

## INSPECTION REPORT

### **SIR FREDERIC OSBORN SCHOOL**

Welwyn Garden City

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117525

Headteacher: Stuart Shephard

Reporting inspector: Michael Owen  
22926

Dates of inspection: 27-30 January 2003

Inspection number: 251939

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11-18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Herns Lane Welwyn Garden City Hertfordshire
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr B Richardson
Date of previous inspection:	10-11 May 2001

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9391	Norma Ball	Lay inspector		Attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students?
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3643	Derek Jones	Team inspector	Mathematics	
7428	Ray Jardine	Team inspector	Science	
31685	Valerie Girling	Team inspector	Art and design	
8501	Paul Hartwright	Team inspector	Design and technology Information and communication technology	
4773	Peter Gilliat	Team inspector	History	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
20247	Roger Parry	Team inspector	Geography Special educational needs	
31690	Bridget Smith	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages English as an additional language	
18670	Peter Tidmarsh	Team inspector	Music	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Sir Frederic Osborn School is an increasingly popular 11-18 mixed comprehensive school. With 896 students on roll, it is slightly smaller than average but it is growing. The attainment of students on entry to the school is below average. Most come from the town of Welwyn Garden City and their social and economic circumstances are below average. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is broadly average. Eleven per cent of students come from a range of mixed, Asian or black ethnic backgrounds. However, the number of students whose mother tongue is not English is small. Both the proportions of students with special educational needs and with a Statement of Special Education Need are average. Staff recruitment has been a major problem in recent years.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

This is a fast improving school that is emerging from a particularly difficult period. Standards are rising and the achievement of students is now satisfactory. They are positive about school and this is reflected in their behaviour. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, with a significant proportion of good teaching. Good leadership and management have helped the school on the road to recovery. As a result, the quality of education is now satisfactory, as is the value for money the school provides.

#### **What the school does well**

- Standards are rising in English, mathematics, science and most other subjects;
- Teaching is improving, with particular strengths in teachers' subject knowledge, planning of lessons and the management of students; as a result, learning and achievement are fast improving;
- Positive relationships result in good personal development and a desire to learn;
- The very high level of care and support given to students helps them to cope well with school;
- Good leadership has ensured a clear focus on improving the quality of education.

#### **What could be improved**

- Standards, to sustain and extend the improvements that have taken place in English, mathematics, science and other subjects;
- Provision for art and design and for girls' physical education;
- Teaching, by recruiting and retaining more qualified permanent teachers and by more regular monitoring and evaluation to promote consistently good classroom practice;
- The use of data which enables the school's performance to be compared to other schools and to achieve more clarity about where improvements can be made.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school was last inspected in May 2001, when it was judged to be making good progress, though still having serious weaknesses. This progress has continued. Standards have continued to rise, particularly in the last six months and the school is getting closer to meeting its targets. Achievement is now satisfactory and is good in the 6<sup>th</sup> form, because the quality of teaching has improved despite on-going difficulties with recruitment. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's effectiveness continues to be very good while monitoring of teaching by middle managers is satisfactory. Progress on the school's assessment policy is sound. Attendance and punctuality have improved, though exclusions have not reduced enough. Overall, improvement is good.

## STANDARDS

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

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

**Key**

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

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

GCSE results have been consistently well below the national average and in the lowest 5 per cent nationally, based on the proportion of 5 A\*-C grades, 5 A\*-G grades and average points. In 2002, results in English language and mathematics were poor, though in science they improved. The school did not meet its reasonably challenging targets. However, results in national tests in Year 9 indicate the shoots of recovery, with English matching national averages and above average when compared to similar schools, science improving, though still below average, and only mathematics remaining well below – largely because of considerable staffing problems.

Significant improvements to staffing and teaching are now kicking in so that work seen during the inspection showed remarkable improvement. While Year 9 standards in English continue to be average, in both mathematics and science they are now also approaching average. In Year 11, standards in English, mathematics and science have improved to below average. Year 9 work seen in citizenship, information and communication technology (ICT), modern languages and music was average and in other subjects it was below average. Year 11 work seen was below average for all subjects except citizenship, ICT and music. Standards in literacy and numeracy are average. In subjects inspected the 6<sup>th</sup> form numbers are small but in mathematics and religious studies standards are above average, in biology, business studies and English they are average.

