the effect of deflating the results. The 2001 results reflect good progress from pupils' attainment on entry in Year 7, which was below average. Test results at the end of Year 9 are rising in line with results nationally, while the trend in the GCSE results is below the national trend.

Standards in lessons observed were above average overall at the end of Year 9, reflecting improvements made in the curriculum. Standards in Year 11 lessons were average, and represented good achievement for pupils in that year, from their attainment at the end of Year 9. In 2001 students achieved better GCSE results in science, drama, English literature and history than in their other subjects. Their results in art, information and communication technology (ICT), design and technology, French and physical education were not as good as in their other subjects. Boys do not achieve as well as girls overall at GCSE. The achievement of pupils eligible for free school meals and those with special educational needs is comparable with their peers.

Results at A-level, while below the national average, represent good progress, relative to students' GCSE results. A-level results are similar to those reported at the last inspection and girls do particularly well. Results of vocational courses are good. Results in the AS-level examinations are satisfactory. The school makes effective use of challenging targets for GCSE and sixth form examinations to raise results. In lessons observed students progressed well. Standards were in line with expectations overall.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils have good attitudes to learning and they enjoy taking part in the wide range of experiences and opportunities available.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good with few instances of unsatisfactory behaviour. The school has a good atmosphere and pupils work hard and do their best.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are good. Older pupils, including sixth formers, help younger pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and from all backgrounds participate well in all aspects of the life of the school.
Attendance	Satisfactory, with little unauthorised absence.

A small number of pupils do not behave well in a few lessons - usually when the purpose of a learning activity is not clear and pupils do not understand the relevance of what they are studying. Sixth form students feel they are treated as adults and respected. They have positive attitudes and their personal development is good.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning are good overall and better than at the last inspection. Examples of good teaching were seen in all subjects and of very good teaching in most, including support for pupils with special educational needs. Teaching and learning were particularly effective in English, music and drama and good in all other subjects apart from art and modern languages where it is satisfactory. Examples of excellent teaching were observed in English, mathematics, science, design and

technology, and PACE lessons. Literacy is very well taught in English in Years 7 to 9 and given effective emphasis in all subjects. Numeracy teaching is effective. General strengths in teaching include teachers' use of their knowledge to develop pupils' understanding, and good planning so that pupils learn in a carefully structured way. Just occasionally, variety is lacking or activities go on for too long, so that pupils lose interest. This was a feature of the very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching observed in science. Weaknesses in class management contributed to the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching observed in religious education and mathematics. In some modern foreign languages lessons there is too much use of English and not enough use of the foreign language.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The quality and range of learning opportunities are good for pupils in Years 7 to 9, and very good for those in Years 10 and 11. The school provides good careers education and guidance and a good alternative education programme for those pupils in Years 10 and 11 who would benefit from a reduced National Curriculum.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Pupils have equal access to the curriculum through a range of strategies including in-class support, small group withdrawal work and out-of -hours learning opportunities.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very few students with English as an additional language have no language difficulties that require additional support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for moral and social development is good, and provision for cultural development is satisfactory. Provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. There are few planned opportunities to support pupils' spiritual development and the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pastoral arrangements are strong and information on pupils' progress is used effectively to monitor and support their improvement.

Extra-curricular activities are good, including many sports, music, drama and revision activities. Provision in the performing arts is particularly good. Provision for pupils' personal and citizenship education is good. Links with parents are effective; they work closely with the school in promoting regular attendance.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the principal and other key staff	Strong and very supportive leadership by the principal ensures clear direction, and good teamwork among very capable senior and middle managers. The school has a very positive ethos. The sixth form is effectively managed. Strong leadership in many subjects has a significant impact on the progress of pupils, including those with special educational needs.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good, except for the provision of collective worship and religious education in the sixth form.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Planning, monitoring and evaluation, both of results and of priorities for improvement, are strengths.

The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school has very good procedures to ensure that the principles of best value for money are applied in the use of its resources, and all additional funding received by the school is used for the intended purposes.
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Teachers are suitably qualified by training and, in nearly all cases, by experience to cover appropriate aspects of the curriculum, including special educational needs. A strength of the school is its involvement in the School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) programme, which provides a useful means of tackling teacher recruitment problems in the area. Resources are adequate to meet the needs of the curriculum. The learning resource centre provides a good range of texts to support pupils' work across the curriculum. The overall provision of computers is good, but some departments, including science, music and modern foreign languages, do not have easy access to them. Growth in pupil and students numbers means that the accommodation is inadequate and more is needed, particularly for the sixth form and lunchtime dining use. The principles of best value are applied to all major purchasing decisions

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations that their children work hard. • Their children like school. • Their children are making good progress. • Parents feel comfortable in approaching the school. • The range of extra-curricular activities the school provides. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework. • The closeness with which the school works with parents. • Behaviour.

Inspectors agree with parents' favourable views. Inspectors found homework to be effectively used. The school works hard to involve parents and inspectors found these arrangements to be good, as in promoting regular attendance. Overall standards of behaviour are good. There are few instances of inappropriate behaviour, even when large numbers of pupils and students are moving along very narrow corridors and staircases at lesson changeover times.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form in 2001 was average in size with 166 students. This has risen to 191 in September 2002 with just under two thirds being female students. The proportion of students continuing their education at the school from Year 11 in 2002 was just over half. The overall level of attainment of the students starting Year 12, although covering a wide range, is close to average. In 2002 the school offers 24 AS-level courses in Year 12 and the almost all of these are continued to A2 level (A-level), with the addition of AS further mathematics. Complementary to this provision is an extensive range of vocational courses offered to Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) level and Intermediate level General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses in Business, Engineering, Health and Social Care, ICT, Leisure and Recreation and Leisure and Tourism. A small number of students are engaged on a one-year employability course that aspires to NVQ level 1. For students with a strong interest in computers a commercially sponsored networking academy programme (CISCO Systems) is offered in collaboration with other schools through the Internet.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an effective sixth form. Many students embark upon AS courses and in 2002, 77 per cent returned to complete their studies to A-level. Overall the quality of teaching is good and often very good. Students respond well to good teaching and have positive attitudes towards the school. Students with special learning needs are well integrated into the sixth form and receive considerable support from their fellow pupils. Provision for all post-16 courses is good and in the case of drama and performing arts, psychology, media studies and health and social care it is very good. In some subjects teaching strategies are heavily teacher dependent, and students do not make enough progress in developing research and independent learning skills. Very good use is made of ICT within courses and students have good access to computers across the school, including those within the learning resource centre. Both leadership and management of the sixth form are good, as is the progress made since the last inspection. The two co-directors have clear roles and responsibilities that ensure that the day-to-day administration of the sixth form proceeds well. However, the current system by which students register their attendance is unsatisfactory and this constitutes a health and safety issue for the school. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. The strategic direction and development of the sixth form is clear and is responding to the needs of the students and the local community. The oversight of the sixth form through the senior leadership team is very effective. Sixth form provision is enhanced through links with the other post-16 providers within the Education Action Zone.

Strengths

- Most students make good progress because teaching is good.
- Students have positive attitudes and enjoy the courses they are studying.
- The match of courses to the interests and aspirations of students is very good.
- Effective leadership provides clear direction for the development of the sixth form and is well supported by parents, governors and the local community.
- The sixth form is cost-effective.

What could be improved

- The induction programme for students on entry to the sixth form and the role of the form tutor.
- Opportunities for independent learning.
- Provision for religious education.
- The system for recording students' attendance.
- Accommodation for students' personal study and recreational activities.

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

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
Business	Good. Teaching is good, resulting in students developing good attitudes and achieving well.
English Literature	Good. The A-level course is popular and standards are rising at the end of Year 13. This is linked to the very good teaching and learning and planning to improve results.
Drama and Performing Arts	Very good. Teaching is good and a very good range of opportunities is provided through the school's arts college status.
Media Studies	Very good. Very good teaching and a highly relevant curriculum lead to very good achievement. Standards are above average and students have very positive attitudes to their work.
Mathematics	Good. Although results at A-level in 2001 were below average, teaching is good and students make good progress and achieve well in lessons. The subject is very effectively led and managed.
ICT	Good. Good teaching and well-planned courses are enabling students to make good progress in an increasingly popular subject.
Health and Social Care	Very good. As a result of very good teaching students gain excellent attitudes and achieve well.
Biology	Satisfactory. Although results at A-level in 2001 were below average students now make good progress as a result of good teaching. Inadequate resources, particularly of books, hinders students' independent study.
Psychology	Very good. Student numbers are too small to make valid comparisons with national figures. Teaching is very good and this, together with exceptionally good support, leads to very good achievement. Students are enthused by the subject.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students receive good guidance in relation to their academic progress. They are well supported as individuals.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Clear roles and responsibilities for the co-directors ensure that day-to-day management is effective. There is a clear strategic direction for the sixth form. This is shared by parents, governors and the local community. The system by which student record their attendance is unsatisfactory.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are taught well and challenged to do their best. • Their work is thoroughly assessed and they know how to improve. • Teachers are accessible to help. • The choice of courses suited their talents and career aspiration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advice and guidance on what to do after they leave school. • Wider range of enrichment courses. • Help with personal problems. • More constructive advice on what to do in the sixth form.

Inspectors support the favourable views of the students. The vast majority of the students are very positive about the sixth form. The inspection team could find little evidence to support students' opinion that the advice and guidance they receive prior to entry into the sixth and in respect of opportunities post sixth form were insufficient. Indeed, students interviewed during the week contradicted these opinions. Students and parents are provided with detailed information on the opportunities the sixth form offers through the prospectus and consultation process. Careers education and guidance is available for students who seek it. The view of the inspection team is that the range of enrichment courses in the sixth form is good. However, the team concludes that the accommodation for sixth form students seriously restricts their recreational activities.

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 pupils' achievements

1. During the course of the inspection the 2002 End of Key Stage 3 National Summary Results were published by OFSTED and so it is possible to compare the school's end of Year 9 test and assessment results with national averages. Because national comparative information for the 2002 GCSE and A-level examinations was not available at the time of preparing the report, the school's 2002 results are reported with the 2001 results compared to national figures.
2. Standards of attainment on entry to the school in Year 7, although covering the full attainment range, have been below average overall. Although standards on entry have been rising over the last four years, they remain below average. The overall results in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 also show a rising trend in line with the national trend over recent years, even though they fell in 2001 to be well below average. One of the features of the school's performance is the positive effect that strategies to cope with difficulties in staffing have had on standards. Although in a few subjects these difficulties have been acute and had an adverse impact on standards, taken overall, achievement is consistent with expectations based on the below average standards of attainment on entry to the school. This is the case with the 2001 results, which although well below average reflected satisfactory achievement on the part of this year group. Nevertheless, the school has successfully taken a number of initiatives to raise standards in Years 7 to 9 and the national test results rose to be average in 2002. These results represent good achievement from standards of attainment on entry that were below average overall. The initiatives taken in English have had a significant effect on standards and the 2002 results rose sharply to be above average in comparison with all schools and well above in comparison with similar schools. Results in mathematics also rose in 2002 and although they remained below average in comparison with all schools they were average in comparison with similar schools. Inspection evidence in English and mathematics is consistent with the results in national tests. Achievement in science has been affected by frequent changes in staffing and the 2002 test results were well below average in comparison with all and similar schools. However, these results were also affected by an administrative error that led to a significant minority of pupils being entered for an inappropriate test paper. This had the effect of further deflating the results. When this is taken into account, the science results were below average in comparison with all schools and average in comparison with similar schools. Inspection evidence indicates that standards at the end of Year 9 are now closer to expectations. Girls tend to have better results than boys in English while boys have better results than girls in mathematics and science.
3. The 2002 teacher assessments in other subjects show standards by the end of Year 9 to be well above expectations in music and above expectations in art, history and design and technology. The assessments show standards to be close to expectations in geography but below expectations in ICT, modern foreign languages and physical education. Inspection evidence is broadly in agreement with teacher assessments, with the exception of design and technology, where the indications are that attainment is closer to expectations, rather than above. Standards in religious education are consistent with expectations in the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Girls outperform boys in all subjects other than modern languages and physical education where there are no differences in the standards attained by boys and girls.
4. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades in 2001 was average both in comparison with all and similar schools. The 2002 results are similar to the 2001 results and close to the school's target for the year. There has been a downward trend in the average GCSE points score over recent years to be below average in comparison with all schools in 2001, even though average in comparison with similar schools. However, the average points score is not an accurate reflection of overall performance in the GCSE examination. Thirty pupils in Year 10 and 30 pupils in Year 11 follow a programme that leads to NVQ accreditation. However, success in the award is not translated into GCSE points, even though the number of pupils following this course is included when the average GCSE/GNVQ points score is calculated for the year group. The effect of this is to depress the overall average point score.

When these pupils are excluded from the calculation, the school's average points score is close to the national average. When standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are taken into account then achievement at the end of Year 11 is consistent with expectations. The overall performance of girls is above that of boys.

5. The percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-C in English was well below average in 2001. However, the 2002 results, although below average show a marked improvement. This improvement is confirmed by inspection findings. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in mathematics, although below average in 2001 with similar results in 2002, show a steady improvement over recent years. There has been a steady increase in the number of pupils achieving a grade C. The 2001 results in science were above national averages and well above those for English and maths. They were well above average when compared with similar schools. Even though the 2002 fell slightly, results in science have improved significantly since the last inspection. Although girls achieve better results than boys in English, results in mathematics and science are broadly similar.
6. Although GCSE results in other subjects are mostly below national averages, these results again reflect satisfactory and sometimes good achievement when standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are taken into account. Particularly good results are achieved in the expressive arts, which incorporates music, drama dance and art. The 2002 results were very similar to the well above average results obtained in 2001. In 2001 six pupils received letters from the examining body congratulating them on receiving the maximum marks in the examination and in 2002, one pupil received a congratulatory letter on achieving one of the top five marks in the country out of well over three thousand candidates. Results in drama in 2002 were similar to those obtained in 2001 when they were well above average. Results in history were average in 2001 and rose slightly in 2002. Results in business studies, French, German, geography and ICT, although below average in 2001 also showed improvement in 2002. The 2001 results in English literature were close to average, but dipped slightly in 2001. Results in art, physical education and some aspects of design and technology were similar to those obtained in 2001 when they were below average. Other than in design and technology and ICT, achievement is broadly in line with expectations. Standards in religious education at the end of Year 11 are below the expectations of the Agreed Syllabus. Girls outperform boys in all subjects other than business studies, history and ICT.
7. The 2002 results on the GNVQ Foundation and Intermediate courses in health and social care were good. All of the pupils entered obtained pass grades with half of the Intermediate health and social care candidates obtaining merits. Inspectors found that pupils work at standards in line with course expectations. This reflects good progress, from pupils' levels of attainment on entry, which are below average. However, results on the Intermediate Engineering course were poor with only one grade awarded out of 16 entries.
8. The school makes effective use of targets to improve results. Appropriately challenging targets are set annually, for results overall and in individual subjects, and are generally met.
9. Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) achieve well both in lessons and over time. Most make good progress towards targets set for them in their individual education plans (IEPs). They meet the majority of their targets, through systematic, well-structured teaching and work that is generally well matched to their individual needs. A few pupils, including those with statements, make good progress through carefully planned, well-focused small group work and experienced in-class support. However, in some classes pupils do not make adequate progress because teaching methods are not flexible or responsive enough to meet pupils' needs and additional learning support is not readily available. Many with emotional and behavioural learning needs, particularly more vulnerable pupils, make good progress in developing effective social skills and learning a range of strategies to handle situations, which trigger their anxiety and unacceptable behaviour.
10. There are few pupils who speak English as an additional language and none of these is at an early stage of language acquisition. The progress and achievement of these pupils are satisfactory and comparable with their peers.

11. The school makes very good provision for gifted and talented pupils. This is reflected in the very high standards achieved in a variety of extra-curricular activities. Standards of performance in dance, drama and musical performances are high and several pupils have achieved national representative honours in competitive sports.
12. The school has taken a number of initiatives to improve standards of literacy and these are rising. A significant contributory factor here is the enthusiasm with which the English department has adopted the National Literacy Strategy. Pupils with low literacy skills on entry make very good progress because of the emphasis specialist teachers place on the highly interactive reading programme and the Progress Units. Speaking skills are average throughout the school. Whereas pupils use good oral skills in English, they do not display the same level of fluency or give sustained answers in most subject areas. Listening skills are good. Pupils use technical vocabulary accurately in all subjects. In modern foreign languages, there is good emphasis on promoting reading whilst in geography, the buddy system is used to improve literacy skills. In textiles, pupils use the word walls and glossaries to increase their vocabulary. Good reading skills are encouraged in health and social care and in business education, pupils use websites well for research work. Writing skills are satisfactory rather than good because pupils make many technical errors in their work. In history, pupils use the drafting and re-drafting process as well as project work to develop their extended writing skills. There is good creative writing in maths. Although there is limited creative writing in geography, teachers stress the importance of accuracy and Year 11 pupils draft and re-draft their written work. In textiles, pupils work on challenging creative writing and in modern foreign languages, Year 10 and 11 pupils use writing frames to improve their written work.
13. The successful introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy has led to rising standards of numeracy over recent years. The effective starters to each lesson have been successful in improving the mental agility across the younger age groups and rejuvenated an interest in basic numerical work. The use of tables and manipulation of number are applied more confidently since the strategy was introduced. Pupils apply their numerical skills effectively in many subjects. In work seen during the inspection there was evidence of the use of tables, graphs and statistical analyses in geography, and linear measurement and the drawing of pie charts in design and technology. The demands of scientific experiments require pupils to apply formulae, draw graphs and manipulate number accurately. During ICT lessons pupils are able to manipulate and interpret data with the use of computer software. The application and development of pupils' numeracy skills across the curriculum is supported effectively by the teaching strategies employed in the mathematics department.
14. Standards in ICT are consistent with expectations both at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. There are many opportunities for pupils to use ICT in most subjects. For example, pupils apply their computing skills well in mathematics, English, science, music and drama. In science effective use is made of portable computers, which have an infrared link to the school network. The use of ICT in the 'media suite' is helping pupils to produce imaginative work. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to apply their ICT skills in some subjects because of difficulties in accessing computers.

Sixth form

15. Results at A-level, although below the national average over the past three years, represent good progress overall, relative to students' achievements at GCSE. With roughly equal numbers of candidates, the results of male and female students were about the same in 2001. In 2002, with over twice as many female candidates than males, female students outperformed males. A-level results have remained fairly steady since the last inspection. Results of Intermediate level vocational courses in business studies, health and social care, and leisure and tourism are good. Results in the AS-level examinations are satisfactory. Students have opportunities to retake their examinations and improve their grades. About 50 per cent of the students in Year 11 generally stay on to the sixth form; most of the rest continue in education or training and 10 per cent enter employment. In recent years, about 25 per cent of sixth form students have entered employment at the end of Year 12, with the remainder continuing into Year 13. At the end of Year 13, about 25 per cent continue in further education, about 50 per cent proceed to higher education, with the remainder entering employment.

16. In many subjects the numbers of students entered are small, so A-level results fluctuate and comparisons with national averages are unreliable. This is seen in theatre studies and performing arts for example, where the numbers entered tend to be relatively small and results vary quite considerably from year to year. In 2001 there were six candidates in each subject. All students obtained a pass grade but there was only one Grade B and the majority obtained C grades. In 2002, however, results rose appreciably. There were again six candidates in each subject and in both subjects four of the six candidates obtained A or B grades. In English, results in 2001 were well below average but improved in 2002. The 2001 chemistry results were well above average, while the biology results were below and the physics results well below. In 2002 the biology results improved, while the chemistry and physics results were slightly below the 2001 results. The 2001 results in art, media studies, economics, and physical education were all above average. The 2002 results are broadly similar to the 2001 results. Results in dance, geography, history, music, psychology and sociology were all below average in 2001. Value added information shows that almost all students achieve grades above those predicted by their performance in GCSE examinations. The numbers of male and female students following the various courses are generally too small to determine any consistent differences in performance.
17. In lessons observed and in the samples of work scrutinized, achievement is generally consistent with standards on entry to the various courses. However, in some subjects teaching strategies are too heavily dependent on the teacher and this restricts students' opportunities to exchange views and challenge each other's thinking. This impedes progress towards higher levels of achievement. The school provides lessons in key skills and students are making good progress. Students' standards in communication, numeracy and information technology are generally good and they cope well with these aspects of their courses.
18. The achievement of students with special educational needs is good. Higher attaining students are supported well and achieve good A-level results. The school makes effective use of targets to raise results overall and subjects are provided with accurate information on students' predicted and target A-level grades, on the basis of their GCSE performance.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

19. Pupils of all ages have good attitudes to learning and they enjoy taking part in the wide range of opportunities available. The overwhelming majority of pupils can be relied upon to behave responsibly and to respect the school's facilities and equipment. The incidence of permanent exclusions is below the national average. Pupils' personal development is good; they develop into mature young people and feel confident about asking their teachers for help or clarification when it is needed. Relationships between pupils and with adults are good and are based upon mutual trust and respect. This atmosphere of support and understanding helps pupils to learn well and to make good progress in their work. Overall attendance is satisfactory and there are relatively few unauthorised absences.
20. Pupils behave well during lessons. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and employ a very effective blend of high expectations and praise. The result is a lively but harmonious community. The school has a good atmosphere and, within this setting, pupils work hard and do their best. They particularly enjoy taking part in the performing arts and music and the level of participation in the many extra-curricular clubs is high. During lessons, pupils work constructively on their own, in small groups or pairs. For example, during a drama lesson that focused on the factors underlying truancy, Year 10 pupils improvised scenarios that dealt with the relationships between those who exist within and outside established social groups. Through role-play, pupils considered the importance of factors such as eye contact and body language. Pupils analysed their positive and negative responses to the varying behaviour of the 'outsiders' and, in so doing, learned more about themselves.
21. Although bullying does occasionally occur, pupils feel confident that teachers deal with such behaviour firmly and effectively. During the inspection, unsatisfactory behaviour was seen in very few lessons. It tends to arise because a minority of the pupils, often boys, lack motivation and interest. Sometimes, this is because the teacher does not adequately explain the purpose of the intended activity and the pupils do not understand why it is relevant to what they are

studying. Exclusion is used only at the final stage of an escalating series of sanctions when exclusion is the only option for pupils who are unable to conform to the school's expectations of behaviour. Nevertheless, the school works hard to maintain pupils in full time education and in the last school year the number of permanent exclusions was below average for a school of this size, although the number of fixed period exclusions was above. All exclusions are well documented and the school works hard and involves parents as much as possible in order to prevent such behaviour recurring.