Attainment on entry was below average in all years. Therefore achievement, that is, progress over time, including that of students with special educational needs, is now satisfactory in Years 7 to 11 and good in the 6<sup>th</sup> form.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Satisfactory. Most students are positive about their work and enjoy coming to school. They are sure the school has improved a great deal and are proud to wear their uniform as a mark of their loyalty.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory. Students are polite and friendly and behaviour in lessons is generally good. A small minority tries to buck the trend. The school is a calm and civilised place to be in and students feel secure.
Personal development and relationships	Good. The very good ethos of care promotes good relationships at all levels. Students accept responsibility and contribute to the life of the school.
Attendance	Satisfactory. The school has worked hard to deal with persistent absentees. Unauthorised absence is above average, because the school is meticulous about applying the criteria.



## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	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 satisfactory overall in all years in English, with some better teaching in Years 7 to 9 and the 6<sup>th</sup> form. They are satisfactory in science, and good in mathematics, where staffing provision has greatly improved. They are good in design and technology in Years 7 to 9 and good in history, ICT, modern languages, music and business studies; they are satisfactory in citizenship, geography, religious studies and in design and technology in Years 10 and 11. In physical education, boys are better taught than girls. Teaching and learning in art and design are unsatisfactory because of a lack of challenge in almost every aspect of the subject.

Where teachers have good expertise, lessons are well planned, with interesting variety and appropriate activities that interest and engage students. Marking is not consistently good and often does not indicate what is needed for improvement. The quality and frequency of homework varies. The few unsatisfactory lessons mostly reflect difficulties in recruitment of suitably qualified teachers. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is satisfactory. Overall the school adequately meets the needs of students at all levels of attainment, including those with special needs, those from different ethnic backgrounds and the very small number for whom English is not their mother tongue.

Students in Years 7 to 9, in particular, concentrate well and have a good awareness of their learning targets. Most students want to learn and enjoy participating in lessons. They use the library and ICT facilities well for research and presentation. On the few occasions when concentration flags and learning seizes up, it is usually because of a lack of expertise on the part of the teacher.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is enhanced by drama and a second language. In Years 10 and 11 the range of vocational options and new subjects such as psychology and business studies increase opportunity. However, the statutory curriculum for ICT is not fully met.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Most students are well integrated into the normal curriculum, with appropriate support where needed.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Good. A part-time support teacher works in conjunction with the special needs co-ordinator to ensure that any students who need help receive it.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Spiritual development is satisfactory but is not well planned. Moral, social and cultural development are good. Students are taught to know right from wrong, to work together and exercise responsibility. They learn to appreciate the diversity of cultures in modern Britain.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good. Students are very well looked after. Good monitoring is improving attendance and behaviour. Assessment information is well used to track individual progress but there is not enough rigorous analysis of subject performance against national data.

The school works increasingly well with parents, who appreciate the spirit of openness that now prevails.

#### HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The recently appointed headteacher is providing clear-sighted and determined leadership. He is well supported by a good team of experienced, capable and hard-working senior staff. Delegation of responsibilities to heads of faculty and heads of year is good, although targets for improvement are not sharp enough.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Governors have stood by the school in difficult times and steered it towards the improvements it has made. However, they are not ensuring the school meets all statutory requirements in respect of curriculum and race relations policies.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring and evaluation of teaching is sound but is inconsistent among heads of faculty. Performance management is not fully in place. The school secures best value by challenging existing practice and through competition and consultation. But it does not compare itself enough with other similar schools to make useful national comparisons and identify areas for improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Funds have been well directed towards securing improvements in the learning environment and increasingly, to recruit and retain staff. Staffing is unsatisfactory because of the lack of suitably qualified staff in some areas of the curriculum. The good accommodation and learning resources, especially ICT, enhance the quality of education.

#### PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like school and make good progress</li> <li>• They are comfortable to approach the school with any problems</li> <li>• The school expects their children to work hard and do their best and to become sensible and mature</li> <li>• The school provides an interesting range of extra-curricular activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behaviour in school</li> <li>• The amount of homework their children receive</li> <li>• Information about how their children are getting on</li> <li>• The extent to which the school works closely with parents</li> </ul>

The inspection team agrees with the positive comments but not with all of the concerns. Behaviour in the school is now satisfactory, for the most part good, with occasional pockets of difficulty, reflected in the number of exclusions. We agree that homework is not always set consistently to the timetable. The quality of information for parents is good, though they are not always informed enough about the curriculum.

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 89 students in the small but growing sixth form. It is part of the Welwyn Garden City Consortium, comprising three schools and a college of further education. Students' backgrounds reflect those in the main school, although there are more males than females: attainment on entry is lower than average as are socio-economic backgrounds. The number of students with special educational needs is small, as is the proportion coming from minority ethnic backgrounds. Fifty four per cent of students from Year 11 stayed on into the 6<sup>th</sup> form in 2002, a slightly higher proportion than the previous three years, indicating the 6<sup>th</sup> form is growing.

### HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Although standards are average, they represent good achievement because a good proportion of students meet or exceed their target minimum grades. Inspection evidence shows that achievement is set to rise because the quality of teaching and learning is good and leadership and management, both at consortium and individual school level, is good. The provision is cost-effective and meets the needs of Sir Frederic Osborn students well. Overall, the 6<sup>th</sup> form is effective and offers an unusually broad range of courses, because of the good consortium arrangements.

#### Strengths

- The school's involvement with the consortium is working well and enhances the learning experiences of students;
- Students make effective use of good resources to support their learning;
- Students have positive attitudes to each other and to the school and wider community;
- Good leadership ensures that students are given very good support to help their personal development and learning.

#### What could be improved

- The monitoring, evaluation and improvement of teaching and learning to ensure that it consistently meets the needs of pupils of all levels of attainment;
- The extent to which students are given information that enables them to improve their day to day work to exceed their targets.

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

### THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Good.</b> Students achieve well. They have a mature attitude to learning. Staff expertise is good and teaching is well matched to students' needs.
Biology	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Achievement is satisfactory, though it is good for higher attaining students. Teaching is good and students show interest and learn well.
Business studies	<b>Good.</b> Students achieve well because teaching is good and they have very good attitudes to their work. The department makes good use of links with local businesses and is led well.

Religious studies	<b>Very good.</b> Students are achieving very well as a result of very good teaching. Students' work is well assessed and monitored.
English	<b>Good.</b> Standards are average but reflect good achievement. Teaching is good and students respond well, though independent learning is not developed enough.

Work was sampled in some other subjects. Teaching and learning were very good in leisure and tourism, good in geography, physics and information technology, music technology, physical education and theatre studies but unsatisfactory in art and design.

#### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Guidance about 6 <sup>th</sup> form courses is improving and students are given very good advice and support while they are studying.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management are good. The head of 6 <sup>th</sup> form works well with the consortium coordinator to secure appropriate provision and equality of opportunity. Good monitoring of students' performance is leading to rising standards. Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is not yet rigorous enough.

#### 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"> <li>• There is an excellent range of courses</li> <li>• Teaching is good and challenging</li> <li>• Relationships are very good and teachers provide good help and support</li> <li>• The school listens and responds to 6<sup>th</sup> form views</li> <li>• The Young Enterprise activity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice about what to do in the 6<sup>th</sup> form</li> <li>• Assessment of work so that they can see what to do to improve</li> <li>• Careers advice</li> </ul>

Interviews during the inspection found that students were very positive about their sixth form experience and their views are justified. Information about the sixth form and guidance on the most suitable courses has improved this year and is now well co-ordinated. The need to clarify assessment information is valid as there are some inconsistencies at present.

#### COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and students' achievements**

1. Students enter the school with, in general, below average levels of attainment. This includes most of those who join the school other than at the start of Year 7. Although the 2002 National Curriculum tests for students at the age of 14 showed results were below average, this represents an improvement on the previous year, when they were well below.
2. Results in English were in line with the national average both in respect of average grades and the proportion achieving the expected level 5. The proportion achieving level 6 was also in line with the national average. This represented good achievement when compared with similar schools and is part of an improving trend. There was no significant difference in the standards of boys and girls. In mathematics, results were well below the national average for all schools and the gap between school and national results widened. Standards were very poor in comparison to similar schools. Boys did better than girls, reflecting the national picture. In science, results were below the national average and below those of similar schools based on average points. The proportion achieving the expected level 5 or above was below average and by comparison with similar schools it was well below, but the proportion achieving level 6 and above was close to average.
3. Teachers' assessments show the proportion reaching level 5, the expected level, was above the national average in art and design, but this was not confirmed by the inspection. In design and technology and ICT the proportion was average but below average in other subjects. The proportion reaching level 6 was well below in all subjects except ICT, where it was below.
4. The 2002 GCSE examination results were in the lowest 5 per cent of schools nationally based both on prior attainment and eligibility for free school meals. The gap between school and national results has widened, with girls doing slightly worse overall than boys. Although English results were well below average, they were close to average when compared with similar schools. This was part of a consistent trend. In mathematics, the proportion of A\*-C grades was well below average and the proportion of students with grades A\*-G was below average. Results were worse than 2001. In science, results were well below the national average, though there was a reasonable proportion of A\* and A grades and evidence of an improving trend. The performance of science relative to other subjects was better and reflected the change to a modular science course which was better suited to students' needs. Other subjects' results were below average, although history and PE results were well below average. Subjects in addition to science that performed better relative to other subjects were geography and religious studies. Design and technology, English literature, art and design did less well, along with English language and mathematics.
5. There are two main reasons for these results:-
  - a. The impact of the school's reputation when it was placed in special measures following its inspection in 1998 increased the number of students in primary schools with good potential who applied for admission to other schools. At the same time, casual admissions increased, not just of students moving into the area who could not gain a place at other schools, but of students in difficulties at other schools who, in some cases, transferred to Sir Frederic Osborn School rather than face exclusion. Many of these students were poorly motivated and their attendance was poor. Of the 150 students in Year 11 in 2001-2002, 31 were admitted other than in the September of Year 7. Several of these did not attend any examinations. In addition, there were 7 students predicted to gain 5 A\*-C grades who left the school after Year 9.
  - a. Staff recruitment, always difficult in Hertfordshire because of the high price of housing, was doubly difficult for a school in special measures, although it was making some progress and in 2000 was moved up into the category of a school with serious weaknesses. Students' learning was disrupted by constant staffing changes. The full-time equivalent of 47.45 staff left the school in the last two years and the equivalent of 56.45 staff joined. In many cases

this represents short term temporary teachers staying for only a few weeks and then moving on. Although the school was making strenuous efforts to raise the standard of teaching and learning, the impact of this work on short term temporary staff was inevitably minimal. At one stage, the only full-time qualified mathematics specialist in the school was the head of mathematics.