22. Relationships are good. Members of staff provide very good examples of how to behave and address the pupils with the respect and consideration they deserve. Pupils, in turn, speak highly of their teachers and a shared sense of common purpose helps to create a stable and calm atmosphere within which pupils make good progress. The school has a very successful policy of social and educational inclusion. There are very few racist incidents and, when they occur, they are dealt with firmly and very effectively. Pupils relate warmly to their classmates who have physical or behaviour difficulties. During lessons, their contributions are always respected and they are readily assimilated during group work. The inclusive nature of this school is clearly reflected in its harmonious and friendly atmosphere.
23. Although pupils gradually form their own set of values and beliefs, they do not always appreciate how their actions impact upon others. For example, during mid-morning breaks, pupils drop an inordinate amount of litter. Many are oblivious to the extra work they create for the site-management staff. During lessons some pupils, often boys, lack motivation and may demand much of the teacher's time and attention. They fail to understand or heed the impact this has upon their more committed and motivated classmates. As they move through the school, however, the majority learn to understand intangible concepts such as the value of friendship and, through the performing arts, develop their expressive and creative abilities. In response to a concerted effort by their teachers, pupils' self-esteem and confidence steadily grow. They enjoy extra-curricular clubs and relish the sense of achievement and pride they feel when, for example, they perform during assembly or as part of a school production.
24. The school code of conduct forms the lynchpin of everyday life and this is consistently promoted by all members of staff. As they get older, most of the pupils are increasingly able to distinguish right from wrong and develop the ability to make reasoned and responsible decisions. For example, Year 9 pupils considered the pros and cons of the various forms of contraception that are available and of their responsibility to themselves and to others. Pupils enjoy taking an active role in the life of the school; for example, house representatives are elected by their class and can take part in the house or school council to discuss issues such as uniform changes and the provision of lockers. A small number of pupils take part in Tendring Youth Forum and help to arrange benefits such as subsidised admission to local leisure centres and the provision of skate boarding facilities.
25. The school works hard to improve attendance and the overall average has steadily improved over the last four years. It is now marginally above the national average and the number of unauthorised absences is relatively low. There is no difference between the attendance of boys and girls or between any of the ethnic groups. Pupils usually do their best to arrive in good time for their lessons although the size of the school sometimes makes this difficult.

Sixth form

26. Sixth form students have good attitudes to the school and to their work. Just over half of those in Year 11 choose to stay on for the sixth form and those who remain are well motivated. Students spoken to during the inspection are enjoying this phase of their education and would recommend the sixth form to others. Around three quarters of those in Year 12 carry on into Year 13 and this is very similar to the national average. Relationships with each other and with members of staff are good; they are polite and helpful towards visitors. Students with special educational needs are fully included in the day-to-day life of the sixth form. Students' personal development is satisfactory; they are responsible young adults and can be relied upon to get on with their work both at home and at school. This mature approach is reflected in the good progress they make. There is no history of formal exclusion from the sixth form.

27. Helped by the many opportunities provided by the performing arts, students are confident public performers and many seize the opportunity to represent the school in music or drama productions. They have a clear understanding of common values and how their actions affect others. Many of the students like the sixth form to feel like a separate entity from the main school and it is up to students to take the initiative if they want to become involved with the younger students. While some volunteer to help with clubs and so on, the majority does not. Students' cultural development is satisfactory. They appreciate cultural diversity and accord dignity to other people's values and beliefs.
28. No figures for sixth form attendance were available but numbers present during the week of inspection, along with the available registers, indicate that overall attendance is satisfactory. Students are not required to register at the start of morning and afternoons sessions. Instead they are given responsibility for attendance at lessons and should sign in and out of school, and meet their tutor at least once a week. However, many students readily admit that they do not register their arrival or departure and as a result the school does not have an accurate record of who is, and who is not, on site at any one time. This constitutes a serious health and safety hazard should there need to evacuate the buildings in an emergency.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

Main school

29. Teaching and learning are good overall and better than at the last inspection. In lessons seen across Years 7 to 11, teaching was satisfactory or better in 98 per cent of lessons, good or better in 67 per cent, very good in 27 per cent and excellent in four per cent of lessons. Teaching was unsatisfactory in two per cent of lessons. Learning followed a similar pattern. Examples of good teaching were seen in all subjects and of very good teaching in most, including support for pupils with special educational needs. Teaching and learning were very good in English, music and drama and good in all other subjects apart from art where they are satisfactory. Teaching in modern languages is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching in art is satisfactory. Examples of excellent teaching were observed in design and technology and PACE lessons in Years 7 to 9, and in English, mathematics and science lessons in Years 10 and 11. Teaching of this quality had a significant effect on pupils' learning in these particular lessons. Inspectors found homework was set throughout the school and generally effectively used.
30. General strengths in teaching include teachers' use of their knowledge to develop pupils' understanding, and good planning so that pupils learn in a carefully structured way. These features are evident in many English lessons. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, pupils made rapid progress in understanding the implications of cultural diversity as they explored the concept of power in relation to master and slave relationships. The lesson was well structured to build carefully on pupils' previous learning and skilful questioning both challenged and extended their thinking. Similar strategies used in a Year 9 science lesson enabled pupils to make very good progress in understanding the factors that affect livestock breeding. In mathematics, teachers' use their subject knowledge effectively to ensure that pupils build systematically on their existing skills. This was seen, for example, in an excellent Year 10 lesson, where pupils sustained intense concentration as they calculated moving averages using computers. In music, teachers make very good use of their subject knowledge to challenge and raise the levels of pupils' performance. This was seen in a Year 7 lesson, for example, where pupils' keyboard playing improved as they responded to the guidance of the teacher. In the best religious education lessons, teachers enhance pupils' understanding by means of appropriate illustrations. This was seen, for example, in a Year 8 lesson on Sikhism. However, weaknesses in lesson planning and activities that were not well matched to the attainment levels of pupils contributed to unsatisfactory teaching in one lesson in science.
31. The English department lays an excellent foundation for the development of pupils' literacy skills. Teachers have adopted the National Literacy Strategy enthusiastically and this is reflected in rising standards in Years 7 to 9. Teachers employ a variety of strategies to motivate and inspire pupils. For example, Year 7 pupils' reading skills are enhanced because

teachers show interest in the stories pupils are reading and provide many opportunities to talk about them. In the upper years appropriate texts engage pupils' attention and extend their understanding of the use of language, as in, for example, an excellent Year 11 lesson, where pupils investigated how in 'An Inspector Calls' the actions of different characters lead to the unravelling of the plot. Most subjects make effective contributions to the development of pupils' literacy skills. There are opportunities for pupils to plan, draft and rewrite their own work in English, geography, history and religious education. Support for the development of pupils' writing skills is provided through the use of subject-specific key words. Pupils' reading skills are developed and consolidated through opportunities to read both silently and aloud in many lessons.

32. Through the adoption of the National Numeracy Strategy the mathematics department lays a good foundation for the development of pupils' numeracy skills. Lessons begin with rapid mental exercises that help to improve the speed and accuracy of pupils' mental calculations. Most teachers are aware of the need to reinforce and develop pupils' numeracy skills in all curriculum subjects. Numeracy is developed through measuring and judging proportion in art and design and technology, and in interpreting data in geography, science and physical education. Teachers promote the use of ICT in many subjects. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 use word processing and desktop publishing programs for their work. This is particularly evident in geography and history. Most pupils are skilled at accessing information from the Internet. The teaching of the ICT course in Years 7 to 9 provides pupils with basic competencies in the use of spreadsheets and databases.
33. Most teachers have high expectations and in lessons where these are communicated clearly to pupils. In drama, for example, pupils make good progress because of the enthusiasm and sense of enjoyment engendered by the challenging pace of lessons. In a Year 9 lesson pupils gained a greater understanding of the moral and social issues raised in 'Romeo and Juliet' through the teacher's enthusiastic and innovative approach to the topic. Teachers generally share their objectives with pupils at the start of lessons and review them at the end. As a result, most pupils are clear about what they are doing and become fully involved in their learning. This was evident in an excellent Year 9 PACE lesson, where pupils made excellent progress in understanding hygiene matters related to sex and contraception because of the teacher's clear explanations and guidance. The clear explanation of learning objectives is also a feature of teaching in history. In a Year 9 lesson, clear objectives and challenging questioning helped to consolidate pupils' understanding of the growth of the British Empire. However, expectations need to be raised in modern languages lessons in Years 7 to 9, where teachers make too much use of English and not enough use of French or German.
34. Teachers use a good range of strategies to enable pupils to learn and develop skills. In an excellent Year 11 textiles lesson, the very effective use of a variety of prompts and resources led to pupils producing high quality designs. Paired and small-group work is used well in many subjects. The very effective use of a variety of teaching and learning strategies in physical education helps to maintain pupils' interest and motivation. This was seen in a Year 9 badminton lesson where pupils worked enthusiastically in small groups as they developed their forehand and backhand strokes. In expressive arts, pupils work successfully in small groups devising presentations that integrate music, dance and drama. Small-group work is used effectively in English and religious education to discuss and extend pupils' thinking and to undertake investigations in science. Teaching strategies generally take satisfactory account of the needs of gifted and talented pupils.
35. Pupils are well managed in most lessons. However, weaknesses in basic teaching strategies and classroom management contributed to unsatisfactory teaching in one mathematics lesson and one religious education lesson. Experienced teachers know pupils well and usually have high expectations of their behaviour. Pupils nearly always respond by working hard. Incidents of unsatisfactory behaviour usually occurred when pupils were not involved enough in lesson activities.
36. The quality of teaching by special educational needs teachers is good, and most teaching assistants contribute well to pupils' learning. Subject teachers have satisfactory awareness of pupils' Individual Education Plans and often use them in lessons. However, the plans are not

all of uniform quality. In some subjects the plans lack clarity and do not have subject-specific targets. There is a need for increased monitoring of how the plans are being used to ensure that they provide the information that teachers need in order to guide their lesson planning. Pupils with special needs are fully included in all lessons and their contributions are valued.

37. In most subjects teachers mark work regularly and pupils understand the grades they are given. However, there are inconsistencies in marking in science, where pupils are not given enough guidance on what they must do in order to improve the quality of their work. Pupils are taught to evaluate their own learning in several subjects: this is, for example, a good feature of lessons in English and drama.
38. By the time pupils are in Year 11, most have developed good learning habits. They work systematically, record their work carefully and review their learning to gauge their own strengths and weaknesses. They have a good sense of how they are doing and readily ask if they feel they do not understand. Over the school as a whole learning is good in response to good teaching.

Sixth form

39. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are good and a little better than lower down the school. Teaching and learning were satisfactory or better in all lessons and good or better in 85 per cent of lessons. In 41 per cent of lessons, teaching and learning were very good. In 5 per cent of lessons, teaching and learning were excellent. Good teaching is a feature of many lessons in the sixth form. This results in a clear progression in students' work with most students achieving results in the A-level and GNVQ courses above those predicted from standards of attainment on entry to sixth form. Marking is effective and the use of examination criteria and comments keep students well informed of their standards and how to improve, although comments are sometimes too brief and lack depth of analysis. Key skills are separately and effectively taught. Students with special educational needs receive good support, especially those with physical disabilities.
40. Teachers' planning takes careful account of course requirements and of the range of attainment levels in their teaching groups. This is particularly apparent in the teaching of the GNVQ health and social care course. Teachers' lesson plans are thorough and well structured. Lesson aims are made very clear to students and the effective application of the teachers' subject knowledge provides students with a very good grounding in the theory and practice of health and social care. Very good lesson planning is also a feature of teaching in business studies. This helps to ensure consistency in teaching and that lesson activities present students with increasing demands in lessons.
41. Most lessons start with a review of earlier learning and a clear outline of the lesson learning objectives. This promotes continuity in students' learning and summaries and reviews at the end of lessons help to consolidate learning. Teachers make effective use of their very good subject knowledge to challenge and extend students' learning. In mathematics, for example, teachers make good use of their subject knowledge to pose challenging questions that identify any gaps in learning. This helps to ensure that students have a thorough understanding of the lesson activities. Teachers' high levels of enthusiasm and desire to share their subject knowledge with students are features of very good teaching in drama and theatre studies. Highly innovative ways of teaching not only help to broaden students' understanding of drama and the theatre, but also give them greater insight into the historical periods in which their studies are set. Teachers in science also have good subject knowledge and in many lessons use a suitably wide range of methods to engage students' interest. However, lack of stimulus and enthusiasm because the methods are too heavily dependent on inputs from the teacher and do not allow students enough opportunity to engage in independent learning. This over-dependence on teacher-directed activities is also a feature of some mathematics lessons.
42. The overall quality of teaching in English is very good. In the best lessons, teachers use lively methods to engage students' interest and involvement. In a very good Year 13 lesson on 'Othello' for example, very high teacher expectations and the effective use of an interactive strategy promoted rapid gains in understanding the characters and plot. High expectations are

also a feature of teaching in media studies where teachers make very good use of excellent resources to stimulate and promote students learning. The very good use of resources and a high level of challenge are also features of teaching and learning in ICT. This was seen in an excellent Year 13 lesson, for example, where students were motivated by the high level of pace and challenge as they engaged in their coursework.

43. Very good classroom relationships form the basis of the good teaching seen in the sixth form. In history and geography, for example, students make very good gains in knowledge because of the mature and supportive relationships in lessons. Teachers transmit their high expectations to their who students respond accordingly. High expectations were particular features of the excellent lessons observed in performing arts, music and ICT. High expectations and consistently very good teaching in psychology are key factors in raising standards. Excellent support is provided to students through the highly innovative use of the subject Website. This provides students not only with details of the week's psychology lessons and set homework but also with a means of communicating with their teacher. This facility provides students with an unusually high level of tutorial guidance.

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

44. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good for pupils in Year 7 to 9, and very good for those in Years 10 and 11. The school's curriculum provision has been enhanced considerably by its successful bid for specialist Arts College status and recognised in the award of the Gold Arts Mark. The curriculum provides a sufficiently wide and balanced range of learning opportunities to suit the needs and aptitudes of all pupils. The curriculum is inclusive and the school offers a very good alternative education programme for those pupils who would benefit from a reduced National Curriculum, and a programme that offers other pupils a vocational placement and training. This range of opportunities provides pupils with equal access and opportunities to learn. The school has made good progress in its curricular provision since the last inspection. A 60-minute lesson has been adopted and although this has reduced the overall number of teaching periods the time allocated to subjects in Years 7 to 9 is sufficient. At the time of the last inspection provision for religious education was not enough to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. The time allocated to religious education is now adequate. As at the time of the last inspection, the school does not comply with the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. The teaching time of 25 hours a week meets government recommendations. The school is in the process of compiling a register of gifted and talented pupils. Nevertheless, good provision is made for these pupils, in particular for those with aptitudes in the performing and expressive arts. All pupils are encouraged to take advantage of the wide range of enrichment activities that the school provides.
45. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 builds on the excellent links with the primary schools, in particular through the innovative 'moving up - moving on' project. All National Curriculum subjects are taught, together with religious education and PACE. These subjects provide a good range of appropriate and stimulating activities. Pupils are taught mainly in attainment groups from Year 7. There are specific programmes for individuals as well as opportunities for withdrawal to work in small groups. French is now the core foreign language for pupils. There is currently no discrete ICT provision for pupils in Year 7, although the school has firm plans to introduce this in the next school year.
46. The school has created a very broad curriculum that offers pupils a wide range of choices in Years 10 and 11. Additional and vocational GCSE subjects, together with a specifically designed programme for some pupils, enhance the breadth and relevance of the curriculum for this age group. Pupils follow a common core of subjects: English language and literature, mathematics, double or single award science, ICT and physical education. The range of options has been extended since the last inspection to meet the needs of all pupils and to place an increasing emphasis on the vocational contexts of learning. To this affect the school currently offers General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) Foundation and Intermediate courses in Health and Social Care, a Foundation level course in Leisure and Tourism, and

Intermediate level courses in Engineering and ICT. There are plans to extend this provision in future years to include science. Not all pupils study a modern foreign language or design technology, and for about 30 pupils in each year, this can mean following one of the many alternative programmes. These programmes are rigorous and lead to NVQ accreditation. Pupils are only admitted to them following an interview and the signing of a contract of engagement. Pupils are closely monitored at their work placement and regular reviews of progress are undertaken. The outcomes of these reviews are shared with pupils and parents. The structured way in which the various pathways have been constructed allows considerable flexibility for all pupils. This increased range of achievement opportunities, particularly for lower-attaining pupils and for those who are under-achieving, offers them the best possible chance of success. Good achievement opportunities are also provided for higher attaining pupils and those seeking to specialize in the performing arts. However, the reduced number of pupils studying design and technology in Years 10 and 11 seriously weakens the prospect of providing sustainable teaching groups in the sixth form.

47. In Years 7 and 8, the PACE programme is taught by form tutors. They prepare their lessons using an outline plan that lists the topics to be covered over the whole school year. Pupils undertake an appropriate range of modules that includes factors affecting truancy, personal safety and how they can raise money for charity. In Years 9, 10 and 11, the programme builds upon this solid foundation and pupils rotate between specialist teachers, each of whom delivers one or more of the various strands. The programme covers a wide range of relevant issues, including prejudice and discrimination, citizenship, drug education and sex education. The PACE programme contains all the required elements. However, responsibility for the co-ordination of the programme is shared between three teachers and there is no monitoring to ensure the consistency and effectiveness of the teaching and learning.
48. The school makes very good curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs. The aim of the school is for pupils with additional needs to be taught in the mainstream classes wherever possible and have access to the full curriculum. For those who need individual or small-group teaching in order to improve basic skills, this is organised in a way least likely to cause disruption to learning and the curriculum. As a result pupils with SEN are fully integrated into all aspects of school life and have access to the same curriculum as their peers. The school makes every effort to ensure the full inclusion of pupils with SEN, as seen, for example, in the arrangements made for a pupil with cerebral palsy to take part in a school visit to Ypres. Through the early identification of pupils with SEN and very good liaison with the primary schools mean, the school is able to make appropriate provision as soon as pupils arrive in school and they are able to take part in the variety of activities the school offers.
49. The school is developing effective strategies for teaching literacy across the curriculum. The adoption of the Key Stage 3 Framework for Teaching English by the English department, which is recognised as a leading English department within Essex, is having a positive impact on pupils' reading, writing, speaking and listening. The department has highly effective links with the primary schools and the literacy strategy builds well on their experiences from the primary schools. The enthusiastic adoption of the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy by the school has led to increasing awareness of the importance of raising standards of literacy in all subjects in order to raise standards overall. Most classrooms have displays of key words and reference is made to these in lessons. Teachers are aware of the importance of focusing on language and spelling in their marking. Within mathematics the recommendations of the Key Stage 3 Numeracy Strategy have been fully implemented and the school has recently adopted a policy for the development of pupils' numeracy skills in all subjects. The successful implementation of the policy will help to ensure a co-ordinated approach to the development of pupils' numeracy skills in all subjects. The school has established a Key Stage 3 working party to promote, support and monitor the implementation of the Key Stage 3 Strategy through representatives of each department. This year the focus is on science, ICT and the foundation strand. A successful bid has been made for additional support for science and the foundation strand, led by history and music.
50. The good quality of the school's provision for careers education and guidance ensures that pupils receive the appropriate advice needed to make choices at 14, 16 and 19. Careers guidance is good and is provided for pupils of all ages. The careers teacher works in close

partnership with Colchester Institute and pupils are offered comprehensive advice on courses they can follow after they leave school. The career education programme is taught from Year 9 as part of the PACE programme and aims to ensure that pupils are well informed about career opportunities so that they can become realistic planners for their own futures. They benefit from a programme that includes preparation for option choices and an information evening before making their Year 10 choices. In Years 10 and 11 pupils are given all the essential information about choices at 16. This guidance, along with work experience placements in Years 10 or 11, prepares pupils well for their life after school and gives them a good insight into the work place.