6. Despite the gloomy picture, however, the overall improvement in 2002 in Year 9 average points from the previous year and in particular the encouraging English results suggested that the considerable effort to tackle staffing problems and focus on improving teaching and learning was beginning to turn the school around.
7. The evidence of work seen during the inspection confirmed without doubt what the parents also told us: that the school was making rapid strides in the right direction. Standards of work seen during the inspection are still below average overall, but in the key under-performing subjects of mathematics and science they are now very close to average in Year 9. This represents satisfactory achievement overall, since these students have made progress from below average starting points. The reasons for this improvement are -
  - a. The good leadership and support to teaching and learning over the previous 3 years is now making a difference;
  - b. Additional resources, improved accommodation and the impact of improved behaviour management has made the school a much more attractive place to be in, raising staff, students' and parents' morale and expectations;
  - c. In particular the new headteacher worked very hard to attract new staff to the school for September and, although some staffing situations have remained flimsy, some good, well qualified staff have made all the difference.
8. In English, standards at the end of Year 9 are average, but the standard of spelling, punctuation and grammar has an adverse effect on the quality of writing. Reading skills are average and improving as a result of giving more attention to wider reading. At the end of Year 11 standards are still below average but improving, as more consistent staffing and teaching make a difference to learning. Students engage well in discussion activities but do not sustain their ideas for long or tie them in with their reading and writing. But they do read a wide range of texts and comment sensibly on them and most of them take a pride in their written work, despite some deficiencies in basic skills.
9. In mathematics there has been a considerable improvement as a result of much more stable and well qualified staffing provision from September 2002 and very good leadership. Standards at the end of Year 9 are fast approaching average and although they are still below average in Year 11, they have improved remarkably.
10. In science, standards are improving throughout the school. In Year 9 they are now very close to average; in Year 11 they are below average rather than well below. A change of course to modular science has improved students' motivation, although there continues to be a weakness in the students' skills of scientific enquiry. Students' skills in using ICT for analysis and research are good but a weakness is that they struggle to speak or write about science at any length.
11. Standards are average in citizenship, ICT and music in Years 7 to 9. Standards in art and design are below average because of a lack of commitment to improvement, which is very unusual in this school. Difficulties of recruiting staff have contributed to below average standards in design and technology. In history they have improved from well below to below average and in geography they are below average. In French they are now average in Year 9, but they are below average in Spanish, which is not started until Year 8. While standards in both languages in Year 11 remain below average, they are rising as more students opt for language courses at this level. Standards are rising in GNVQ business studies as staffing improves. Standards in physical education are below average because although they are rising fast for the boys, staffing difficulties are holding down standards for girls. There was no significant difference noticeable in the standards of students from minority ethnic backgrounds.

12. Achievement in all years has improved considerably as a result of the strong focus on improving teaching and learning and good application of the National Strategy for Years 7 to 9, particularly in literacy.
13. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 in English is good, particularly among high attaining students. Although basic skills in writing are not yet as high as they should be, they are fast improving along with reading skills. Good attention to boys' learning needs is having a good impact on standards and the use of ICT is helping to focus on improving presentation. In Years 10 and 11 achievement is satisfactory and higher attaining students in particular are developing well in their appreciation of literature. Lower attaining students lack the confidence and skills to write at length. In mathematics, the under-achievement of previous years was caused by severe staffing difficulties, the worst in the school. Now that these difficulties have been virtually eliminated, achievement is satisfactory and in many respects good because the pace of learning has accelerated so quickly over one term. The achievement of higher attaining students in science is good and of other students, satisfactory. A more appropriate and well planned curriculum is making a difference, along with overall improvements to teaching and learning.
14. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 in ICT, French, Spanish and music; it is satisfactory in all other subjects. In Years 10 and 11 achievement is satisfactory in all subjects, with the exception of art and design and girls' physical education. Students from different ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well as others.
15. Students' literacy skills are average. They are making satisfactory progress in improving skills in Years 7 to 9, but in Years 10 and 11 in particular, written work is often marred by mistakes. This is particularly noticeable in subjects such as geography and history. In English, science, French, Spanish and geography students use technical language to good effect. Skills are less secure in mathematics and are unsatisfactory in art and design and physical education. Standards in essay writing are good in religious studies and geography but, generally, students' extended writing is under-developed. Students' research skills are sound, and they make good use of the library and the Internet. Speaking and listening are a strength for a large proportion of the students and are particularly evident in subjects such as drama, where there is directed discussion.
16. The standard of numeracy overall is average. In science the students make sound use of the skills of estimating, measuring and calculating variables such as pressure, speed and density and displaying information graphically. Sound basic skills are also evident in mathematics, accounting for the rising levels of attainment. Other examples were seen in music, where students use computers to compose in timed units, in ICT when using spreadsheets and databases and in food technology where they calculate quantities well.
17. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in all years. In the majority of subjects they achieve as well as other groups of students. For example, students in a low attaining mathematics class in Year 7 made satisfactory progress in measuring using centimetres and millimetres because the teacher and support assistants consolidated learning through repetition. Students make less than satisfactory progress in art and design because tasks do not match their learning needs appropriately.
18. None of the small number of students whose mother tongue is not English is at the initial stage of learning English. Their progress is satisfactory and they achieve largely in line with their peers.