51. The good range of extra-curricular activities the school provides enriches pupils' learning and participation rates are high. There are particular strengths in the wide range of performing arts activities that enable pupils to develop and demonstrate their expertise in dance, drama and music. Pupils take part in regular productions of high quality. The school provides a good range of sporting activities for individuals and teams. Booster classes are offered to provide pupils with additional support and all pupils have easy access to the school's very good ICT facilities. Pupils have the opportunity of taking part in a large number of both local and overseas visits. There are field trips in geography and visits to Colchester Castle and the Belgium battlefields in history. In art, drama, music and dance pupils have the opportunity to visit theatres, exhibitions and recitals. In modern languages pupils have the opportunity to visit Boulogne and Paris.
52. Links with the community have strengthened since the previous inspection and are now very good. The school's extensive network of contacts permeates a very wide range of organisations throughout the business world, community organisations and the armed forces. Their various contributions are used in many imaginative and innovative ways in order to enrich the curriculum and to broaden pupils' social experience. Each contribution is tailored closely to the needs of the individual and is used to very good effect. For example, volunteers may come into school in order to provide mock interviews, or to mentor those in Years 10 and 11 who are becoming disaffected. Pertinent help and advice encourage them to persevere and part time work placements may be arranged for pupils who are reluctant to attend school regularly or who are at risk of exclusion. The school has also established closer liaison with various external support agencies. These are used to provide counselling and guidance to pupils and their families who are experiencing particular difficulties.
53. The school participates in a wide range of national and local initiatives. For example, it is a member of the Clacton and Harwich Education Action Zone and is the lead school for a School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) scheme. These links are put to very good use and help to ensure that the school is adequately staffed with teachers whose experience and qualifications are well suited to the demands of the curriculum. The school is also a member of the local Consortium of Coastal Schools and is pro-active in ensuring that these links remain close and mutually supportive. Prior to the new intake at the start of each academic year, all the contributory primary schools are visited and subject liaison requests are lodged with each school. Curricular and social liaison with the primary schools is excellent and curricular links are extensive. For example, the English department has pioneered the 'moving up - moving on' project. This is widely recognised as an outstanding example of good practice; it is currently used throughout the consortium and has attracted national attention. Close curricular liaison in other subjects, such as science, mathematics and the performing arts also help to smooth the transition from primary to secondary school. This ensures that pupils are able to settle down quickly once they arrive and are able to resume their studies with minimal interruption.
54. Links with Colchester Institute are close. The institute provides vocational courses for individuals who leave at the end of Years 11 and 12, as well as for a small number of disaffected pupils in Years 10 and 11. Along with other providers within the community such as 'ENDAIM', this alternative curriculum is a great success for some pupils and has utterly transformed their attitude to school and learning.

55. Overall, the school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school recognises its importance and its impact on pupils' progress, attitudes and achievement. There are several references to these aspects of pupils' personal development in the school's documentation, especially with regard to behaviour, equal opportunities and bullying. Provision for moral and social development is good, and provision for cultural development is satisfactory. However, provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory overall. The statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met. There is some evidence of planning in departments for spiritual development, but this is inconsistent and lacks structure. In some subjects, opportunities for the spiritual development of pupils were observed. For example, in English, pupils are exposed to a range of literary works such as Orwell's '1984' and Miller's 'The Crucible' that enable them to learn about how the human spirit can be affected by fanaticism, fear and greed. However, not enough attention is given to this aspect of pupils' personal development and the opportunities that arise in most subjects to enhance pupils' spiritual development are not taken.
56. Provision for pupils' moral development is good. Adults set very good examples for pupils and ensure good order in the school. Teachers communicate a strong sense of right and wrong through the reinforcement of the school's code of conduct. This is accepted by pupils and supported by parents. The reward system promotes the positive aspects of self-discipline, co-operation and consideration for others. Moral development is also fostered through a variety of topics in PACE, some of which increase pupils' understanding of citizenship. In physical education, pupils' awareness is raised about issues such as taking drugs and cheating in games. In history, moral issues surrounding war and population are discussed and in religious education the need for examining ideas from different viewpoints is fostered. In English, pupils experience and discuss moral issues arising from a range of literature.
57. Provision for pupils' social development is good. Through its Arts College status, pupils have regular opportunities to perform within school and the local community. These experiences enable pupils to grow in confidence and encourage them to use their initiative. Within subjects such as business studies and modern languages, pupils undertake residential trips, for example to Brussels, and these help pupils to become more aware of the wider world. Pupils are able to grow in confidence and become increasingly aware of their personal qualities. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to work together during lessons and on other school activities, such as charity fundraising. Pupils are encouraged to become involved in the decision-making process by being elected as a house representative or sports captain. Others may be elected as charity co-ordinators and Year 11 pupils can become prefects. Some Year 11 pupils also volunteer to act as 'buddies' and, through their lunchtime drop-in sessions, help to ensure that pupils who may be undergoing difficulties receive advice and support.
58. Provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. There are many opportunities for pupils to be involved in activities that extend their cultural development. The curriculum provides very good coverage of British and European cultural traditions. This is seen, for example, in the wide range of well-supported visits to theatres, art galleries, museums, local music festivals and the visits to France and Belgium. However, the curriculum does not provide enough planned opportunities for pupils to develop an awareness of the variety of different cultures and traditions that exist in contemporary society. Some subjects make a significant contribution to this aspect of pupils' cultural development. In art, for example, the study of artists from other cultures forms an important part of the curriculum and in English pupils are exposed to the work of authors from different cultures. In music, pupils listen to and play music from different cultures, and discuss the origins and influences on the composers. However, more could be done across a wider range of subjects to foster this aspect of pupils' personal development.

Sixth form

59. The sixth form has responded well to local needs and curricular provision is good. The school offers 24 GCE AS and A-level courses, with the addition of an extensive range of vocational course offered to Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) level and to GNVQ Intermediate level in Business, Engineering, Health and Social Care, ICT, Leisure and Recreation and Leisure and Tourism. This range of courses offers a considerable number of

opportunities to students, including those with lower GCSE examination grades, who might otherwise not continue with their education. This work is supported by the school's close links with external training providers. The school stipulates that students should have obtained a minimum of four grade C's in the GCSE examination in order to embark upon an AS level course. Student numbers in the sixth form are rising, with over half of the students from Year 11 returning to Year 12 in 2002. The retention rate from Year 12 to 13 is slightly higher than the national average of around 75 per cent. The timetable is thoughtfully constructed and virtually every student in the present Year 12 was able to obtain his or her first choice of AS level courses. There is a range of enhancement courses for students such as general studies and key skills. A very small number of students re-take GCSE examinations in mathematics and English. The increase in the range of subjects offered is an improvement since the previous inspection. The statutory requirement for collective worship and religious education in the sixth form are not met and this was the position at the last inspection.

60. The amount of teaching time allocated for all AS, A-level and Vocational courses is adequate for coverage of the course programmes. All students are expected to give additional time to subjects through independent study. However there is no structured induction programme that would help students to derive the greatest benefit from their personal study periods. Few students benefit from individual careers interviews because the service provided by the local careers service has been reduced. Nevertheless, the school's provision for careers education and guidance is good. All students are encouraged to seek an interview with the careers staff to explore possible avenues after leaving school, but the onus is on students to request it. If they take the initiative, they can have individual careers interviews and are able to access information relevant to their potential careers. Specific sessions on job application and interview techniques using local employers and other professionals are part of a programme tailored to meet individual students' needs. Opportunities exist for work experience and work shadowing. Work experience is an integral part of vocational course programmes. Appropriate advice and guidance is available for students intending to continue into higher education. Students with special educational needs are supported well.
61. Many sixth form students take an active part in the life of the school community. Arrangements for their continued spiritual, moral and social development are satisfactory. Many of the features of the school's provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development apply also to them. Provision is made for these aspects of students' development within a wider general studies programme. Topics covered include health and sex education, and drugs awareness. However, sixth form students do not take part in a daily act of collective worship and there is no provision for religious education. As a result, not all statutory requirements with regard to sixth form provision are met. The lack of a religious education programme in the sixth form severely limits the opportunities available for students to discuss spiritual and moral issues. Many opportunities to enhance this aspect of students' personal development are not taken.
62. Visits and conferences extend opportunities directly provided by the school. Some sixth formers assist younger pupils, for example in paired reading schemes, but more could be done to involve students with younger pupils in this way. Students contribute strongly to school drama productions and musical events. Opportunities are enhanced by cultural events and visits. Field visits in biology, geography and history and visits to France for modern foreign languages, enable students to apply their learning and improve their skills in relevant subjects. Performing arts students benefit from visits to theatres, concerts and galleries. Overall, the range of enrichment opportunities is good.
63. Links with the community are excellent and are put to very good use in a number of ways. For example, speakers from Anglia Polytechnic University, visit the school to talk with students about possible careers. Links with the nearby Colchester Institute have improved since the previous inspection and are now very good. Students will also derive benefit from a 'Learning to Learn' project the school is embarking on in collaboration with the University of Cambridge. A recent science and technology day involved speakers from the University of Essex and a multi-cultural day included speakers from a number of different faiths.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

64. The previous inspection found that the school provided good support and guidance for its pupils and this continues to be the case. Over the intervening five years, the 'house' system has continued to evolve and it forms an integral part of school life. It also acts as the cornerstone of the pastoral care system and good teamwork helps to ensure that pupils are well looked after during the school day. Routine health and safety procedures are in place although an issue relating to the safety checking of portable electrical equipment was drawn to the attention of governors during the inspection. Child protection procedures are good and meet statutory requirements in full.
65. The system of allocating brothers and sisters to a particular house is popular with pupils and parents, and contributes towards a strong sense of school identity. Heads of house liaise very closely with each other and with their individual form tutors. They are in a very good position to monitor pupils' personal development and they do so well. During discussions, most of the pupils say that they like coming to school and that they feel well looked after. This good standard of educational and personal support plays an important part in motivating pupils to work hard and to make the most of their time at school. Form tutors and heads of house are well supported by the senior management team and by a conscientious and dedicated education welfare officer. The school works exceptionally closely with its contributory primary schools and the pastoral and academic liaison is of excellent quality. This prepares pupils very well for their transition to secondary school and helps to ensure that they are able to settle down quickly once they arrive in Year 7.
66. Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development are good. Pupils are placed in one of five houses when they enrol and their tutor and tutor group are also drawn from their designated house. Pupils stay with their form tutor throughout their time at the school and this continuity helps to ensure that members of staff and their pupils get to know each other well. Relationships between pupils and members of staff are good and teachers are sensitive to pupils' 'ups and downs'. Tutors also closely monitor their pupils' attendance, punctuality and their personal planners. As well as encouraging a basic work ethic, this also helps tutors to spot any personal problems and deal with them at an early stage. At regular intervals, pupils of all ages have one-to-one reviews with their tutors. These meetings follow a set format and pupils indicate that they find the discussion to be useful. Pupils reflect upon their personal strengths and weaknesses and on the academic progress that they have made over the intervening period. As a result, they have a very clear idea of how well they are progressing and targets are identified in order to help them to improve in the future. This structured system of self-review helps pupils and tutors alike to monitor individual progress and to identify when additional support is needed.
67. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are effective. Members of staff provide very good examples of how to behave and their expectations are high. Pupils know exactly what is and what is not acceptable behaviour, and most willingly comply. Disciplinary procedures are flexible and can be tailored to suit the individual misdemeanour. Procedures for dealing with bullying are also effective and parents and students are confident that any such behaviour is dealt with firmly.
68. There are close ties with outside agencies and a wide range of different types of support is available for pupils who are at risk of exclusion. These pupils are very well supported. If needs be, they may, for example, move to a part-time timetable and choose from a range of vocational courses provided by Colchester Institute. Although the number of fixed period exclusions has risen since the previous inspection, the number of permanent exclusions has fallen to one sixth of its previous level. This is a testament to the success of the school's skilful management of challenging situations and to its successful policies for social and educational inclusion.
69. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good. Teachers complete a register at the start of every lesson and the parents of any unexplained absentees are contacted on the first day. Helped by a system of electronic registration, the school monitors individual attendance very closely and emerging trends are quickly identified. Although the school strongly discourages parents from booking family holidays during the school term, some

continue to do so. Any pupil whose attendance gives cause for concern is reported to the relevant head of house and he or she may relay these concerns to the education welfare officer during their weekly meetings. This liaison is very effective and is reflected in a relatively low level of unauthorised absence.

70. The school has very good procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. Responsibility is shared between two members of the senior leadership team who co-operate closely and effectively. The school has a centralised assessment information system (CMIS) which is used to track pupils' progress and to set targets throughout their school careers. On entry to the school in Year 7, reading and spelling ages supplement information from National Curriculum tests and cognitive ability tests. GCSE, GNVQ and AS level results are added later to provide a comprehensive indication of pupils' and students' progress throughout their school careers. Teachers can access data directly from the school's network, and enter the results of assessments conducted during the year. A feature of the school is the use of sub-divisions in the National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9 in order to more accurately reflect pupils' attainment.
71. Target setting and monitoring are particularly strong in the two years leading up to the GCSE examination. The school is rigorous in its use of the Autumn Package (published by the DfES), which provides national benchmarking information and enables schools to evaluate performance and make predictions about pupils' performance in the GCSE examination. This information is used effectively to counsel pupils about post-16 option choices. There are good arrangements for form tutors to check regularly with pupils how well they are doing and whether they are doing well enough. Assessment information is also used effectively to evaluate the performance of departments in external tests and examinations.
72. Assessment procedures are good in English, science, music and business, and satisfactory in geography, religious education and the expressive arts. In English, teachers analyse and use the data very well to set targets for the year, measure the effectiveness of teaching and gauge value-added. The department is now extending its assessment procedures to involve pupils in self-assessment and personal target setting. Effective use is also made of assessment in mathematics and science. However, not enough use is made of assessment information to identify underachievement and support learning in modern foreign languages, drama and design and technology.
73. Procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs are very good. Their progress is closely monitored, through standardised testing and through reviews of their IEPs. The school fulfils its statutory duties to monitor and review the provision for pupils with special educational needs and to plan for transition to the next stage of education. The provision described in Statements of Special Educational Needs is fully implemented.

Sixth form

Assessment

74. Procedures for assessing and monitoring students' progress in the sixth form are very good. Teachers know individual students well and remind them of ways of improving their work in lessons. In most subjects teachers provide students with the specifications for the qualifications they are working towards. Information on academic progress and many aspects of personal development are well documented in records of achievement during Year 12 and form the basis of references for employers and universities, which are usually completed in Year 13. Formal reports provide parents with good information on students' progress and achievement. This careful monitoring of students' progress and the effective use of target setting contribute to students' progress in the sixth form with many exceeding their initial grade predictions. The school is rigorous in its use of assessment information that provides reliable predictions about students' performance in the A-level examination. Initially, students' targets are based on their performance at GCSE or its equivalent. Arrangements for the assessment of students with special educational needs are very good, as they are lower down the school.

Advice, support and guidance

75. The school provides good academic and personal guidance and support for sixth form students, and almost everyone feels that the range of courses suits their talents and career aspirations well. However, there is no formal induction programme for students entering the sixth form and as a result they feel that they are under prepared for the greater personal autonomy allowed to them. For example, the procedures for signing in and out of school are not adhered to and some could make more constructive use of their personal study periods. Students are kept closely informed of their progress. In addition to their annual report and regular parents' evenings, students receive an assessment sheet each term. This report details the standard at which they are working in each subject, along with a target grade. Students find this most helpful. They also feel that their work is thoroughly assessed and that they are given a very clear idea of how they can improve their grades. Students indicate that teachers are always willing to help them if they are having difficulties with their work and that they have a clear idea of what it is that they have to do to improve their work. A minority of students, however, have been permitted to embark on A-level courses in science for which they have been inadequately prepared because they have taken Foundation courses at GCSE.
76. One third of students who completed the questionnaire indicated that they would like to receive more careers advice. This is largely due to the reduction in the service provided by local careers officers. However, during interviews, students readily concede that careers information is available and all they have to do is ask. Links with universities, colleges of further education, training providers and employers are excellent and students acknowledge that they receive good guidance on the options available to them in further and higher education, and training.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

77. The school places great emphasis on working closely with parents and is keen to involve them as much as possible. Parents are pleased with many aspects of school life; they support the school and their children well. Attendance at consultation meetings is high and almost everyone comes along to the form tutor parent evenings. Although some parents take their children out of school for family holidays, the majority do their best to ensure that their children attend regularly. Although there is no parents' association or similar organisation, individuals fund raise and a skills register is maintained. The school uses their individual expertise well and their experiences enrich the curriculum and give pupils a taste of the wider world. Parents support extra-curricular activities well and encourage their children to work hard and achieve their very best.
78. The school enjoys a good reputation within the area and is over-subscribed. Although only a small number of parents returned their pre-inspection questionnaires, their responses indicate that there are few areas of concern. Parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting were also largely positive, although a few concerns were shared. For example, around one fifth of those who voiced an opinion have misgivings about pupils' behaviour. While inspectors agree that behaviour is occasionally unsatisfactory, parents can be reassured that pupils nearly always behave well. A similar proportion was dissatisfied with the amount of homework set and the closeness of the partnership between home and school. Inspectors do not agree with these concerns. The amount of homework is similar to that provided in other schools and the partnership between home and school is constructive and mutually supportive. Parents are kept well informed about the progress their children are making, although the quality of comment within pupils' annual reports is not always sufficiently specific or constructive.

Sixth form

79. As part of the inspection process, students were asked to complete a questionnaire. In addition, several groups met inspectors to discuss their views on the subjects they are studying and on the sixth form in general. Most of the students spoken to say that they are enjoying this period of their education and are pleased with the way in which they were helped to settle in. Nine out of ten of those who completed the questionnaire would recommend the sixth form to friends and almost everyone is pleased with the readiness of teachers to give advice when it is

needed. Inspectors agree with these areas of strength. However, almost 40 per cent of students feel that the school provides an inadequate range of enrichment courses and extra-curricular activities. Inspectors do not agree with these concerns. The school provides a good range of enrichment activities, particularly in the performing arts and sport. Students who completed the questionnaire also expressed misgivings about the advice provided about which courses to take in the sixth form and careers advice. Students interviewed during the inspection, however, contradicted these views. Although some students voiced concerns about the level of personal support provided, students interviewed said that sufficient help and advice is indeed available; they have only to ask.

80. Facilities for independent study are very limited and students would like to have somewhere quiet where they can go to work during the school day. Although there is an area set-aside in the learning resource centre for the use of sixth form students, students say that other groups often interrupt their studies. Inspectors agree that the sixth form study area in the learning resources centre is inadequate.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

81. The overall leadership and management of the school are very good. The principal provides thoughtful leadership and a clear educational direction for the school. Targets for results are agreed and are generally met. The principal provides a very effective lead in planning for improvement and co-ordinating the work of the school. He is assisted by an effective senior leadership team. Very good teamwork is a feature among vice-principals and assistant principals. Line management responsibilities are clearly defined and each member of the senior leadership team has responsibility for particular departments. Meetings are sequenced to review National Curriculum test and external examination results in the different subjects, identify development priorities and to review progress towards the targets identified in school and department improvement plans. The outcome of this process is that progress towards targets is closely monitored and there is coherence in the wide range of initiatives the school has taken in order to raise standards.
82. The school aims provide a clear guide for policy, practices and procedures. There is a clear commitment to improvement and the raising of standards. Central to the realisation of this commitment are the processes of improvement planning and self-evaluation. The senior leadership team has a clear understanding of the importance of monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning in order to raise standards and has provided good leadership in the development of evaluative strategies within the school. Through a carefully structured programme of departmental reviews and lesson observations, senior managers have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas in which improvement is needed. The school makes very good use of new technology to store and retrieve essential management information. A comprehensive assessment database has been established and good use is made of this information by the senior leadership team. Detailed analyses of pupils' performance are undertaken and trends in performance are closely scrutinised as part of the review process with heads of department. There is now a need to ensure that all subject leaders and co-ordinators are equally effective in monitoring and evaluating work in their areas and in making use of assessment information to guide planning. While there is evidence of very good practice in some subjects, for example in English and ICT, there is room for improvement in others. The school recognises this and has plans to develop these aspects of the work of middle managers.
83. The overall quality of management provided by heads of department is good. The quality of leadership and management in English is excellent and having a significant impact on standards. Within the performing arts, very good leadership and management in drama and music have led to significant progress since the last inspection. Pupils derive great benefit from the very good quality of provision in these areas. Good progress in the humanities owes much to the good leadership of the head of humanities, while good leadership is also being provided in mathematics, science, design and technology and physical education. However, in the absence of a head of religious education the interim management arrangements for the subject are creating too great a workload for the head of history, who has been given responsibility for

the subject. Leadership in ICT, which was identified as having weaknesses at the time of the last inspection, is now good and is contributing to improvement in the subject. Although there is evidence of the increasing use of assessment information in subjects such as mathematics and history, it is a weakness in some other subjects.

84. The co-ordination of special educational needs provision is very good. All legal requirements are met and the appointed governor is well informed and plays an important part in work in the area. There is close liaison with external agencies. All teachers have received appropriate training on the requirements of the new Code of Practice.
85. The governing body fulfils most of its statutory requirements. The exceptions are the provision of a daily act of worship and of religious education in Years 10 and 11, and the sixth form. The governors are knowledgeable and well aware of the scope of their responsibilities. They receive regular reports on results and expenditure, and take part in training events in order that they can perform the role of 'critical friends' most effectively. Relationships with the principal and senior staff are supportive and professional; governors effectively delegate many of their responsibilities to them and contribute to performance management arrangements. Overall, the governing body operates with appropriate effectiveness.
86. The quality of financial management and planning is very good. Governors are actively involved with the principal and the senior leadership team in financial planning and monitoring and are given very good support by the school administrative and secretarial staff. All school plans are carefully costed and directly linked to educational outcomes. The school is in receipt of a number of additional grants and these contribute to what appears to be a high income per pupil. However, all expenditure is aimed at improving standards and governors have agreed with the principal that additional support staff are justified in providing more time for teachers to teach. This has led to staffing costs being above average. The school has very good procedures to ensure that the principles of best value for money are applied in the use of its resources, and all additional funding received by the school is used for the intended purposes. The few weaknesses raised in the most recent auditor's report have now been corrected. The school provides good value for money.
87. Many strengths in leadership and senior management have been maintained since the last inspection. The key issues of the last report were tackled vigorously, soon after the inspection, and good progress has been made, including raising standards of literacy and ensuring greater consistency in teaching and learning. The range of courses provided in the sixth form has been extended and the school is successfully building on its strengths in the performing arts. The structure of the school week has been changed and curriculum provision for science, modern foreign languages and music has been improved. However, although the amount of curriculum time for religious education has been improved in Years 7 to 9, it remains inadequate in Years 10 and 11. The school remains unable to provide a daily act of corporate worship and there is still too little attention to pupils' spiritual development across the school as a whole. There are now closer links between pastoral and curriculum management so that pupils' academic and personal development are monitored and supported more effectively.

Resourcing

88. Teachers are suitably qualified by training and, in nearly all cases, by experience to cover appropriate aspects of the curriculum, including special educational needs. The school, in common with many in the area, experiences difficulty in recruiting teachers and has worked hard in trying to fill all teaching posts with permanent staff. Although the school has been successful in most subjects, difficulty has been experienced in recruiting suitably qualified religious education teachers and this affects the continuity of pupils' learning. Performance management arrangements are in place and clearly linked to the school's priorities for improvement. The induction of new staff is very good and new teachers are well supported. A strength of the school is its involvement in teacher training. It is involved with the Graduate Teacher Programme and has an excellent record as the lead school in the SCITT programme, which operates with five schools in the local consortium, and is based on the school site. School staff provide very good mentors for trainee teachers on both schemes. The SCITT

programme has provided 10 teachers for the school over the past three years and is providing a useful means of tackling teacher recruitment problems in the area. There are seven SCITT students training in the school this year.

89. The school makes effective use of in-service training to increase the expertise of staff. All teachers have participated in literacy training and effective strategies are now in use in most subjects. The number of support staff is appropriate in all areas of the school. Support staff are very effective in helping the school to achieve its aims. Computer technician support is good, systems are well maintained and provide a reliable resource for both administrative and curriculum use. Administrative, technical and lunchtime staff provide good service for the school.
90. Resources are adequate to meet the needs of the curriculum. The learning resource centre provides a good range of texts to support pupils' work across the curriculum. The librarian is enthusiastic and the use of the library has improved, so that it has a good impact on learning. Patterns of borrowing are monitored in order to gauge reading habits and provide the most appropriate reading materials for pupils and staff. The resource centre promotes reading and research skills through the Year 7 library induction programme, the wide range of texts for different ability groups, opportunities for pupils to gain work experience in the library and extra-curricular activities. The overall provision of computers is good, but some subjects, including science, music and modern foreign languages, do not have easy access to them. The use of computers, while satisfactory overall, is not developed well enough in art, music and history. Although there are some shortages of books in science, the overall resources available to the school and their effective deployment have a positive effect upon pupils' learning and the standards achieved. Teachers are helped to cope with paperwork by helpful administrative and learning resources staff.
91. The accommodation for the school is unsatisfactory. The number of pupils and students in the school has increased by about 17 per cent since the last inspection and there are a number of shortcomings that arise from this growth in pupil numbers. The school dining area, for example, is totally inadequate for the number of pupils and students in the school. Many subjects have large adjacent specialist rooms and departments make the best use of these areas; in most, the displays help to create a bright and stimulating learning environment. However, there are also areas in need of decoration and the external environment has areas in need of refurbishment. A particular weakness is the accommodation for resistant materials and engineering where the layout of the rooms and the access to equipment and resources constrains independent learning and impedes improvement in standards. The lack of a theory base for physical education restricts the teaching and learning strategies. The school is in the final stages of making a Private Finance Initiative bid to tackle these and other inadequacies in the accommodation. Good standards of cleanliness and care, provided by the site management and school cleaning staff, maintain a pleasant functional environment. However, owing to the lack of space in the school dining room, many pupils eat food outside and a considerable amount of litter is left in the playgrounds after break and lunchtimes.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

92. The sixth form is effectively co-ordinated. There are clear distinct aims that underpin the school's commitment to raising achievement and success of students. Pupils of differing abilities are integrated well and considerable effort is made to ensure that this is an inclusive sixth form. Close contact between the assistant principal and the two co-directors of the sixth form ensures that on a day-to-day basis, arrangements work well. Regular meetings with the four confederation schools ensure that a broad curriculum provision is available for all pupils in the area. Currently all AS and A-level courses are provided at the school. Following a review and student survey, the sixth form action plan has identified the key issues for development to be careers and higher education guidance, and further expansion of the curriculum. The school has identified the need to strengthen the role of the sixth form tutor as a mentor so that student progress can be more closely monitored and to ensure that the courses followed are closely matched to students' needs. The sixth form is distinct yet also an important part of the

whole school. Sixth formers are known well individually and benefit from responsibilities they undertake. Some contribute effectively to the school as a whole. The school strives hard to encourage pupils to continue their education beyond the age of 16. The range of courses offered suits the abilities of most students. For many pupils, studying one-year vocational courses, success has led them either to employment or further study at the school or the local College of Further Education. Expenditure on the sixth form is contained within its income and the sixth form operates cost-effectively. Students' progress is monitored carefully and appropriate action is taken to provide additional support when this is necessary.

93. Staffing arrangements are satisfactory. While overall the number of teachers is in suitable proportion to the number of sixth form students, several small teaching groups have been afforded, to accommodate student choice. Teachers are suitably qualified for the courses provided. Arrangements for monitoring sixth form teaching are systematic, as for the school as a whole. Overall, the sixth form is adequately resourced. Growth in sixth form numbers means that the sixth form accommodation is wholly inadequate. Although the accommodation for subject areas is generally satisfactory, the accommodation for recreation or independent study is not. At the time of the inspection the rooms allocated to students in Years 12 and 13 had no furniture. As a result the rooms do not provide an environment in which responsible attitudes to the use of personal study periods can be established and this has a detrimental effect on learning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

94. To raise further the standards of work, attainment and progress of students, the governors, principal, senior leadership team and staff should:

Main School

- (1) Strengthen teaching of religious education, so that the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus are met in Years 10 and 11, and provide consistently good opportunities for reflection and collective worship (*paragraphs 6, 44, 55, 85, 87, 186, 188, 193-195*);
- (2) Ensure that there is a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities with regard to the co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation of the PACE programme (*paragraphs 47, 131*);
- (3) Strengthen procedures for monitoring and evaluating work in subjects by ensuring that all teachers with managerial and co-ordinating roles have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and are provided with the training necessary to enable them to monitor and evaluate teaching and learning effectively (*paragraphs 82, 83, 116, 136, 167, 184, 192*);
- (4) Strive vigorously and, with governors, work collaboratively with the local education authority to improve the accommodation, especially for lunchtime use (*paragraphs 91, 124, 142, 173, 183*).

Sixth form

- (1) Ensure that there is an appropriate induction programme for students entering the sixth form and that sixth form tutors are provided with the necessary training to enable them to perform their roles effectively (*paragraphs 75, 92*);
- (2) Draw on the models of good practice in sixth form teaching to ensure that all teachers use a wider range of teaching and learning strategies and in particular strategies that encourage students to take greater responsibility for their own learning (*paragraphs 17, 41, 196, 201, 207, 227*);
- (3) Comply with the statutory requirements with regard to the provision of religious education in the sixth form (*paragraphs 59, 61, 85, 87*);

- (4) Ensure that there is an effective system for recording students' attendance so that the school has can confirm immediately when students are on and off site (*paragraph 28*);
- (5) Strive vigorously to improve accommodation for students' personal study and recreational activities (*paragraph 80*).

In addition to the preceding areas for improvement the following less significant weaknesses need attention:

Main school

- The classroom management skills of few teachers (*paragraphs 36, 107, 147*); access to and use of information and communication technology in some subjects (*paragraphs 14, 90, 60*); provision for design and technology (*paragraphs 46, 139, 143*); the information contained on some pupils' IEPs and the availability of learning support in some lessons (*paragraphs 9, 36*).

The school has a good sense of its own strengths and is aware of areas for improvement. Almost all of the issues raised are included in school plans.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	138
	Sixth form	56
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		78

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 - 11							
Number	6	32	55	42	3	0	0
Percentage	4	23	40	30	2	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	3	23	22	8	0	0	0
Percentage	5	41	39	14	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1453	191
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	210	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	16	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	244	3

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	38

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	44
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	88

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	90.7
National comparative data	90.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.7
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	136	141	277

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	99	90	78
	Girls	113	73	57
	Total	212	163	135
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (53)	59 (53)	49 (43)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	41 (22)	36 (24)	15 (18)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	103	97	91
	Girls	122	88	77
	Total	225	185	168
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	81 (56)	67 (54)	61 (53)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	(24)	(24)	(19)
	National	32 (31)	43 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	133	128	261

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	51	106	119
	Girls	60	121	126
	Total	111	227	245
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	43 (37)	88 (85)	95 (93)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	(96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	35.1
	National	39.0

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	11
	National	N/A

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	30	32	62

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	31	36	67
	Average point score per candidate	3.5	3.8	3.6
National	Average point score per candidate	N/A	N/A	N/A

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	30	32	62	1	4	5
	Average point score per candidate	12.5	12.4	12.5	2	9.8	8.2
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.7	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

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

Exclusions in the last school year

No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
1606	143	0
0	0	0
13	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
2	0	0
1	0	0
2	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
11	0	0
0	0	0
2	1	0
1	0	0
4	0	0
0	0	0
2	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 - 13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	87.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.8

Education support staff: Y7 - 13

Total number of education support staff	24
Total aggregate hours worked per week	561

Deployment of teachers: Y7 - 13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 - 11

Key Stage 3	27.1
Key Stage 4	24.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/02
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	£
Total income	4,887,501
Total expenditure	4,930,288
Expenditure per pupil	3,144
Balance brought forward from previous year	42,932
Balance carried forward to next year	145

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	41.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	31.4
<hr/>	
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3.3
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1644
Number of questionnaires returned	227

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	52	6	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	37	52	3	0	7
Behaviour in the school is good.	20	51	16	2	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	56	18	4	4
The teaching is good.	22	64	6	0	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	52	8	1	11
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	40	55	2	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	52	43	3	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	20	56	15	2	8
The school is well led and managed.	25	57	7	0	11
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	30	57	5	0	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	47	44	2	1	6

Other issues raised by parents

- Twenty-three parents attended the meeting with the registered inspector. The issues they raised reflected, to a large extent, the findings of the questionnaire.

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Standards at the end of Year 9.
- Teaching and learning.
- Lively and innovative approaches to implementing the Key Stage 3 National Literacy Strategy.
- Outstanding leadership and management.
- The use of ICT, assessment information and initiatives to raise standards.

Areas for improvement

- Standards at the end of Year 11.
- Pupils' writing skills.

95. In 2002, standards in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were above the national average and well above average for similar schools. Results have been improving each year apart from the slight dip in 2001. The upward trend is faster than the national trend and is a direct result of teachers adopting innovative strategies to tackle weak literacy skills and the effective use of assessment information to raise standards. Pupils achieve better results in English than those in mathematics and science. The gap between boys' and girls' attainment has been narrowed. Given standards of attainment on entry to the school, achievement at the end of Year 9 is good.
96. The percentage of pupils achieving GCSE grades A*-C was well below average in 2001. The literature results were below average. However, the English results for 2002, though below average, showed a marked improvement whereas the English literature results were similar to those of the previous year. Lower attaining pupils achieve well and the proportion of pupils attaining GCSE grades in the A*-G range is similar to the national average. Girls do better than boys and the percentage of girls achieving the higher grades A*- A grades was slightly better than the national average. When standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are taken into account overall achievement at the end of Year 11 is satisfactory, with some pupils doing better.
97. Inspection evidence confirms that overall, standards by the end of Years 9 and 11 reflect the most recent results, with pupils making good progress in reading and satisfactory progress in writing. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are rising and the upward trend continues in Years 10 and 11. This is largely due to the effective use of highly interactive teaching methods and the specification of precise learning objectives. This includes using the acronyms WALT (What am I learning today?) followed by TIB (This is because) and then, WILF (What I am looking for). Pupils are left in no doubt about the purpose of a lesson and are able to respond positively when learning is reviewed.
98. Speaking skills are generally good, with most pupils able to communicate their ideas effectively. They participate well in discussion and display good debating skills. This was seen in a Year 11 lesson, for example, where middle attaining pupils gave sustained answers and widened the discussion during a lively discussion on Gothic Horror after analysing Poe's, 'The Tell Tale Heart'. Higher attaining pupils tend to take on more demanding roles during oral work and boys tend to contribute more than girls to class discussion. Nevertheless, pupils work well together. They listen attentively and show good levels of concentration and interest. This was seen, for example, in a Year 7 lesson on sentence structure. However, there is a need for pupils to be more consistent in the use of formal spoken English.
99. Most pupils reach above average standards in reading by the end of Years 9 and 11. Teachers impart a love of literature and the emphasis on analyzing texts is successful in developing pupils' enthusiasm towards a wide range of literary texts. Pupils' grasp and appreciation of

literary texts is a strength in their learning. A significant number of Year 7 pupils with below average reading ages respond well to the intensive Early Reading Response (ERR) work. The interactive approach increases their confidence to read independently and become reflective when blending sounds to pronounce words. Pupils display good analytical skills when discussing themes, characters and the writers' use of language because teachers develop their research skills well. Pupils display an increasing knowledge of the social, historical and cultural background of texts. They also work effectively in small groups to analyse texts. Very good examples were seen in a Year 11 lesson where lower attaining pupils were analysing Priestley's, 'An Inspector Calls' and in a Year 10 lesson where pupils were studying Shelley's, 'Frankenstein'.

100. Pupils display a range of writing skills and while those of higher attaining pupils are generally above average, basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar, are apparent in the work of many. Teachers maintain a sharp focus on developing good basic literacy skills and have identified weaknesses in sentence construction as areas for improvement. The department ensures that pupils use a topic sentence and the method: Point, Quote, Explain (PQE) to improve the quality of written expression and analysis. This is helping to improve standards of writing. Higher attaining pupils structure their work coherently into well-organised paragraphs. All pupils engage in extended writing in various forms and most make good use of ICT. Pupils with special educational needs make reasonably good progress in writing because of the intensive approach to developing basic literacy skills.
101. The quality of teaching is very good overall and occasionally excellent. Planning is detailed and teachers use the Key Stage 3 Literacy Strategy extensively to improve basic skills. The pace of lessons is brisk with intensive starter activities and structured, focused plenary sessions, which involve pupils articulating their achievements. Planning focuses on the needs of pupils and irrespective of their ability, work is always challenging. As such, higher attaining pupils are stretched, as demonstrated in a Year 9 lesson when gifted and talented pupils were involved in exciting and innovative cross-curricular work with drama and English exploring the theme of slavery followed by role-play. Teachers employ modelling, peer-assessment, regular feedback, high quality worksheets and discussions to enthuse pupils. They motivate pupils to aspire beyond their target grade. For example, in a superb lesson, lower attaining Year 11 pupils were given the openings of sample essays with different grades to demonstrate the standard to which they can aspire. Classroom management is very good, as is the deployment of assistants who challenge, support and encourage pupils with medical, learning and behavioural difficulties. Marking is constructive, with concise targets to help pupils improve their work. On the rare occasions when teaching is satisfactory rather than good, it is because pupils are reticent and not pushed enough.
102. Leadership of the department is excellent. A very committed team supports the head of department who provides a clear focus on raising standards. This has led to the introduction of a range of initiatives well in advance of many local and national initiatives. For example, the extensive use of ICT and the excellent transition arrangements to ensure continuity when pupils enter the school in Year 7. The department's work is firmly based on the assumption that all pupils can achieve their potential and so there is a continuing drive to raise standards. A carefully constructed scheme of work underpins teaching and curricular provision is very good. This has led to the department's recognition as a leading English department in the local education authority. Assessment procedures are very good and assessment information is used effectively to guide planning, set targets and monitor pupils' progress. Teaching is effectively monitored and linked to performance management. This makes a very good contribution to pupils' achievement.
103. Since the last inspection, the department has made good progress in developing strategies and a range of initiatives to raise standards and improve pupils' vocabulary and oral skills. The English department is a centre of excellence and is well placed to make further improvements in the GCSE examinations.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths:

- Teaching and learning.
- Effective use of assessment information and target setting to raise standards.
- The effective implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy is supporting the improvement of pupils' basic numerical skills.
- Strategies to raise the standards at all levels.

Areas for development:

- Strategies to challenge the gifted and talented.
- The sharing of good practice within the department.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in a few lessons.

104. Standards of attainment in National Curriculum tests in mathematics at the end of Year 9 are improving in line with the national trend. Results in 2002 were an improvement on 2001 and although below the national average were average in comparison with similar schools. Boys' results are improving at a faster rate than girls'. Test results are below those achieved in English but above those achieved in science. When attainment on entry in Year 7 is taken into account, achievement at the end of Year 9 is consistent with expectations. The number of pupils attaining A*-C grades in the GCSE examination in 2001 was below the national average. However, there has been a steady increase in the number of pupils who are achieving grade C. Results in 2002 were similar to those achieved in 2001 with no significant difference in the results obtained by girls and boys. Results show steady improvement over the last five years.
105. Inspection evidence shows progress to be satisfactory or better in Years 7 to 9. Pupils with special needs are well supported in lessons and make good progress as a result. For example, a group of lower attaining pupils in Year 7 made good progress in developing their understanding of fractions because of the effective support they received from their teacher and a teaching assistant. The lesson was well-planned and effective use was made of a starter activity to engage their interest and enthusiasm. There are no significant differences in the performance of girls and boys. By Year 9 pupils develop good algebraic skills. This was seen in a Year 9 lesson where pupils were able to expand brackets and simplify expressions. Pupils worked confidently and, with good support from the teacher, were able to extend their skills considerably by the end of the lesson.
106. Pupils make good progress through Years 10 and 11, even though standards are below average at the end of Year 11. Inspection evidence shows standards to be above those indicated by recent GCSE examination results. For example, a higher achieving group in Year 10 were working with moving averages. They were able to manipulate and interpret realistic data representing car sales as well as present their work graphically with the use of computer software. In this lesson pupils demonstrated high level thinking skills and were able to deepen their understanding with excellent use of technology. Pupils at all levels of attainment were aware of their targets and had the confidence to seek support in order to achieve them. In the few lessons where pupils were not sufficiently challenged or the learning objectives were not clear enough, the pace was slow and the pupils lacked motivation and enthusiasm. The department is making good use of national mathematics competitions to stimulate motivation and interest. In collaboration with performing arts, the department is making innovative use of a drama teaching assistant to raise interest in lesson starter activities.
107. The quality of teaching in mathematics is good overall. Most lessons make effective use of the short introductory activity to settle pupils and stimulate their interest before embarking on the main activity of the lesson. Effective management of some potentially challenging pupils results in their working well and making good progress. However, in the one unsatisfactory lesson observed, pupils' interest was not engaged and classroom management skills were weak, with the result that not enough learning took place. In order to improve teaching and learning there is a need to ensure that all lessons have clear learning objectives and that learning activities are carefully planned to match and challenge the needs of all pupils. Particularly good

examples of effective teaching were seen in a Year 7 lesson on average, and in a Year 10 lesson, where good questioning skills engaged pupils' interest and led to successful learning. All teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and this is used effectively to question pupils and offer clear explanations. Pupils are able to use calculators and computers confidently and most are able to calculate mental arithmetic problems quickly and accurately in their head. Good use is made of numerical exercises to promote the learning of tables and the recognition of patterns in sequences. Pupils are able to measure angles and lines accurately and make correct use of mathematical equipment.