### **Sixth form**

19. Students have access to a very wide range of courses in the consortium. As a result numbers from the school taking each course tend to be too small to make valid comparisons with national data. However, in 2001 GCE A/AS average points were well below average. When advanced vocational qualifications are included, they are below average. The results of males are below those of females, whose average points scores were in line with the national average.

20. In subjects where there were at least five entries – English, general studies, geography and mathematics - results were well below average, with the exception of art and design and business, whose six students' results were above average. Average points scores improved in 2002 but no national data is available for comparisons. Similarly, for those students who completed GNVQ Intermediate leisure and tourism and information technology courses, no national comparative data is available.
21. The best measure of standards in these circumstances is achievement, that is, how much progress did students make from their starting points? Nationally valid systems exist for calculating what A level grades a student might be expected to get on the basis of their GCSE results. Data for the school's 2001 A level results shows that 63 per cent of students met or exceeded their target grades. In 2002 the proportion increased to 74 per cent. In addition in 2002 in AS level examinations, taken at the end of Year 12, 83 per cent of students met their target minimum grades and 59 per cent exceeded them.
22. Current work seen during the inspection confirms this picture of good achievement - the result of good teaching. The small numbers on each course mean that national comparisons do not tell the story. However, in the subjects reported in detail there is good achievement overall and very good achievement in religious studies. Standards in the key skills of literacy and numeracy are average.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

23. Students' attitudes to school are satisfactory. They like their school and show good interest in the activities available. In lessons most students are positive about their work and learning. Two thirds of lessons seen were characterised by good or better attitudes and behaviour. Students cooperate well in the majority of classes and settle to individual work with interest. The majority of students listen attentively to their teacher and to the contributions that other students make to the class and show respect for the ideas and feelings of others. Parents are pleased that their children like school and feel that the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible. Students with special educational needs and those who come from a range of different ethnic backgrounds all show similarly satisfactory attitudes.
24. In lessons and around the school behaviour is satisfactory and often good. Students are very clear about the expected standards of behaviour and the majority meet them well. There is a minority of students who can be very challenging but in most lessons their behaviour is well managed and does not interrupt the learning of the class. Where lessons have good pace and a variety of interesting tasks students work sensibly and behave well. However, in a few lessons where the pace of work is slow and based on routine activities that do not fully involve the class, students lose interest quickly and behaviour deteriorates. The number of exclusions has risen recently because the school has strongly reinforced its behaviour code to help improve behaviour further.
25. Students enjoy good relationships with each other and with members of staff. Their personal development is good and is closely linked to a strong ethos of care and respect. They mix well at break and lunch time and enjoy happy and relaxed leisure periods. Students are good at exercising responsibility, for example helping in the dining room and in the library. The School Council meets regularly and discusses a wide range of school based issues. A number of its recommendations have been implemented.
26. Attendance is now broadly satisfactory and this is a good reflection of the very determined effort that has been made to improve the situation throughout the school. Despite the strong emphasis on the need for regular attendance a number of families still take holidays in term time or condone casual absence from school. The school works well to integrate a small number of students who find regular attendance at school difficult and support by the Education Welfare Officer is good. Some students who have transferred from other schools come with established patterns of poor attendance which the school works hard to change. Unauthorised absence is above the national level but this is in part a reflection of the very strict interpretation of unauthorised absence that the



school maintains. Punctuality to school and lessons is broadly satisfactory and another area in which the school continues to promote improvement.

### **Sixth form**

27. Students in the sixth form enjoy their work and value the experience of sixth form life. Their attitudes to work and to the sixth form are good and they provide very good role models for younger students. They undertake a range of responsibilities with pride and efficiency. In lessons the vast majority of students listen attentively and work with good concentration. They enjoy lively discussions and are able to work well independently when given the opportunity. Over two thirds of lessons seen were characterised by very good attitudes and behaviour. There are good relationships between students and with staff which, together with the positive attitudes, help to create a very good learning atmosphere in classes. Students settle quickly into the sixth form and value the time and care given by staff in helping them settle to sixth form studies, develop greater independence and select the most suitable courses. Behaviour is good and contributes to the enjoyment that students gain from being in the sixth form. A small number of students have left but there have been no exclusions. Attendance is satisfactory and the head of sixth form assigns a high priority to improving both attendance and punctuality.