108. Relationships are generally good and teachers have a clear sense of care and interest in their pupils. This results in generally good behaviour and positive attitudes towards the subject. However, in one lesson excessive calling out and the inappropriate behaviour of a few pupils, impeded teaching and learning to the extent that the lesson was unsatisfactory. The majority of pupils work well together in groups and show appropriate respect towards their teachers and other pupils. Good use is made of resources to support teaching and learning. The effective use of white boards was seen in a Year 11 lesson, for example, to promote learning and quick recall. Good work cards and starter activities have been devised for use across the department. Good use is made of the overhead projector to make explanations clear.
109. The department is well managed and there is an effective, and conscientious teaching team. Schemes of work are well constructed and support effective teaching and learning. The displays of pupils' work show good evidence of cross-curricular work and the subject's contribution to the development of literacy skills. A considerable amount of assessment information is made available to the department and this is used well to guide planning. Effective links with the primary schools ensure continuity at the time of transfer. Learning is stimulated by the introduction of master classes, which provide additional challenge to higher achievers. Good progress has been made since the last inspection and the department continues to embrace new ideas and initiatives in an attempt to raise standards.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good with some very good and outstanding features.
- Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good.
- The attitudes and behaviour of pupils.

Areas for improvement

- Standards at the end of Year 9.
- The provision of books and equipment.

110. Standards of work throughout the school are at least satisfactory and are improving because teaching is good. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.
111. Results in the 2002 National Curriculum test results for pupils at the end of Year 9 were well below average. When compared with other schools, results were well below average for Levels 5 and 6. Science results were well below those in English and mathematics. Results were not as good as those for 2001 partly due to an administrative error in entering some pupils for the wrong test paper, and partly due to frequent changes in teaching personnel. Teachers accurately assessed the attainment of pupils in Year 9. Since the last inspection, results have varied but have not improved significantly. There are indications, however, that results will improve in 2003.
112. GCSE examination results, in 2001, were above national averages and well above those for English and maths. They were also well above average when compared with similar schools. However, the proportion of pupils obtaining the highest A* and A grades was below average. Results were similar for boys and girls. Even though results in 2002 fell slightly, results have improved significantly since the last inspection.

113. As a result of good teaching, pupils are making good gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding in science. Standards have improved throughout the school and are now at least in line with national averages. For example, higher attaining pupils in Year 9 understand 'energy transforms' and are beginning to understand how to write chemical equations. Lower-attaining pupils are less confident; they cannot write equations but do know how acids react with carbonates. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 11 have a very good understanding of unsaturated organic compounds and how stomata operate in the leaves of plants. Lower-attaining pupils are much less secure in their knowledge and understanding but do know, for example, that chlorophyll is used during photosynthesis. Progress made from Year 7 to Year 11 is good. The standards of literacy and numerically throughout the school are at least satisfactory and often good.
114. Teaching is good overall with very little unsatisfactory teaching. Pupils learn well as a result. Some lessons have very good and occasionally excellent features. The principal features of teaching are the effective use of teachers' good subject knowledge, high expectations, good planning and, in many lessons, a range of methods that maintain interest and promote learning. In some lessons, however, there was not enough opportunity for pupils to work independently. Homework is set regularly to extended and consolidated classwork.
115. Assessment is used very well to monitor the progress of pupils, to identify underachievers, adjust teaching and guide curricular planning. Day-to-day marking, while being thorough overall, does not always indicate how pupils can improve, neither does it always provide targets for future work, although there are excellent examples of both. The identification of appropriate learning objectives, coupled with good support for pupils' learning, enables pupils, throughout the school, including those with special educational needs, to make good progress in improving their knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts. Nevertheless, there are indications that the highest attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9 could achieve higher standards if they were provided with greater challenge and more opportunities for independent learning. In the majority of lessons pupils work hard and at a good pace.
116. Leadership and management of the science department, led by a hard-working and dedicated acting head of department, are good. She is supported by an adequate number of teachers, who work well together as a team. There are several teachers who are either new to the profession or still in training. They are well supported by more experienced colleagues. Educational direction is clear and focused. As a result, there is evidence of new developments that are likely to lead to further improvements. The administration of the department on a day-to-day basis is good and subject planning is closely linked to school development planning. However, the department has yet to engage in longer term strategic planning. Individual teachers keep accurate records of pupils' progress and these are used effectively to guide lesson planning. The quality of teaching is monitored through lesson observations and the outcomes used to raise standards. Resources, in terms of basic equipment, are barely adequate and even though the provision of textbooks has improved recently, the overall provision of books, including those in the school library, is poor. The provision of laptop computers, while being good, is not supported by sufficient software such as CD-ROMs. The number of rooms in the department is adequate and they are in good order. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection and the capacity for improvement is good.

ART AND DESIGN

Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers plan well before lessons.
- Teachers are well informed and possess good subject knowledge.
- Clear objectives are set for pupils during lessons.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are good.

Areas for improvement

- The slow pace of some lessons.
- Opportunities for design work involving ICT and photography.
- The content of assignment briefs and pupils' interests.
- The attainment of boys.

117. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with levels of attainment in art and design that are below the national average for pupils of their age. Consequently, the majority struggle to achieve control over basic drawing, painting and craft skills in the initial stages. However, most enjoy drawing and painting and apply themselves readily to the task of acquiring new knowledge and appropriate skills. Throughout Year 8 and into Year 9 they make steady progress and by the end of Year 9 most produce work of a standard that is broadly in line with the national average, with a small minority working above. Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated into teaching groups and are expected to work hard to achieve their full potential. Achievement is good from the start of Year 7 to the end of Year 9.
118. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 suggest that standards are above the national average. Inspection evidence indicates that these assessments are unreliable and that standards are closer to the national average. Some adjustment is required therefore, to ensure that these assessments are brought into line with the national figures.
119. In the 2001 GCSE examination, the results were well below the national average. Boys' attainment was well below that of girls'. These pupils performed less well in art and design than in all other subjects that they took that year. There was a further decline in attainment in the 2002 examination, with a fall in the overall number of pupils who achieved the highest grades and a significant fall in the number of boys who achieved grades A* - C. However, these results must be seen in light of issues relating to staffing and curricular changes that have had a major impact on the department since 1999. During that year the previous head of department was absent on long-term illness. The new head of department has only been in post since the year 2000, since when there has been a complete turnover of staff in the department.
120. Inspection evidence shows that Year 7 pupils respond positively to the tasks that are set by their teachers. They work well to improve their drawing skills to achieve better control over composition, line and tone in their two-dimensional studies. In Year 8 pupils' concentration has improved and they are capable of engaging in extended work over time. They are also better at managing their own time. By the time pupils enter Year 9 they are starting to produce art and craft work that is broadly in line with national expectations. However, the lowest attaining pupils struggle to gain control over basic drawing and painting techniques. The majority of pupils make better use of line and tone to describe the shape and form of objects, such as faces, that they have been asked to draw.
121. In Years 10 and 11, work seen in pupils' portfolios indicates that they are making satisfactory progress. They are however, working within a very narrow model of the curriculum that places undue emphasis on traditional drawing, painting and craft skills. In Year 11, the content of most lessons is determined by the GCSE examination specifications. In one lesson seen pupils had great difficulty in settling down to work. They were not highly motivated by the theme of still-life. Careful consideration needs to be given to the design of assignment briefs that draw upon each pupil's own interests as starting points for personal investigation and exploration. At present there is little evidence of pupils producing images using cameras, computers, scanners and printers. The majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, are producing work of a standard that is broadly in line with national expectations.
122. Although teaching in all years is satisfactory overall, there are many strong features. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are technically competent to teach basic drawing, painting and craft skills. Lesson planning is good and clear objectives are set for pupils. The management of pupils is good and all, including those with special educational needs, are expected to work to the best of their ability. Good use is made of the very limited range of media and materials that are currently available. Assignment briefs need to be reviewed and re-written in such a way that they draw much more heavily on pupils' own experiences of the

world. At present too much emphasis is placed on secondary historical art material. Assessment, recording and monitoring systems lack rigour at present. Greater needs to be made of assessment information in target setting for individual pupils.

123. In the recent past there have been major issues surrounding the leadership and management of the art and design department and staffing in the department generally. Undoubtedly this has had a very unsettling impact on both teaching and learning. However, since the appointment of a new head of department in 2000, staffing issues have been largely resolved. The narrowness of the present curriculum is acknowledged and steps are being taken to remedy this situation. Two new members of staff have been appointed who bring expertise in ICT and photography.
124. Although the accommodation is satisfactory, the art studios require refurbishment and in particular, the provision of storage facilities for pupils' work, resources and equipment. The art studios are too small to accommodate some of the large group sizes of over 30 pupils and this has an inevitable impact on learning. Resources are just adequate, but pupils have very limited access to a wide range of media and materials, which are essential if they are to develop fully those skills that are necessary to the communication of ideas and expression of feelings.
125. Although there is evidence of a decline in overall standards since the last inspection, the reasons for this are clear. On the basis of work seen during the inspection there is now a distinct, positive trend in terms of the standards of work that pupils are producing from Year 7 through to Year 11 and the department is well poised to make improvement.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths.

- Good teaching.
- Opportunities for pupils to contribute to decision making.
- The contribution to pupils' personal development.

Areas for improvement.

- The co-ordination of the PACE programme.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning.

126. The curriculum plan is that pupils are provided with their entitlement to citizenship education mainly through the PACE programme and supported by related themes and topics covered in other subjects. Pupils also have opportunities to develop an understanding of responsible citizenship through activities such as elections to the School Council and the extra-curricular activity programme. Overall, these provide a good range of opportunities to enhance the development of citizenship and ensure that by the end of Year 11 pupils have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of what good citizenship entails.
127. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good. They enjoy the opportunities for paired and group work that the programme allows, together with variety provided by the range of external speakers. Relationships are good.
128. In Years 7 and 8, the PACE programme is taught by form tutors. The programme is taught by form tutors and carefully structured to provide them with the resources needed to cover the topics. The programme provides a good range of appropriate and stimulating activities. Teachers prepare their lessons well, using an outline plan that lists the topics to be covered over the whole school year. Teaching in the lessons observed was good overall and pupils showed an increasing awareness of the importance of personal and social responsibility to citizenship. In one excellent Year 9 lesson, pupils made excellent progress in understanding both the personal hygiene and wider social issues related to sex and contraception because of the teacher's clear explanations and guidance.

129. In Years 9, 10 and 11, the programme builds well upon this solid foundation. Pupils rotate between specialist teachers, who deliver one or more of the various programme strands. The programme is again well structured and covers a wide range of relevant social issues, including relationships, prejudice and discrimination, drug education and sex education. Careers education provides good support to the development of citizenship, as pupils become realistic planners for their own futures. Similarly, work experience placements in Years 10 or 11 prepare pupils well for life after school and give them a good insight into the responsibilities of employers and employees.
130. Effective contributions are also made to the development of citizenship through drama, for example, where pupils are able to examine through role-play the causes and consequences of interpersonal conflict. Similarly, in physical education pupils learn to accept decisions and in the upper years take on the role of decision makers when acting as referees or umpires. Pupils gain good experience of the electoral process through the representative School Council. They learn the importance of accommodating the viewpoints of others in arriving at decisions through discussion and debate. In history, pupils become aware of how war affects population movements and this gives them a greater understanding of the plight of refugees and asylum seekers. Through religious education pupils also gain a greater understanding of not only of the similarities and differences between world religions, but also differences within particular religions. This helps them to better understand the factors influencing world events.
131. Overall, the organisation of citizenship within the PACE programme is satisfactory. However, responsibility for the co-ordination of the programme as a whole is shared between three teachers and as a result, there is uncertainty about where responsibility for monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning lies. In order to ensure continued improvement in citizenship education there is a need to clarify these responsibilities in order to ensure consistency in teaching and learning and effective monitoring of pupils' progress.

DRAMA

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

Strengths

- The school's status as a performing arts college considerably enhances the opportunities available both to pupils and to the wider community.
- High standards in GCSE examinations.
- Good teaching promotes good achievement.
- Drama makes a very positive contribution to pupils' personal development.
- Effective leadership and management and good teamwork.

Areas for improvement

- The attitudes that some boys have towards the subject.

132. Standards of attainment in drama at the end of Year 11 are consistently above average. Results in GCSE drama and expressive arts were well above average in 2001 with pupils achieving on average over a grade higher than in most of their other subjects. Although results fell slightly in 2002 they remained high. The two subjects have increased in popularity considerably in recent years; in 1999 there were 30 candidates while in 2002 over 90 pupils were entered for GCSE examinations.
133. Inspection evidence shows that although standards of attainment are high, they are not quite as high as the GCSE results would suggest. However, the department suffered from some instability in staffing last year and teachers rightly put their efforts into maintaining high standards in the examination classes. There are clear signs that the currently good quality of teaching and the commitment to improvement are having a positive effect on pupils' attainment. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are able to create the drama and move it on, with a sound understanding of what is dramatically effective. Most collaborate well and in Year 9 lessons some effective still images and short improvisations demonstrated an ability to create character and knowledge of dramatic conventions. Standards are impeded at times by the inability of some pupils, most

often boys, to remain focused and absorbed in their role. Work observed in Year 10 and 11 lessons demonstrates a similar pattern; pupils have good ideas and recognise what is dramatically effective, but the quality of their work is sometimes reduced by a lack of distinction between *acting* and *becoming* the character. However, the work during the inspection of pupils who attend extra-curricular clubs and rehearsals confirms the high performance standards for which the school is noted.

134. Pupils display generally positive attitudes towards the subject and their behaviour is good. They enjoy the work but a significant minority has yet to make the leap from regarding drama as play rather to seeing it as a serious and important subject.
135. The quality of teaching and learning is good and at times very good. Most drama teachers are new to the school and are already working very well as a team to raise the profile and standards of classroom drama to match those of extra-curricular work. They have very good knowledge of and enthusiasm for the subject and the very good relationships with their pupils are building a sense of trust and security within which pupils can flourish. Lessons are very well planned. Teachers are careful to ensure that learning objectives are shared with pupils and take every opportunity to address the spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of pupils' development through topics and their teaching approaches. This was demonstrated in a very good Year 9 lesson. The teacher worked in role to introduce pupils to the story of 'Romeo and Juliet' through a monologue which transposed the story to an Asian background. Pupils were completely absorbed by her performance and understood the moral and social issues raised. They made very good progress in devising short scenes based on the story. Assessment is well used in many lessons to show pupils how to further improve the drama, although in some lessons the teacher tends to take the lead role in this rather than involving pupils more actively so that they can evaluate the success of their own and others' contributions.
136. The department is very well led and managed. The recently appointed head of performing arts has drawn together the various skills of established and new staff very effectively and responsibilities are shared to exploit their different interests and strengths. She has identified the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning as priorities for development and procedures for monitoring and assessing pupils' progress have been updated. In addition, the curriculum is being revised in order to introduce and consolidate the use and understanding of a wider range of drama techniques and conventions and to include more opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of other cultures and traditions. The new workbooks being used for each unit of work encourage reflection and contribute to the development of pupils' writing skills. She is now leading the department in identifying ways in which it can attract more boys to take up the subject at GCSE level and to involve more of them in school productions. The introduction of the school's status as a specialist arts college has been outstandingly well managed and has brought about considerably increased opportunities for pupils and for the wider community. These include very good accommodation and resources, a wide range of extra-curricular activities and local, national and international links with other institutions.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the provision for design technology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching, especially in food technology, textiles and graphics.
- The new teacher assessment and self-assessment systems.
- The use of computers and application of literacy strategies.

Areas for Improvement

- Consistency of designing skills in Years 7 to 9.
- The sharing of good practice.
- GCSE results, particularly in engineering and food technology.

137. The 2001 teacher assessments showed pupils' attainment to be in line with national expectations. The 2002 teacher assessments were above the 2001 assessments. Inspection evidence does not substantiate teacher assessments, because pupils' designing skills lack consistency across the department.
138. The proportion of pupils gaining A*-C grades in the 2001 GCSE examination was well below the national average. Boys' results were lower than girls'. Textiles and graphics produced the strongest results. In 2002 the results were similar to those gained in 2001. Pupils are not performing as well in design and technology as they are in other subjects.
139. Currently in Years 10 and 11 design and technology is an optional subject. Students have the choice of studying the subject through resistant materials, food technology, graphics, textiles and engineering or alternatively, opting for a new vocational GCSE. Attainment is below average at the end of Year 11 in engineering/resistant materials subjects, where boys predominate, but in line with expectations in food technology and above expectations in textiles and graphics. Standards in graphics and textiles have been maintained over recent years, while standards in food have improved because staffing difficulties over the last two years have been resolved. The major disparity across the aspects of technology is at the design stage. In some areas inconsistent attention to detail when researching and erratic use of the design process to plan is having an impact on the quality of making. Reduced curriculum time for technology in Years 7 to 9 restrains the content of the schemes of work, which is having a knock-on effect on the quality of designing in Years 10 and 11. For example in a Year 11 engineering lesson, pupils worked superficially on questionnaires to identify needs in their final design and then ignored the result of their investigations. In food technology, however, pupils gave detailed attention to the analysis of an existing convenience food by examining nutritional content, deconstructing and weighing ingredients and exploring packaging. The outcome of this investigation was then clearly seen in the quality of their own designs.
140. Pupils with special needs make very good progress. They enjoy practical work and their success improves their designing. Very good use of teaching assistants and of ICT, together with the effective application of literacy strategies, helps pupils in the presentation and accuracy of their written work. In the Year 7 textiles challenge, where pupils were asked to write about 'A Day without Textiles', creative writing was generally very good. Although the department does not have a policy for gifted and talented pupils, independent learning through challenging teaching and constructive feedback ensures that the majority of pupils achieve their potential.
141. The quality of teaching is good overall. Teaching and learning benefit from the industrial and commercial experience of the teaching team. Practical skills are taught well and enhanced by the diverse skill and experience of teachers and technicians. In the best teaching, lively, and well-planned lessons promoted high levels of participation and learning. In food technology, pupils concentrate hard and apply their numerical skills effectively to ensure accurate measurement of ingredients. The result is that all bakery products are of high quality. Teachers capitalise on every opportunity for learning. In textiles pupils' imagination is captured by a stimulating studio where displays of pupils' work, celebrated alongside beautiful designs from other cultures, highlight possibilities for showing flair and exploring new ideas to enhance, for example, their cushion covers.
142. Less successful lessons occurred where the rooms and furniture restricted independent learning because pupils could not circulate comfortably. In these rooms access to equipment and tools is difficult and this lead to disorganisation and a negative impact on designing and making.
143. Management of the department is good and capitalises on the strengths and diversity of the teaching team. Assessment procedures, which include good opportunities for pupils to engage in self-assessment, are embedded in the new schemes of work. The department's improvement plan is closely linked to the school improvement plan. The link between departmental planning and school planning is reinforced through the line management link to the senior leadership team. Improvement from the previous inspection is only satisfactory because although teaching and the use of ICT have improved there are still issues related to designing generally and attainment at the end of Year 11.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Teaching.
- Achievement.
- The capacity to sustain improvement.

Areas for improvement

- Access to and use of ICT.
- Fieldwork.
- The use of assessment.

144. Teachers' assessments show standards at the end of Year 9 to be consistent with the national average. This is confirmed by inspection findings. Given that attainment on entry in Year 7 was below average, attainment at the end of Year 9 represents good achievement.
145. Before 2002 the percentage of pupils gaining A*-C grades in the GCSE examination was below average. Even though the percentage of pupils gaining A*-G grades has generally been in line with the average, with girls reaching above average or average results for the last four years. Pupils taking geography did less well than in the other examination subjects taken. The department identified several areas, including the attainment levels of pupils choosing the option and coursework that have a bearing on relative performance and has worked hard to improve them. In the 2002 examination, results are much improved, with the percentage of A*-C grades above the 2001 national average and girls well above. Boys' grades, though still below average, show an appreciable improvement each year for the last three years. Achievement overall from standards at the end of Year 9 is good. The department is continuing to implement strategies to raise the level of boys' attainment. While the department is striving to raise the standards of all pupils, particular attention is being given to pupils predicted to obtain D grades and greater emphasis is being given to the application of ICT skills in fieldwork. Inspection evidence indicates that standards at the end of Year 11 are now much closer to national expectations.
146. The department puts much emphasis on the development of literacy and numeracy skills throughout Years 7 to 11. As a result pupils' writing skills are improving. With the help of writing frames, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, develop the ability to make notes and write extended pieces of work. This is seen in Year 9 pupils' writing on Japan, for example, and the notes of Year 7 pupils on earthquakes. In Year 7 there is also evidence of good imaginative writing, with understanding of the human and environmental consequences of an earthquake. Pupils are able to use a good technical vocabulary and they display good understanding of geographical processes and patterns in work on structural geological features. They also use number well, in graph work in climate and population studies, and in measurement and use of coordinates. Lower attaining pupils in Year 9 are able to use percentages in calculating age groups in work on population pyramids. By the end of Year 11 pupils are gathering and analysing data and reaching conclusions, and this is evident in coursework based on the local area. At present not enough use is made of ICT to support teaching and learning, although there has been an improvement in this area in Year 11. All pupils are given the opportunity to contribute in lessons and pupils work well in mixed sex groups, seen in Year 7 for example, where more competent readers were paired with pupils who were having some difficulties. Pupils with special needs are able to make good progress with the help of very effective teaching assistants.
147. Teaching overall is good. Enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers plan their lessons well and make clear presentations that motivate pupils. Pupils gain confidence from working in a friendly and supportive atmosphere in which humour plays a big part. Although most lessons involve a variety of activities there is a need for greater sharing of good practice in order to ensure that pupils concentrate for the full hour in all lessons. Pupils are provided with good information on how well they are progressing and this helps to reinforce their knowledge and understanding. Assessment strategies are steadily improving and these need to be further improved to ensure

that all pupils have a full understanding of level descriptors and that a portfolio of moderated work is compiled. Behaviour is generally good in lessons, though there is a need to improve classroom management techniques to fully involve a few potentially challenging pupils.

148. Since the last inspection improvement has been good. The strengths have been maintained and teaching and learning have improved. Examination results have also improved. The department has new and vigorous leadership and much improved Programmes of Study and schemes of work have been put in place to further raise standards. Pupils do not at present have enough opportunities to engage in fieldwork. This is acknowledged and plans are being implemented to tackle this issue. The new head of geography received very good support from other members of the subject team and together they have the capacity to continue the department's progress.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching.
- GCSE coursework.
- Support for pupils' learning.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching and learning strategies.
- The use of ICT to support teaching and learning.
- Development planning.

149. In 2001 teacher assessments showed the attainment of pupils at the end of Year 9 to be slightly below national expectations, although the 2002 assessments show the proportion of pupils reaching the expected Level 5 rose significantly. The proportion of pupils attaining grades A*-C in the GCSE examination has been rising over recent years to be at the national average in 2001. Overall figures have masked some fluctuations in the performance of boys and girls with the former outperforming the latter in two recent years, but not in 2002 when the proportion of pupils attaining A*-C grades rose substantially, with over three-quarters of girls achieving those grades.
150. In work seen during the inspection pupils make good progress to attain standards that by the end of Year 9 are consistent with national expectations. Pupils are able to select information from a range of sources and use it effectively to reach substantiated conclusions about events in the past. They undertake individual research and enquiry well, sometimes making use of ICT in preparation for extended writing, which is an area of strength for many pupils. Lower attaining pupils produce incomplete, or limited amounts of work that do not always reflect the level of understanding that they reveal in oral work. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, especially in those lessons where in-class support is available.
151. Inspection evidence indicates that attainment at end of Year 11 is above national expectations. Pupils analyse, interpret and evaluate sources well, and demonstrate good skills of synthesis and logical argument in deriving conclusions. This is seen, for example, in work on the similarities and differences in aboriginal and ancient Egyptian medicine. In very high quality coursework pupils make detailed notes and use photographs, illustrations, overlays and maps very well in their studies of Framlingham and Orford castles. In recent years lower attaining pupils have done less well in the GCSE examinations relative to their counterparts nationally, but in work seen and in the 2002 examination their attainment was at least in line with expectations. Standards of literacy are generally good, reflecting the efforts made by the department, although minor spelling errors remain, as do opportunities to make greater reference to chronology.

152. In the vast majority of lessons pupils respond positively to the opportunities offered them. Most listen attentively and contribute when asked, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and confidence. In the best lessons, where they are challenged by high expectations and involved in active and independent learning, they respond eagerly. No unsatisfactory behaviour was seen in lessons and on most occasions, behaviour was good. In lessons where there was a heavy reliance on teacher directed learning, there was a slow pace and pupils' concentration waned as they lost interest. Relationships, both between pupils and with their teachers, are good. Pupils' personal development is at least satisfactory but would be enhanced by wider opportunities for independent learning and the use of self-evaluation in assessment.
153. The quality of teaching is good throughout the school and no unsatisfactory lessons were seen. Pupils make good progress in learning because teachers use their good subject knowledge to explain clearly and question judiciously. In a Year 9 lesson on the 'Match Girls' strike, for example, pupils acted out the hardships of nineteenth century working life. They made good gains in knowledge and understanding as a result of high expectations, a brisk lesson pace and a significant collaborative input by the head of drama. Detailed planning, skilful classroom management and careful selection of resources led to good or better teaching and learning in more than half of the lessons seen. In lessons where learning was not of this standard, a lack of variety in teaching methods, a tendency to tell rather than ask, and tasks and materials not adapted for differing levels of ability, resulted in pupils not realising their full potential. Errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar are sometimes overlooked and whole-class opportunities to apply pupils' ICT skills are restricted by access difficulties.
154. Underpinning the improvement in the GCSE results is the very good monitoring and support available to pupils, typical of which is the comprehensive revision booklets developed by the department over a number of years. The subject is well managed and led. The current post holder is an experienced teacher and a committed historian, but currently his other responsibilities in relation to the oversight of religious education, prevent him from concentrating solely on the history department. He has a clear focus on raising attainment and his close involvement in the school's teaching and learning strategy is already contributing towards that end. The departmental handbook, assessment procedures and schemes of work are well thought out and contribute to the consistency of practice, although there is scope for more rigorous improvement planning. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is **good** in Years 8 to 11. Provision in Year 7 is unsatisfactory, but the full implementation of the plan to provide timetabled ICT lessons for all pupils in Year 7 will eliminate the inadequacies in September 2003.

Strengths:

- The ICT examination course for all pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Assessment procedures and practice in ICT courses.
- The number of computers is well above average for a school of this size.

Areas for improvement:

- Provision for ICT in Year 7.
- Standards at the end of Year 11.
- The use of ICT to aid teaching and learning in other subjects.

155. Results in the 2001 GCSE examination were well below the national and the school averages. There was a significant improvement in the percentage of pupils gaining A*-C grades in 2002. However, results were still below the school average and are unlikely to match the national figures when they are available.
156. Evidence from lessons and examples of recent work indicate that overall, standards in Years 8 and 9 are consistent with national expectations. Girls achieve a higher standard than boys. Good progress is made in most discrete ICT lessons, which are now taken by all pupils in Years 8 and 9. Pupils in Year 7 do not make as much progress in ICT because they do not yet

have enough opportunities to develop new skills in a systematic way when they use ICT in the subjects of the curriculum. Plans are well advanced for ICT lessons for all pupils in Year 7 to be introduced next year as part of the school's response to the National Key Stage 3 strategy for ICT. Many pupils in Year 7 have reasonably effective keyboard skills, but knowledge of appropriate word-processing functions is limited. Skills are developed well in ICT lessons in Year 9, where pupils were observed working on a topic about newspapers. The lesson was well planned and pupils were able to examine and discuss different types of newspapers. With support from the teacher, they identified different presentation styles using correct terminology and related them to particular audiences. A range of advanced word processing and desktop publishing skills were demonstrated by the teacher and then used effectively by pupils to produce publications for specific audiences. Images and additional information were readily available via the fast broadband Internet connection. Pupils are adept at using the Internet effectively for research.

157. There have been significant improvements in the ICT curriculum in Years 10 and 11. All pupils now follow a GNVQ Intermediate ICT course. Progress is good in lessons and attainment overall is at least consistent with course expectations. Many examples of work are of a good standard. In a Year 11 GNVQ lesson with a lower attaining group, pupils were using tables effectively for handling information, much of which was obtained from the Internet. Skilful teaching and well-produced resources enabled the class to make good progress resulting in attainment being consistent with national expectations.
158. In most ICT lessons pupils have a positive attitude towards their work and are usually keen to make progress. However, careful classroom management is sometimes needed to ensure that pupils give their full attention during presentations and whole-class sessions in ICT rooms. Presentations are most effective when pupils move away from the computers or turned them off to look and listen. But this was not always done, and some pupils did not follow the teacher's instructions because they became distracted.
159. Teaching is good overall. There have been significant staff changes in the last two years. A new head of department is in post and the number of ICT specialist teachers has increased. These factors are having a positive impact upon standards. Many good resources have been produced within the school and are available through the Internet. Teachers take opportunities to help pupils develop appropriate literacy and numeracy skills in ICT lessons. New assessment procedures are used well in Years 8 and 9. Assessment and marking in Years 10 and 11 are very thorough and meet the requirements of the course. Teachers are well aware of pupils' special needs they are provided with good support. The ICT department is well led and managed and well supported at senior management level. Teachers in the department work effectively as a team, sharing resources and expertise. The technical aspects of ICT are well catered for. The computer network is reliable and well maintained. Internet access and use are carefully monitored. ICT developments have been well supported through Education Action Zone funding.
160. All teachers have undertaken ICT training recently and laptop computers are available for use by all teaching staff. These factors have stimulated interest in the use of ICT. There are many opportunities for pupils to use ICT in most, but not all subjects. Use in mathematics, English, science, music and drama is good. In science effective use is made of portable computers, which have an infrared link to the school network. The use of ICT in the "media suite" is helping pupils to produce imaginative work. In some departments the use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning is underdeveloped and some subjects are finding it difficult to gain access to computers as a result of the increased number of discrete ICT lessons, despite the fact that the number of computers is well above average. Plans are in place to help overcome this problem. Supervised access to computers outside teaching time is good. There has been good improvement in the provision for ICT since the last inspection. Pupils in Year 7 will have ICT lessons next year, ensuring that all pupils in all years have appropriate opportunities to develop their ICT capability and enable higher standards to be achieved. Some subject departments still need to use ICT more effectively to enhance teaching and learning.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Improved GCSE results in French and German.
- Teamwork, and the level of support for new teachers.
- Most teaching in Years 10 and 11.
- Improving attitudes and behaviour.

Areas for improvement

- Standards at the end of Year 9.
- Expectations, especially of lower attainers.
- Assessment and its use in Years 7 to 9.

161. Teachers' assessments in 2001 showed attainment to be below the national expectation, for both boys and girls, at the end of Year 9. However, given below average standards on entry in Year 7, this represented satisfactory achievement. Standards have risen slightly in 2002, continuing a trend of improvement. Though girls have done consistently better than boys, their performance has declined as that of boys has improved, so that there is now no significant difference. Fewer pupils are reaching higher levels, indicating that some higher attainers do not do as well as they should. GCSE results at grades A*-C in French were well below the national average in 2001, for both boys and girls. However, a sharp improvement in 2002 raised standards to above the national average for 2001. Girls did better than boys by greater than the national difference. In German, results in 2001 were below average, for both boys and girls. In 2002, results were well above the national average for 2001, indicating significant continued improvement for a subject, which is being phased out. Girls did better than boys, consistent with the national difference. Results across the full range of grades, A*-G, show that all pupils who were entered gained a grade in 2002, indicating at least satisfactory achievement for lower attainers, including those with special needs. Numbers gaining the higher grades, A* and A, are consistent with the national average, indicating at least satisfactory achievement by higher attainers, mostly girls. In 2001, pupils did less well in French than in other subjects, but better in German. Overall, results show good achievement in Years 10 and 11.
162. In work seen in lessons and books, attainment in Years 7 to 9 is still below average, but improving. Higher and average attainers acquire and retain knowledge well, enabling them to understand general meaning in listening and reading tasks. They write paragraphs of increasing length and accuracy, and include tenses and opinions by Year 9. They can exchange information in structured role-play, but pronounce poorly. The quality of support helps lower attainers, including those with special needs, to concentrate well. However, the work provided for them is not demanding enough to move them forward at the expected rate. They identify most details in simple listening and reading tasks, but lack confidence in oral situations because their tasks are limited to choral repetition or the production of single words. Similarly, much of their writing is restricted to listing and labelling. Although most pupils achieve as well as they should in Years 7 to 9, there is unsatisfactory achievement by many lower attainers.
163. Inspection evidence indicates that attainment is above average by Year 11. Higher attainers have good knowledge of vocabulary and structures, and understand most of what they hear and read in both French and German. They deduce meaning from context when confronted with unfamiliar language. Their writing is at least sound and sometimes very good as they tackle topics such as holidays, local area, future plans and hobbies, requiring different tenses. Average attainers need more time or repetition in comprehension work, but can identify key details. They write adequately, with content better than accuracy, often failing to apply basic rules on gender and number. Many lower attainers, including some with special needs, do not continue their foreign language. Those who continue achieve well. They benefit from the structured approach to written coursework, and understand and convey information at a basic level. In German, all pupils have difficulty in remembering to begin nouns with capital letters, and in both languages pupils are careless with accents. Speaking remains the weakest skill,

for all pupils. The input of foreign language assistants and structured guidance for conversation are beginning to improve standards, but pronunciation and intonation are weak. Boys speak more confidently, but girls produce more accurate and considered responses.

164. Improving standards relate closely to improving attitudes and behaviour. The department has made these a priority as a pre-requisite to improving learning. In lessons seen, attitudes and behaviour were good, with very little poor attention or unacceptable noise levels. When given opportunities to work together, pupils respond responsibly. However, there is little evidence that pupils can work independently to exceed minimum requirements. The contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, overall.
165. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, with some good teaching, especially in Years 10 and 11. There is no unsatisfactory teaching, an improvement from the previous inspection. Teachers have good knowledge of the languages they teach. Three are native French speakers. Non-specialist teachers, deployed in Years 7 and 8, do a good job and their classes make as much progress as others. However, subject expertise lacks the impact it should have because too much English is used to conduct lessons. Pupils do not hear the foreign language sufficiently to improve their pronunciation skills. The subject makes a good contribution to improving literacy levels, through its four communication skills, the focus on understanding language rules, structured writing and the use of reading schemes. ICT skills are practised rather than taught, and there is a small contribution to numeracy skills through graphs to record survey results. Planning for individual lessons is satisfactory, and good in Years 10 and 11, where examination preparation provides a sharper focus on raising standards. The best lessons cover different skills, have good pace and increase the level of challenge in tasks. In Year 9, average attainers recapped learning from the previous lesson, learned and practised new vocabulary on jobs, then used a worksheet providing stimulating reading and writing tasks. Though some expressed lukewarm attitudes to learning French, they enjoyed this lesson because their attention was fully engaged and they had a sense of progress in learning.
166. The weakness in planning is in expectations. Apart from the use of English, and the lack of expectation for pupils to use French or German in routine situations, too many tasks are at a level below expectation for age. Such work can be repetitious for pupils and fails to accelerate learning. This is particularly evident in work provided for lower attainers and for all pupils early in Year 10. Teaching methods are satisfactory, overall. Teachers share objectives clearly in every lesson, so that pupils can assess their progress. Pair work and surveys allow some independent work, but tend to be heavily structured and not frequent enough to improve oral standards. Much learning is strongly dependent on the teacher. Questions are targeted fairly, so that all pupils are equally involved. Teachers use time and resources well. Support staff make a significant contribution in lessons, and are especially helpful to newly qualified teachers. Marking is satisfactory, with a uniform approach applied. The addition of comments likely to assist future learning is inconsistent, and corrections are not required, so that opportunities to improve learning are missed. In Years 7 to 9, homework consists largely of learning tasks. Evidence from lessons suggests that this is not always done. Again, opportunities are missed to extend the learning of higher attainers within groups. The use of homework is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11.
167. There is satisfactory leadership and management for the subject. There is very strong teamwork and a high level of timetabled and informal support, which helps new teachers considerably. Schemes of work provide helpful guidance, though they lack specific guidance on work for lower attainers. Development planning is very weak, and lacks strategies for achieving its priorities. Assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9 are unsatisfactory. There is no overview of performance by individuals over time, or by skill area. No work has been done to investigate the declining performance of girls. In Years 10 and 11, procedures are good, conforming to examination requirements. Data have been used effectively to raise standards. For example, the decision to change to coursework has improved standards in writing. Accommodation, display and resources are good and have a positive impact on learning. GCSE results and better teaching indicate that there has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The present full-time teaching team.
- The number of pupils taking instrumental tuition and the wealth of performance possibilities available.
- The wide range of courses available in all years
- The commitment of the school to the subject improvement plan.

Areas for improvement

- The availability of practice areas.
- Access to ICT in Years 7-9.

168. Teacher assessments show that by the end of Year 9 in the summer of 2001, the attainment of a large majority of students was well above national expectations. Teacher assessments in the summer of 2002 show a rise in the number of pupils reaching the expected level than in the previous year. In the 2001 GCSE examinations the percentage of students obtaining A* - C grades was below the national average, but above the school average. The 2002 GCSE results show an improvement on those of the previous year.
169. Inspection evidence shows standards at the end of Year 9 are above expectations. Although pupils arrive in Year 7 with a variety of musical experiences, the well-designed curriculum and high standard of teaching enables pupils to achieve good results within a short period of time at the school. In two Year 7 lessons pupils were observed making a musical contribution to classroom ensembles, one of which was made up of sections of varying performing difficulty, and the other included opportunities for improvisation in which the pupils surpassed their own expectations.
170. From work seen in Years 10 to 11 standards are in line with expectations or better. In the Year 10 lesson observed improvisation was being used as a stimulus to develop composition skills. Pupils in Year 11 listened to a piece of modern music based on the twelve notes of the chromatic scale. This was then analysed and the pupils successfully used the techniques discovered as a basis for their own compositions.
171. Attitudes and behaviour in music lessons in all year groups are generally good or better. Pupils enjoy the practical nature of the majority of lessons and are keen to reach the teacher's carefully selected targets. They concentrate well in group work, collaborating with their partner with the more able pupils helping their less able peers. Relationships are good between pupils and between pupils and teachers.
172. Teaching in all year groups is good or better. The teachers' very good knowledge of the subject and their experience of helping pupils achieve good learning is used to good effect. Lessons are well planned to cater for the needs of all pupils and there is an appropriate sense of pace. Teachers' expectations are appropriately high, and these are enhanced by the present arrangements for setting individual targets to enable each pupil to further develop his or her musical ability. Pupils are also motivated by the enthusiasm of the teachers and their ability to create opportunities that allow pupils to achieve beyond their own expectations.
173. Since the last inspection there have been two new heads of department. The present post holder is continuing to develop the innovative work of her predecessors in providing as broad a range of musical opportunities as possible. To this end the expressive arts course has flourished, an increasing number of pupils have decided to study music at GCSE and A-level, and the number of pupils taking instrumental lessons has doubled to well over 200. The present full-time teaching team are united in their aim and efforts to present opportunities for pupils to gain worthwhile musical experiences assisted in particular by very good technical support. New accommodation has been built providing the department with much needed space, and the amount of lesson time available now meets suggested requirements. However, the areas for small groups to practise and access to ICT in Years 7 to 9 are still limited.

174. Extra-curricular activities flourish, with visits abroad adding to the already demanding schedule of concerts and workshops both in school and the locality. One pupil in Year 10 is entering the second year of her BA degree at Colchester, arrangements have been made for some sixth formers to visit the La Guardia school (of Fame renown) in New York, and the next musical production will perform at the school and shortly afterwards in Germany. The last two school musical productions have won the Collyer-Smith Marine Trophy for the best musical in the area competing against experienced local music societies. The drive and vision of the teachers and the new instrumental resources, either on order or those which arrived during the inspection, promise to continue to provide the young people who pass through the department with a worthwhile education which will help prepare them for life.

EXPRESSIVE ARTS

175. To offer a broader range of study opportunities in Years 10 and 11, and to cater for the needs of pupils who wish to prepare for an examination that incorporates the disciplines of music, drama dance and art, the school offers the opportunity to prepare for the GCSE expressive arts examination. Pupils choose to work in one of four areas, music for film, filmmaking, dance-drama, and conceptual art. They complete four school-organised units before tackling the timed unit set by the examination board.
176. Since the autumn of 2000 the numbers of pupils taking the examination have increased from 70 to 100 per year, and the GCSE results for 2002 show an improvement on those of 2001, with 65 per cent of pupils achieving A*-C grades. Both years' results were above the school average for 2001. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 were observed in the music for film category lessons. Pupils in Year 10 have just started their first module and are finding the necessary disciplines difficult. Pupils in Year 11 are working on the final module and are much more aware of the benefits to be gained from allowing the disciplines to assist the planning and completion of the work. Both groups use technical language in discussion. The Year 11 pupils confidently discussed techniques used to create fear in the film 'Psycho' and identified similar techniques in a suitably chosen excerpt from the film 'Scream'. This is in preparation for producing their own two-minute horror story scene. Year 10 pupils are devising a modern Romeo and Juliet setting to depict conflict. This will be filmed in later lessons and the accompanying music composed and recorded.
177. Teaching is good. Teachers use their breadth of knowledge effectively to enable the pupils to solve problems themselves. The pupils are aware of the demands the course makes from information in their course books, which includes assessment criteria and completion dates. This is a worthwhile and exacting course with the discipline acquired being transferred to the pupils' work in other subjects.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching.
- The participation rates.
- Leadership and management.
- The range of activities offered.