### **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

28. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory in all years. This judgement takes into account some lingering pockets of unsatisfactory teaching, largely the result of problems of recruiting staff able to stay in the school for any length of time. Those who do stay benefit from some good monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning and strategies that have been effective in bringing about improvements. These, together with the successful recruitment of staff to some areas of the curriculum, have resulted in 3 out of 5 lessons being good or better and 1 in 5 being very good or excellent, which is better than at the last inspection. This is the key to the rapid improvement that is now taking place. Effective leadership and the commitment of staff and governors at all levels have changed the ethos of the school to facilitate good teaching and learning. In most subjects where teaching and learning are satisfactory, the judgement mirrors the school picture of much good practice but unsatisfactory patches here and there, despite strenuous efforts to improve them.
29. In English, for example, teaching and learning are satisfactory overall because, although there is a preponderance of high quality teaching, there is some which fails to engage students fully. The better lessons are characterised by pace and variety, with enthusiasm and well-pitched activities producing hard work and fast improving levels of achievement. In mathematics, there has been a remarkable turnaround in the subject's fortunes. Teaching and learning are now good overall, with some outstanding teaching resulting in a very rapid rise in standards and greatly improved achievement. Before last September there was a succession of temporary teachers and the head of department was sometimes the only person in the school with any expertise in the subject. But since September the staffing situation has been transformed. Very good leadership has secured well planned lessons, generally good use is made of the National Strategy for Years 7 to 9 and students are engaged in learning in a way that is securing substantial gains. The picture in science is satisfactory overall, with some continuing staffing problems impacting upon the proportion of good teaching. Lesson planning is good and good questioning, backed up by good relationships, is capturing students' interest and motivating them to learn. The pressure of setting up and completing practical lessons means that from time to time the conclusions of lessons are rushed, giving insufficient time for students to consolidate their learning.
30. Generally, however, there is good practice in telling students the learning outcomes at the start of the lesson and going over them again before the lesson ends, to assess how well they have been absorbed. Often lessons also begin with some lively questioning to recall what has been learnt previously or to challenge thinking. For example, in an excellent Year 11 English lesson, the teacher's probing questions about students' grasp of characters in "An Inspector Calls" tested their powers of analysis and generated a lively discussion involving almost all the class. Students deepened their grasp of the play's themes of power, class, respectability and guilt, learning to

substantiate their views by reference to the text. By contrast, in a Year 10 art lesson on landscape painting, the aims of the lesson were not made clear. The teacher did not take into account students' previous experience and skill levels or provide enough visual stimulus at the outset. Students tried unsuccessfully to do sponge painting and then too much talk by the teacher got in the way of any further participation. The lesson finished early with very little achieved and with de-motivated students.