Areas for improvement

- The marking of pupils' work.
- The amount of responsibility given to pupils in leading activities and in planning.

178. Standards, as seen in lessons of pupils' work, at the end of Year 9 are consistent with national expectations with a number of pupils exceeding them. This is better than the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 indicate, owing to a slight underestimation of the work of pupils. Most pupils have secure hand-eye and foot-eye co-ordination skills that allow

small and full games to be played effectively, especially in football, hockey, netball and badminton. Swimming has a high profile and the range of strokes and personal survival skills are good. In gymnastics pupils show good body tension in balances, although the quality of movement of the body linking movements is weaker. The pupils enter the school with physical skills below expectation and so show good progress through Years 7 to 9. Boys and girls are able to work out simple gymnastic sequences and dance routines. When asked to evaluate the work of their peers, pupils are able to do so and give advice on ways of improving; the quality of this advice is variable, as is its spontaneous use. Pupils use technical terminology accurately in lessons. All groups of pupils make similar progress.

179. Standards in the core course at the end of Year 11 are also consistent with national expectations. Pupils demonstrate a greater degree of tactical awareness and are developing the roles of officials, coaches and umpires or referees. They use equipment in the fitness centre safely and understand the effects that the different pieces of equipment have on the body. Transfer of skills is also seen in, for example, comparing the similarities and differences of tennis and badminton. Pupils following the GCSE course obtained results that were below the national average in 2001, when pupils did significantly worse in physical education than in their other subjects. Results improved slightly in 2002, although the number obtaining grades A*-C was only slightly better, more higher grades were obtained and pupils attained results similar to their other subjects. Pupils following the GCSE course show a higher level of practical skill than those in the core course but are weaker in the theory element of the course. School teams have achieved considerable success locally and a number of individuals have achieved success at local and national level.
180. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are good. Pupils arrive ready to participate and bring appropriate kit for lessons. Levels of participation are high and levels of participation in extra-curricular activities are increasing. In all lessons pupils work well in pairs and in groups, although when not directly supervised the pupils' weaker organisational skills are seen and concentration varies. The very good relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves encourage a positive environment in which learning can take place and in which the pupils feel confident in trying out new ideas. The constant celebration of success in assemblies and the sporting 'Hall of Fame' also builds up their confidence.
181. Overall, the teaching of physical education is good. One lesson seen was very good, and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. There is no significant difference between the teaching in Years 7 to 9 and that in Years 10 and 11. Strengths within teaching are the teachers' management of the pupils and the teacher-pupil relationships both of which complement the challenge in the lessons and the teachers' high expectations of the pupils. In a number of lessons different activities are given to stretch the more able pupils and support those with weaker skills. Weaknesses in teaching are when the lessons are too teacher dominated, with missed opportunities for pupil involvement in leadership roles and planning. In the GCSE course the theory work is a relative weakness, marking lacks a focus, so that in a number of instances poor literacy is ignored, and spellings are not corrected. Comments on the work are also general rather than giving a specific comment as to how the work could be improved. The organisation of the course also means that pupils with weaker organisational skills do not accumulate a secure body of notes that help with revision purposes.
182. The curriculum meets the National Curriculum requirements and pupils are given a good experience of physical activities. This is enhanced by the good provision of extra-curricular activities that take place after school and in the lunch-break. Pupils of all abilities take part in these. There is a large number of school teams and participation in these and the inter-house matches means that a large number of pupils get experience of match situations and personal responsibility as team captains.
183. The facilities for physical education in school are in need of repair and redecoration, but they are enhanced by the substantial use of the leisure centre, giving overall good accommodation. The lack of a permanent base for GCSE theory work means that subject-specific display material cannot be used to supplement teaching and the methods used in teaching are restricted. The staff make the best use of what is available and the displays in corridor areas is raising the profile of the subject. All groups of pupils are catered for and make similar progress.

184. In line with National Curriculum requirements the department has moved to the use of national curriculum levels for assessment. The department has good procedures, although the criteria are being applied a little harshly. Leadership and management of the department are good. The relatively new head of department has a clear vision for improvement and has revitalised many areas. Those responsible for the boys' and girls' physical education complement each other and all members of the department share the vision for improvement, giving good role models as team members. Monitoring of the teaching and learning in the department is currently undertaken in an informal way and needs to be formalised; and the good ideas for development need to be structured in a way that makes evaluation easy.
185. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. There have been many changes of staff, which has brought a new enthusiasm into the department. New ideas are being implemented, participation rates by pupils have risen and the range of extra-curricular activities is continuing to increase. There is a constant striving for improvement and the uptake of examination level courses is rising significantly. The department has a very good base from which to improve further.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths.

- Enthusiastic and committed management.
- Teaching, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- Contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Areas for improvement.

- Statutory provision in Years 10 and 11.
- Leadership and management.
- Subject specialist teachers.
- Support for non-specialist staff.

186. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is consistent with expectations in relation to the Essex LEA Agreed Syllabus. In Years 10 and 11, attainment is well below expectations owing to the subject not being allocated enough curriculum time to cover the Agreed Syllabus, a lack of specialist teachers and weaknesses in the arrangements for subject leadership and management.
187. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, attainment in Years 7 to 9 is in line with expected levels. There are several examples of pupils developing their knowledge and understanding of religious language, principles and concepts. Pupils generally make sense of what they study and demonstrate a sound knowledge of various religions. There are many opportunities for pupils to relate this to their experiences of life. The teaching challenges pupils to extend their knowledge and understanding and, on several occasions, to develop attitudes and form their own views about religious principles and concepts. In one Year 7 lesson, pupils developed a sound knowledge and understanding of how a person's belief can influence his or her way of life. Through a well-directed discussion, pupils demonstrated a good understanding of how mystical experiences can have a significant effect on people. In a Year 8 lesson, pupils developed a good understanding of symbolism in relation to Sikhism. They understood the importance of identification through the use of symbols and could relate these to the principles of respect, commitment, honour and truth. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. The use of key words, technical language and good discussion work were useful aids to improve literacy and oral competency. Overall, pupils' progress and achievement is good.
188. In lessons and work seen in Years 10 and 11, attainment is below expected levels owing to a lack of curriculum time to cover the Agreed Syllabus. In one Year 10 lesson, pupils developed their knowledge and gained some understanding of religious and moral aspects such as the Christian and Islamic views of marriage and divorce. Pupils explored their feelings and formed

opinions about divorce in today's world. However, their progress is restricted by the lack of ability to analyse and evaluate information, and to form judgements about religious and moral issues. In a well-structured Year 11 lesson, pupils were exploring a range of views on euthanasia. However, pupils did not demonstrate the necessary skills of investigation, the ability to analyse information and develop balanced arguments. The lack of specialist teaching, and the inadequacy of provision is having a serious impact on the standards achieved by pupils in these years. Pupils do not receive their full entitlement to religious education.

189. There are no significant differences in the standards achieved by pupils of different sex or different ethnic background. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted or talented make similar progress.
190. Overall, pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Where pupils' interest is stimulated, they behave well, and apply themselves to the work. They collaborate with each other and work at a productive pace. The relationship between teachers and pupils is generally satisfactory, and teachers support individuals both academically and personally.
191. Teaching varies from unsatisfactory to very good. Overall it is good. The lack of specialist teachers does have some impact on standards. Lesson aims were shared with pupils in most cases. Teachers make good use of questioning to consolidate current learning and to review previous work. They use a suitable range of styles that enable pupils to *learn from* as well as *learn about* religion, and this did assist pupils to maintain their interest and develop understanding of religious principles and concepts.
192. The assessment of pupils' work is generally satisfactory and helpful comments are made in exercise books. The procedures provide a sound basis for assessing what pupils know and understand. Assessment does not sufficiently inform the future planning of new work. Furthermore, the department does not set detailed targets against which it can assess pupils' progress. Consequently, pupils are unclear about the standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve. This is recognised as an area for development.
193. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is broad and balanced. It meets the needs of the pupils and the requirements of the Essex LEA Agreed Syllabus. However, the limited amount of time given to the subject in Years 10 and 11 means that appropriate coverage of the syllabus is not possible. As a consequence, statutory requirements in relation to religious education are not met. The religious education curriculum contributes well to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, so providing opportunities for pupils to explore world issues of justice, relationships and personal beliefs.
194. The school's arrangements for the management of the department are unsatisfactory. The department is managed by the head of humanities, but the extent of his other responsibilities do not enable him to tackle the many issues facing the department at this time. He does, however, approach the task with enthusiasm and commitment. There is mixed support from other departmental staff. Planning is satisfactory. The systematic monitoring of pupils' work and the monitoring of teaching are recognised as key areas for future development.
195. Since the time of the previous inspection, the overall staffing profile of the department has been reduced significantly. The lack of specialist teachers is a matter of concern, as it adversely affects pupils' achievement and progress. Standards in Years 7 to 9 have improved. However, the paucity of provision for pupils in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form has not been adequately dealt with. As a consequence, progress since the last inspection is unsatisfactory.

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

In the inspection, nine 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-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	5	20	15	100	62	2.6	1.5
Biology	1	0	2	0	52	0	0.8
Chemistry	1	0	5	0	43	0	0.8
Music	2	0	29	100	84	2.5	2.1

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	11	27	43	82	87	3.8	5.8
Biology	8	13	34	100	88	4.2	5.2
Chemistry	5	60	43	100	90	7.6	5.9
Physics	7	14	40	43	88	2.0	5.7
Design and Technology	11	0	30	73	91	2.7	5.4
Economics	6	33	36	100	89	6.0	5.5
Computer Studies	9	0	23	67	86	1.6	4.6
Art and Design	3	67	46	100	96	7.3	6.6
Music	1	0	35	100	93	4.0	5.7
Dance	3	0	39	0	89	0	5.5
Geography	3	0	38	100	92	5.3	5.7
History	4	0	35	50	88	1.5	5.5
Sociology	5	0	35	40	86	1.2	5.3
Psychology	16	19	34	88	87	4.0	5.3
Physical Education	5	40	25	100	92	5.6	5.1
English Language	29	3	30	79	92	3.5	5.3
Communication Studies	17	35	31	100	93	7.6	5.9

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	4	100	N/A	25	N/A	0	N/A
Health and Social Care	5	100	N/A	40	N/A	0	N/A
Leisure and Tourism	5	80	N/A	40	N/A	0	N/A

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

196. The inspection covered mathematics in detail, including A and AS-levels. In sciences, the focus was on biology but chemistry and physics were also sampled. In chemistry, results in 2001 were well above average and students did well in comparison with their results at GCSE. Physics results however, were below average in 2001. In the two chemistry lessons observed, students worked well and were eager to learn. Teaching was at least satisfactory. In one lesson observed, in which teaching was very good, Year 13 students improved their knowledge and understanding of the chemistry of polymers. The teacher gave very clear explanations and used skilful questioning to ensure that all students could explain the processes involved. Teaching in physics, whilst being satisfactory overall did not provide enough opportunities for students to engage in independent learning. This has an adverse impact upon standards.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- The range of courses at AS and A-level.
- Because teaching is good students achieve well.
- Effective use of computers and graphical calculators to support learning.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of attainment at the end of Year 13.
- Students' note taking.
- The information given to students about their progress and what they need to do to improve.

197. In 2001 the overall results achieved by the 11 students entered for the A-level examination were below the national average. Three male students achieved the higher A or B and all female students achieved a grade. Of the five students who have accepted their AS level grades in 2001 all achieved a grade; however, only one student gained a grade C. When standards of attainment on entry to the course are taken into account achievement is satisfactory.

198. In 2002 seven students were entered for A-level and five gained pass grades. Only one student achieved a grade C. In contrast, the 2002 performance by 25 AS level candidates shows much improvement, with nine achieving A or B grades and the remainder achieving pass grades. The retention rate from Year 12 to 13 in 2002 is satisfactory with 16 students having returned to complete the course to A-level course. Several of these students will retake AS modules alongside A-level in 2003.

199. Students currently studying mathematics are achieving well in lessons. For example in one Year 13 further mathematics lesson, students engaged in a purposeful and challenging discussion with their teacher about the validity of proof by induction. The teacher skilfully used students' questions to very good effect to consolidate and underpin their learning. These

students went on to tackle similar questions with enhanced confidence. Following a well-planned introduction on quadratic functions and their associated graphs, students in another Year 13 lesson used graphical calculators effectively to determine movement of functions on the x-y plane. As a result they were able to rearrange the functions and compare their results with the standard method they had used previously.

200. Students in Year 12 have made a positive start to their AS mathematics course. As a result of the good teaching and the enthusiasm of their teachers, students tackle a range of tasks that require them to develop a strategic approach to the solution of each task. They use the opportunity to discuss ideas in pairs and evolve strategies that they can describe to others, for example over a telephone. Through this AS module students are encouraged to think about different approaches to solving problems and to deepening their knowledge. In one Year 12 lesson it was clear that the teacher was aware of the students' wide attainment range and had taken this into account in planning the lesson. As a result, all students made good progress in the lesson. The effective teaching of mathematical methods is evident in students' work, although the quality of student's note taking is a weakness, and does not provide a good source for future revision.
201. Teaching in the sixth form is never less than good and is often very good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge and experience effectively in teaching the methods and principles needed to approach standard problems in each of the modules studied. For example, in one Year 12 lesson the teacher successfully built on students' GCSE work to teach them how to manage bivariate data. In one or two lessons seen, students were challenged by their teacher to think about the methods and why they work. As a result students began to evolve a greater insight into understanding how and why these methods work and if not why not. However, there is a need to increase the range of teaching and learning strategies by allowing students to engage in more open-ended tasks and independent research. In all lessons students receive effective individual support, praise and encouragement. This enables them to consolidate their learning and move on with greater confidence. The homework set provides good opportunities for students to consolidate their learning. Although students' work is marked and assessed regularly, written comments do not always provide enough guidance on how students can improve their work.
202. The considerable enthusiasm shown by teachers for the subject is having an impact on students and their attitude to learning. Students are attentive, work well together, support and help each other, particular with pupils with special learning needs. The atmosphere in lessons reflects the positive relationship that has been forged between students and their teacher. There are sufficient resources to support learning and access to ICT is good. The overall leadership and management of sixth form mathematics are good.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning.
- Pupils work well together and with their teachers.
- The use of ICT.

Areas for improvement.

- The number of students attaining higher grades.
- Opportunities for independent learning.
- The provision of appropriate advanced text and reference books.

203. The inspection covered the AS and A-level courses offered by the school. Although examination results in 2001 were below average when compared with those of all other schools, they represented satisfactory achievement when standards of attainment on entry to

the course are taken into account. Provisional results in the 2002 examinations were better than those for 2001 and were again consistent with expectations based on the results students obtained in the GCSE examination.

204. The GCE A-level examination results in 2001 were below those of other schools nationally. A-level results were better than those achieved in 2000. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade. The proportion gaining higher grades, A and B, was below average when compared with other schools. In relation to their GCSE results, students performed as expected. The provisional 2002 results showed an improvement on those obtained in 2001 particularly at grades A and B. Provisional AS results in 2002 were below the 2001 average.
205. Inspection evidence shows that current standards are generally in line with course expectations. Year 13 students are achieving as expected in relation to their GCSE results but there are indications that some higher-attaining students are underachieving. In the best lessons, students make good progress as a result of good teaching. In a very good biology lesson, for example, students made very good use of the Internet and a very limited range of reference materials to research information on diabetes in relation to their work on the endocrine system. Higher-attaining students in particular recall previous knowledge very well and use it effectively to develop further understanding. Written work is generally well presented and matches the confidence which students display in the classroom. In some lessons, however, progress is hindered by limited opportunities for independent learning.
206. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course. Nevertheless higher-attaining students are achieving well. They show, for example, good knowledge and understanding of how the concentration of a substrate affects the rate of reaction with an enzyme. Most are successfully moving on from GCSE work into new areas of biology. Written work is well developed and, when provided with the opportunity to do so, students make good progress in developing their skills of independent research. Lower-attaining students, in particular those who studied science to foundation level at GCSE, have great difficulty in coping with the demands of advanced work. This is because the foundation GCSE course does not prepare them adequately for advanced work.
207. Overall, teaching is good. The principal features of teaching are the use of good subject knowledge by teachers, good well focused planning and, in some lessons, a range of methods that maintain interest and engender learning. In some lessons, however, there is insufficient opportunity for students to work independently. Homework is set which extends class-work and often takes the form of structured questions. Assessment is used very well to monitor the progress of students, to identify underachievers and adjust teaching accordingly. Day-to-day marking is thorough and usually provides valuable information for students on how to improve their performance.
208. Students respond very well to challenge, work hard and most show interest in their work. They support and help each other and enter into mature discussion as part of their learning. Most undertake independent work maturely, can extract information and make their own notes on, for example, inheritance. Lower-attaining students are far less confident. They are often unwilling to participate in discussions and have greater difficulty in independent research, often relying heavily on their teachers for information. This has an adverse effect on their progress.
209. Leadership and management in the biology department are good. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Target setting, based on careful analysis of students' performance in tests, is used very effectively to provide appropriate learning goals. Apart from the provision of laptop computers, which is good, the range of resources available in the form of advanced level microscopes, standard textbooks and biological periodicals is poor. As a result, students are severely limited in their opportunities for independent research and study. This has a significant impact upon performance.

BUSINESS

210. Students can progress from the GCSE business studies course to the AVCE (Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education) course in Year 12. Two Year 13 students are taking the AVCE as a one-year course alongside the Year 12 students but there is currently no Year 13 (second year) course.

Business Studies

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

Strengths

- Teachers have good relationships with students, and they achieve well.
- There is a positive working atmosphere in lessons.
- Activities are interesting to students.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT.
- Students' independent learning skills.
- Links with local business with industry.

211. Standards in AVCE have varied. In 2001 students' point scores were above average and were below the 2001 average in 2002. However, the numbers of students entered for the award have been very small and it is not possible to make valid comparisons with national figures. When students' standards of attainment at the end of Year 11 are taken into account achievement is at least consistent with expectations. In the Intermediate level GNVQ course all four students completed successfully in 2001, with three gaining merits. This represented satisfactory achievement. The 2002 results were similar and students achieved well. Current students are making satisfactory progress.
212. Inspection evidence shows the attainment of students following the Year 12 Intermediate course to be below expectations. However, this again represents satisfactory achievement when attainment at the end of Year 11 is taken into account. Students gain good knowledge and understanding of organisation charts and are, for example, able to compare the organisational structures of schools with business organisations. They use ICT well to word process their assignment reports and research company information from the Internet, although access to computers is not always available. The Year 12 AVCE course work shows that students make good use of the experience gained through part-time employment to enrich their understanding of how businesses work. The work of higher-attaining students shows a good understanding of theories of leadership styles in relation to a large fashion retailer. In the limited sample of past Year 13 business coursework projects, students generally analysed research data from their chosen businesses well, but their evaluations lacked depth.
213. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have good relationships with students, and support individuals well. Teaching and learning are supported well by the positive attitudes of students. However, in one GNVQ lesson, despite the best efforts of the teacher, a small group of boys lacked motivation with the result that they did not make the progress that they were capable of. Lessons are well-planned and have clear aims. Learning objectives are reviewed at the end of lessons and this helps to reinforce learning. Topical case studies are used effectively. Students' use of ICT in lessons is limited because computers are not always readily available. The layout of some teaching rooms restricts opportunities for students to engage in small group and collaborative work.
214. The subject is well managed by an experienced specialist teacher who, though only recently appointed, has already made good improvements. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory, and the subject has good capacity to improve further.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

215. The focus of the inspection was on AS and A-level courses in ICT. The CISCO Academy course was also sampled.

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning, particularly in Year 13.
- The use of assessment.
- The use of resources through the Internet.

Areas for improvement:

- Standards of attainment.
- The number of female students taking ICT courses.

216. In 2001 A-level computing results for the nine candidates entered were well below average, but they did represent an improvement on the previous year. In 2002 eight students were entered for A-level examination in ICT and results were similar to those in 2001. At AS Level in 2001 results were below the average but all candidates achieved a pass grade. In 2002 a much larger group of 27 students were entered for the AS level examination and results were good, with one quarter of candidates achieving A or B grades. Almost one third of this group were female and this was the first occasion female students have taken the course. There was no significant difference in the results of male and female students.

217. In addition to the AS and A Level courses the school is a local 'CISCO Academy' working in partnership with a neighbouring college and a multinational computer company. There are two cohorts of students following the CISCO Systems computer network technicians course and all are male.

218. The work of students seen in lessons, in folders and stored electronically on computers indicates that standards in Year 12 are consistent with course expectations both in the AS course and the CISCO course. Achievement is consistent with expectations based on standards of attainment on entry to Year 12. In Year 13 standards and achievement on the A-level course are above expectations. Over half of the students on this course obtained very good grades at AS level. On the CISCO course standards are good and achievement is good. Both of the staff who teach the CISCO course are female and the school management hopes that these positive role models will help to attract female students to this very relevant vocational course.

219. Students make very effective use of the Internet to find information. In one Year 12 AS lesson, for example, students were investigating possible weak points in IT systems. They were able to obtain information on the latest viruses and summarise the main threats to worldwide IT systems, including the names and types of virus together with the frequency and any geographical similarities or differences. In the follow up discussion to this lesson students were able to describe the effects of the viruses and to discuss possible consequences for the systems and users. However, a significant minority of students were passive and contributed little to the discussion. All students have proficient keyboard skills; they are able to work quickly and accurately when word processing. In a Year 13 A-level lesson, which involved preparation for coursework, students demonstrated a very good level of IT knowledge, thought clearly and discussed issues with confidence. However, written work showed weaknesses in basic literacy skills. The CISCO systems technician course is taken over two years. Students in Year 13 were observed working effectively in small groups planning how to devise an addressing system in order to set-up and configure routers for the network in their 'computer laboratory'. All groups make good progress and have a very good understanding of the components and suitable connection media. They are working with confidence and using correct terminology throughout.

220. Students in Year 13 show a strong interest and enthusiasm for the subject. They have very mature attitudes towards the subject and are very keen to work to a high standard. There was less commitment among a small minority of students in Year 12. In both years the majority of students are able to work effectively in groups and are good at sharing ideas and knowledge when this is appropriate.
221. Overall, teaching in sixth form ICT courses is good, leading to good progress by students. All ICT teachers and the head of department have been appointed within the last two and a half years. Courses, schemes of work, assessment procedures and resources have all been improved. In lessons observed, teaching was good overall. It was never less than satisfactory and some was excellent. Teachers have good subject knowledge and some bring valuable insights from experience in business and higher education. Very good resources are made available for students through the Web Sites that have been set up by staff. This provides students with access to information both in school and at home. Assessment procedures are good and students know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. There were no sixth form ICT results to report at the time of the last inspection. There is still have some way to go before standards match national averages but the courses are becoming firmly established and standards are rising.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

222. The focus was on AVCE and Foundation and Intermediate level GNVQ courses in health and social care. In addition the GNVQ course in leisure and tourism, and the AS and A-level courses in physical education were sampled. Teaching and learning in the one Year 12 leisure and tourism lesson sampled were good and students were attaining standards in line with cores expectations. The presentation of coursework varies, with that of female students being of a higher standard than that of male students. Assessment is used effectively and students are provided with clear guidance on the standards of their work and what they must do in order to improve.
223. The results of students taking the A-level examination physical education in 2001 were above the national average but they fell slightly in 2002. However, the small numbers do not make a statistical comparison valid. The number of students choosing the subject is rising, with 12 students in the current AS level group. The subject is more popular with male students, there being only one female student in present A-level group. In one Year 12 lesson observed, students were making good progress in understanding the micro-structure of muscles. The lesson was carefully planned to ensure that students gained a clear understanding of this difficult concept. Teachers ensure that students are presented with a high level of physical challenge. This was seen in one Year 13 lesson, for example, where students were working on a core fitness programme. However, teaching in both years tends to be largely teacher directed and there is a need for students to develop greater self-reliance and to take more responsibility for their own learning.

Health and Social Care

224. The school offers AVCE and Foundation and Intermediate level GNVQ courses in health and social care in Years 12 and 13. Course numbers have fluctuated but the new GCSE course introduced in Years 9 and 10 is likely to attract more sixth form recruits. The retention rate on these courses is good. It is not possible to gauge improvement since the last inspection because numbers are small and there is not enough information.

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

Strengths

- GNVQ students achieve very well.
- Work placements help students following the Intermediate course to develop good skills.
- Teaching is very good; teachers have good subject knowledge.
- Students have excellent attitudes and relationships with teachers.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not use ICT enough.
- Opportunities for students to engage in independent learning.
- Advanced students do not make enough use of work placements to enrich their work.

225. In 2001, standards at GNVQ Intermediate level were well above average for course completion with three of the eight students gaining distinction grades and four merit grades. Only one student failed to complete the course. In 2002 results were less impressive but they students achieved very well over time, maintaining the improving trend from previous years. In the AVCE all six students were awarded pass grades in 2002 (there were no entries in 2001). Although these results were below the school average, they were above predictions based on standards on entry to the course represented very good achievement.
226. The majority of Year 12 AVCE students develop good counselling skills through group discussions of situations that can arise in care settings. Their written work is below course expectations at this stage because it is not sufficiently detailed and lacks evaluative comment. GNVQ students, including some with special educational needs, use the Internet well to research data on diet. Year 13 AVCE students produce well-presented child studies and use computers well to word process reports on the influence of a range of factors on child development. AVCE students research and download information on different thermometers to measure body systems well. Their survey reports on the effects of smoking contain valid conclusions, but they do not discuss ethical factors in enough depth and few are able to relate theory to every day experience because they do not have regular placements in care settings.
227. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers' lesson plans are thorough and well structured. Teachers make aims very clear to students. They create a very positive climate for learning through their enthusiastic and supportive relationships with students, most of whom clearly enjoy the subject. Students freely discuss their experience of volunteer 'clients' such as friends and family. In a very good Year 12 intermediate lesson, students worked well in small groups to critically discuss ways of carrying out risk assessments in care settings. In a very good Year 13 AVCE lesson, the one student present carefully dissected a rat under the specialist science teacher's close supervision, and effectively extended his theoretical knowledge. Students' work is marked regularly at all levels so they know the levels at which they are working. GNVQ students tend to be very dependent on teachers in lessons and do not take enough responsibility for their own work. However, they do make good use of the Internet for personal research. Teachers set homework regularly, but students do not use ICT enough to develop their analyses and graphical presentations of statistics on health.
228. Leadership and management are very good. Assessment arrangements meet examination board requirements and students' progress is carefully monitored. Teachers work very well as a team, and use an up-to-date range of resources. There are good links with local schools, nurseries, hospital and residential homes. GNVQ students play effective roles as group leaders in a local community project involving primary school children. The further planned development of work placements and increased use of ICT should help to raise standards. The department has a good capacity for improvement.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

229. The focus was on drama and theatre studies, including the drama element of performing arts, and media, but art, dance and music were also sampled. Standards in music in Years 12 to 13 are in line with course expectations or better. Students in Year 12 prepare either for the AS

music technology or AS music examinations, and some proceed onto either the A2 music course or the A-level music technology course in Year 13. Numbers have increased since the last inspection and so have standards, with students achieving B and C grades in A-level music technology and C and D grades in A-level music. Teaching in music is of a very good standard, with staff enabling students to develop skills necessary for success in their future studies. The number of students studying AS music technology is increasing, with nine Year 12 students following the course this year. The teacher's expertise is very good and this enables students to quickly absorb computer techniques and appropriate musical knowledge. In spite of poor results in the A-level examination in art in 2002, standards are beginning to improve due to the changes in staffing. Teaching and learning are now satisfactory overall, but students continue to work with a very restricted range of media and materials. In spite of this, some are producing exciting images by painting directly onto silk. Assessment and recording lack rigour and not enough use is made of assessment information to support students' learning.

Drama and theatre studies

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

Strengths

- Standards achieved in A-level examinations.
- Teaching overall is good. On occasions it is very good.
- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to challenge and extend their students.
- The school's status as a performing arts college considerably enhances the facilities and opportunities available both to students and to the wider community.
- Extra-curricular activities are well supported and standards in public performances are very high.

Areas for development

- The transition from GCSE to AS courses.

230. Standards overall are above average. Because the department offers both theatre studies and performing arts the numbers entered tend to be relatively small so that standards can vary quite considerably from year to year. This is clearly demonstrated by the difference in results in the last two years. In 2001 there were six candidates in each subject. All students obtained a pass grade but there was only one grade B and the majority obtained C grades. In 2002, however, results rose appreciably. There were again six candidates in each subject and in both subjects four of the six candidates obtained A or B grades. Almost all students achieve grades above those predicted by their performance in GCSE examinations.
231. Inspection evidence from lessons and students' work confirms these high standards in both theory and practical work. In a Year 13 theatre studies lesson students had a secure grasp of the social function and political relevance of gestures in Brecht's work. They were able to discuss how attitudes can be communicated through body movement, make-up, costume and vocal quality and to explore through practical work how gesture can be used to emphasise comedy and parody. They showed an understanding of Brecht's alienation theory and made good gains in relating it to the rehearsal process. In a very good Year 12 performing arts lesson students used their responses to a poem to plan an improvisation combining drama, music and dance. They displayed above average knowledge of practitioners and theories, for instance in discussing the way in which repetitive motifs in music and dance might inform their work. Students' written work reflects the emphasis on practical work. They demonstrate their understanding of text as performance and have produced some perceptive analytical and evaluative comment on plays seen during the course.
232. Students display very positive attitudes towards the subject. They involve themselves enthusiastically both in lessons and in the many extra-curricular opportunities. They speak highly of their teachers' dedication and commitment and the support and guidance they are given to achieve high standards. They enjoy the practical nature of the subject and the way in which they work together with their teachers and the department's teaching assistants. However, they feel that the transition from GCSE to AS courses is rather too abrupt and some had struggled initially with the increased demands on them.

233. These good attitudes are the result of good and very good teaching. Lessons are enriched by the teachers' own exhaustive knowledge and boundless energy and enthusiasm. They not only introduce students to the theory and practice of the drama but also take every opportunity to broaden horizons and develop their students as individuals and members of society. Teachers use a wide range of imaginative approaches to engage and extend their students. For example, in one Year 13 lesson the teacher brought in corsets to give an added dimension to students' understanding of the historical and social context of Ibsen's 'Hedda Gabler'. By wearing these they extended their knowledge of the physical and social constraints on women of the period. Teachers ensure that lessons are intellectually demanding through their own use of an extensive subject specific language and this enables students to become confident in using a similar range of vocabulary. In practical sessions teachers and teaching assistants take an active part, modelling good practice and extending students' skills. In a very good Year 13 lesson the teacher led students skilfully through a visualisation exercise to enter the minds of the young men who killed Michael De Grunchy. She then directed them in exploring two contrasting ways of presenting the story and through close questioning brought them to an understanding of how the audience's reactions can be manipulated by the director and actors.
234. Students' attainment and achievements are promoted by the very good co-ordination of the theatre studies and performing arts courses and by the very good facilities and resources available. These are enriched by the school's status as a specialist performing arts college. This enables the school to offer a wide range of additional courses, such as creative writing, stage lighting and management, tap and modern and jazz dancing. Extra-curricular opportunities are well attended and rehearsals for the forthcoming production of 'The Song of the Nightingale' by Timberlake Wertenbaker demonstrate the very high standards for which the school is known in the community. The head of department leads a strong team through her own very good teaching and her clear vision for further developments.

Media Studies

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

Strengths

- Results at A-level are above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning.
- Students' very positive attitudes and the increasing popularity of the subject.
- The social relevance of the subject.

Areas for development

- The participation of all students in lessons.

235. Results in GCE A-level media studies are above average and have improved since the previous inspection. Since the course started all students entered have obtained a pass grade and in 2001 all five candidates achieved either Grade A or B. In 2002 half of the 14 candidates gained A or B grades. Over the last three years, 23 of the 30 candidates achieved one and in many cases two grades above those expected based on their performance in GCSE examinations. Only two students failed to achieve their expected grades. This represents very good achievement. Although more girls than boys take the subject there is no significant difference in their achievement.
236. Inspection evidence confirms the very good progress made by all students. After only half a term on the course Year 12 students are already gaining confidence in using a range of subject specific terminology in their analysis of film and in their evaluation of the treatment of celebrities by the tabloid press. Their commentaries on 'Double Indemnity' show a sound understanding of how mise-en-scene and montage influence the audience's reading of the film. In a lesson the same students were able to analyse the effects of camera angles, sound, special effects and editing in a clip from 'Terminator'. Students with a range of prior attainment levels understood how speed of editing can contribute to the build-up of tension.

237. By Year 13, students display independent opinion in their written film text analysis and a sophisticated approach to the deconstruction of and commentary on men's magazines. In a lesson observed during the inspection students discussed with much interest and animation a clip from Polanski's 'Rosemary's Baby'. They built on the work they had done in Year 12 and took the analysis of the director's style and techniques to a high level. They had good knowledge of Polanski's background and the events in his life that contributed to the nature of his work. Using a wide range of technical terminology they identified images and effects that suggest the horror genre and those that contravene the rules of the horror convention.
238. Students have very positive attitudes towards the subject and recognise that it equips them with critical and evaluative skills that are of value across the curriculum and help them to make sense of the world around them. They praise the quality of the guidance and support they receive which helps them achieve high standards. Most students are keen to contribute to discussion and to ask questions and challenge each other.
239. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons contain very good intellectual challenge. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and convey their own enthusiasm to their students. Teachers have high expectations and give good guidance to discussions in small groups. In response to very good teaching, students often learn at a good pace. Study techniques are reinforced during lessons and students are encouraged to make use of the Internet and other resources. Probing questions and the open seminar style lessons lead students to work at full stretch and think for themselves. However, teachers do not always encourage less confident students to participate actively and extend their understanding through exploratory talk, although they are well supported in other ways.
240. The subject is very well led and managed. Very good schemes of work ensure that students are introduced to a wide range of media through a good range of teaching approaches. The department benefits from the school's status as a specialist arts college through the state of the art video and editing equipment that enables students to produce moving image work of high quality.

HUMANITIES

241. The focus was on AS and A-level courses psychology. Geography, history and sociology were also sampled. After a period of severe staffing problems, the department is beginning to build up sixth form provision. At present four students in Year 12 are studying AS Level geography. They are well taught and their GCSE course has given them sufficient grounding in the subject to be successful. History lessons are well taught and with the exception of 2000, attainment has been above average in recent years. Fairly small groups and cramped accommodation limit the scope for flexibility in approaches to teaching and learning but students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress to reach the standards that they do. Teaching and learning were good in the one sociology lesson sampled. Although standards were below course expectations in the lesson observed, achievement was good when standards of attainment at the end of Year 11 are taken into account.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning.
- The enthusiasm of students for the subject.
- Excellent support for students' learning through innovative use of the Internet.
- Assessment procedures are used effectively to keep students well informed of the progress they are making.

Areas for improvement

- The accuracy with which students express themselves in oral work.

242. The numbers of students following the A2-level course taught in Year 13 have been small. This makes it difficult both to make comparisons with national figures and to determine any trends in the examination results. In 2001 there were eight A-level candidates, all of whom obtained pass grades with two obtaining B grades. Comparison of these results with standards on entry to the course show that the achievement of four students was consistent with expectations, while the achievement of the other four was above. In 2002, four of the five students entered for the examination obtained pass grades. There were no A or B grades. Comparison of these results with standards on entry to the course show that achievement was consistent with expectations. In 2002, 21 of the 24 students following the course obtained pass grades with six students gaining A or B grades. Psychology courses are increasing in popularity and the numbers of students taking AS and A-level courses are increasing. In the present Year 12, 32 students are taking the AS level course and in Year 13, 15 students are taking the A-level course.
243. Inspection evidence shows overall standards to be consistent with course expectations and some to be above. A contributory factor to the progress students are making is the excellent support and guidance students receive and almost continuous access to tutorial advice through the innovative use of the Internet. Students are able to access information on lesson topics and any homework set through the subject Web site. They are also able to make contact with their teacher and seek guidance through e-mail. This provides students with an unusually high level of support. As a result, Year 12 students are attaining standards that are slightly above expectations at this early stage of the course.
244. Year 13 students are achieving well and their coursework shows a sound understanding of the theoretical foundations of the subject. Their work shows, for example, an understanding of the principles of qualitative and quantitative research and the advantages and disadvantages of different research methodologies. They are able to describe and evaluate conformity studies and to apply the research findings to collective decision-making. Students in Year 12 have a good understanding of the studies of Bandura. They demonstrate an increasing understanding of some of the ethical issues related to research investigations. However, there are limitations in the ability of students, in both years, to use accurate technical vocabulary when describing their studies. For this students display a higher level of knowledge and understanding in their written work than they do orally.
245. Students show a high level of enthusiasm for the subject. They are willing to grasp new ideas and concepts. Students are keen to express their views and show respect for the opinions of others. In discussion they express their points of view thoughtfully and without rancour. The subject makes a positive contribution to students' personal development. Students' work is neat and well presented, reflecting diligence and good application.
246. The quality of teaching is very good. The teacher has excellent subject knowledge and uses this effectively to challenge and extend students' learning. The skilful use of questioning helps to clarify students' understanding of psychological terms and concepts, and the pace at which lessons are conducted helps to ensure that students maintain concentration throughout. As a result they make clear gains in understanding. In one Year 13 lesson on jury selection, for example, the way in which the teacher skilfully probed beyond the initial response encouraged students to extend and reformulate their answers. As a consequence, students' confidence grew and their contributions increased, as did their knowledge and understanding of the topic. Lesson planning is exceptionally good. Students are provided with carefully prepared handouts that show the learning objectives and lesson structure. This helps students to integrate new knowledge and to see clearly the similarities and differences in research studies. This makes a significant contribution to students' learning.
247. Subject leadership is excellent and provides a clear direction for future development. Students' progress against predictions is carefully monitored and additional individual support is provided when necessary. The subject has a very sound base for continued improvement.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

248. The focus on the inspection was on English literature. AS and A-level courses have been offered in English literature and English language and literature. The main courses now offered are AS and A-level courses in English literature.

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

Strengths

- Results in A-level English literature have improved over a period of three years.
- Teachers' specialist subject knowledge.
- Students have confidence in their teachers and are enthusiastic about the subject.
- Leadership, management and planning.

Areas for improvement

- The in-depth analysis of texts.

249. In 2002, there was a significant improvement in the A-level results. A higher proportion of students gained the higher grades A or B. Over the last three years, results have varied from average to below average. The 2001 results were well below average because of the poor attendance of a significant number of students. Traditionally, female students achieve more of the higher grades than the male students. Overall, results have improved since the last inspection. In the 2001 AS English literature examination, all but one achieved a grade, with just less than one quarter obtaining the higher grades A or B. The 2002 AS-level results were disappointingly low and did not reflect the 100 per cent pass rate in the coursework. The provisional results are under review pending an appeal. For most students, their achievement in the A-level English language and literature courses was better than expected with a substantial number exceeding their target grade. In lessons and work seen, standards in the A-level literature course reflect the recent improvements, with students making very good progress in critically analysing texts and good progress in writing.

250. Students reach good standards in articulating their ideas and use the consultative approach, which teachers promote, to discuss, explain and develop their ideas. A small number do not always participate in oral work. Standards in reading are good and students respond well with sensitivity and understanding to a range of literary texts spanning different periods, cultures, styles and form. Throughout the course, wide reading is promoted and students undertake research using the Internet and secondary source materials to increase their understanding of the political and historical background of texts. For instance, work in lessons and in their folders showed an appreciation of the Romantic period when studying Keats's poems. Similarly, detailed research and presentation work using power point exemplified a thorough understanding of the influences that shape a writer's approach, in this instance, Miller's 'The Crucible'. Year 12 students respond well to the induction programme and by Year 13, critical and wide reading are well established. Standards in writing are average overall, with higher attaining students reaching above average standards. Students' critical responses are well structured, with quotations well integrated into their work. Presentation and research notes are carefully prepared. However, technical flaws and imprecise expression lessen the quality of middle and lower attaining students' work.

251. Students display exemplary attitudes and application to their work and are very persistent when analysing texts. They speak highly of their teachers' enthusiasm, encouragement and support and are of the opinion that they 'get them to think beyond what is being taught'.

252. Teaching is very good and occasionally excellent. Teachers have strong specialist knowledge, which they use effectively to develop students' critical thinking and application of the assessment objectives. Lessons are well organised with clear exposition and continuous modelling to illuminate and increase students' knowledge of literary texts. For instance, in a Year 13 lesson on Miller's 'The Crucible' and Orwell's '1984', modelling and documentation enabled students to emulate the standard of work required to achieve a good A-level grade.

This approach led to students developing a greater understanding of their own learning. At the start of Year 12, teachers take a leading role during oral work, guiding and directing discussion to develop students' critical thinking. Teachers use question and answers effectively to assess students understanding of the work and assessment is ongoing as they use every opportunity to drum into students the importance of applying the assessment criteria to their work. Marking is thorough and students are left in no doubt about how to improve their work.

253. Monitoring and evaluation of students' work are very good. Students have challenging targets and staff rightly set timed essays and regular reviews to assess and improve students' work. Rigorous and systematic analysis of results and students' work have led to the department's offering the A-level literature course to reflect students' strengths. The curriculum is very well planned with enrichment activities.
254. The leadership and management of the courses are outstandingly good. There is a clear vision for the development of the sixth form curriculum and specialist teachers keep abreast of curricular changes. Teamwork and structured planning underpin the work of the department. Critical reviews are used to improve standards.