31. Now that there is a higher proportion of staff with expertise in the subjects they are teaching, many more lessons are characterised by good planning of interesting activities that take account of students' learning needs. In a very good Year 8 geography lesson about the climate in Brazil, the teacher made good use of a projector to show how a graph can be constructed to show temperature and rainfall. Students then plotted their own graphs, using data they were given and students with special educational needs were given a partly constructed graph in which they had to supply the missing information. Higher attaining students who finished their task earlier were given an extension task. The result was that all students were fully absorbed in their varying activities and learnt how graphs can provide a quick and informative view of climate. Such well planned lessons with interesting and well pitched activities ensure that students feel positive about learning and, along with the good rapport that teachers build, make behaviour management much easier. Where such good features are absent, concentration wanders and trouble brews. For example, in an unsatisfactory Year 8 mathematics lesson, the lack of variety and pace in the teaching led to inattention, unsatisfactory behaviour by some students and little progress. But a lesson like this is the exception rather than the rule.
32. In some subjects, for example, English, art and design and modern languages, there is a need to sharpen up assessment procedures for two main reasons:
  - a. Data on attainment and achievement both in the subject and across the curriculum are not used enough to ensure that the work is pitched at an appropriate level for individual students;
  - b. Marking is not always consistent, particularly where there have been staffing changes; it does not always flag up to students what they need to do to improve.
33. The school has good ICT resources and teachers are increasingly using these to support learning. They make good use of videos, for example in geography and history lessons; they encourage students to use ICT to record their own work or to research topics on the Internet, such as health related issues in personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons. There is room for further development of such learning strategies to support students in managing their own learning.
34. Parents expressed concerns about homework. Broadly the inspection found that homework was set regularly and students indicated that for the most part they were kept busy. But there are inconsistencies which are only made worse by the need to use short term temporary teachers to plug gaps on the timetable.
35. Teaching of basic skills is satisfactory. The National Literacy Strategy has been effective in raising standards in Years 7 to 9. The catch-up programme for students who are below the level expected of 11 year olds in English when they enter the school has had a good impact. Through good use of writing frames, glossaries and study aids students gradually make improvements to their spelling, reading and writing skills. Most subjects take the teaching of basic literacy skills seriously, though further improvement is needed in some subjects, such as history and physical education. Examples of good practice include: key subject vocabulary displayed prominently in classrooms, the library stocking specialised texts and multi-media materials and the English department having dictionaries available in each classroom.
36. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory overall but it is not coherently and consistently planned in all subjects. There are examples of teaching providing good opportunities for numeracy development in science, through calculation and graph work, in geography through map work, in food technology and in ICT.
37. Teaching of students with special educational needs is satisfactory overall. Most teachers know the targets of students with individual education plans and give them appropriate tasks and

support. For example, in a Year 10 Spanish lesson the teacher gave good support to students to produce dialogues about asking the way in a town. This meant that they could undertake the same task as the whole class and practice using the language.

38. Students for whom English is not their mother tongue and who need support receive lessons from a part-time English language teacher. They are well supported in their lessons, with very little need for withdrawal. There is good liaison between the support teacher and the special needs coordinator, who ensures liaison with the rest of the staff. For example, in a Year 8 mathematics lesson the teacher was able to support a student by ensuring instructions were understood. The provision of key words enabled the student to participate and contribute with confidence, whilst developing their understanding of the English language.

### **Sixth form**

39. Many students benefit from teaching across the consortium but this report concentrates on the evidence for teaching and learning seen in the school during the inspection. Teaching and learning in the 6<sup>th</sup> form are good. This explains how students, many of whom do not have very high grades from their GCSE courses, are managing to cope with A/S and A level courses and are making good progress. Teaching is good in the focus subjects of mathematics, biology, business studies and English. It is very good in religious studies.
40. Teachers know their subjects well and their enthusiasm helps to motivate students. Good questions at the start of lessons fire up interest, for example in a good Year 12 biology lesson on hormones, where the students had been encouraged to research the subject before they came to the lesson. This reflects good planning, in which teachers take good account of students' learning needs. In a very good Year 13 religious studies lesson, students had prepared presentations on ethical issues, stimulated by their attendance at a talk by a visitor. The students had clearly worked very hard and they asked good, probing questions that deepened thought and understanding. The school has introduced a 6 weekly planner in which teachers provide information to students about forthcoming work, enabling them to take more responsibility for managing their own learning.
41. Teachers recognise the need to make learning active. An example was a good Year 13 mathematics lesson on calculus techniques; the teacher varied the activities between doing, talking and writing, moving the learning along at a good pace with short-term, timed goals. Students are often challenged to research topics and to think out their opinions on the basis of evidence. They appreciate and use well the good library and ICT resources available. Generally written work is marked efficiently but there was some evidence of teachers not always making clear what the next steps were and students made this point in discussion with inspectors.
42. Given that some students have achieved very modest grades at GCSE, teachers do not always take enough account of the range of ability within the class, allowing the higher attaining, more articulate students to dominate, while the less confident lower attaining students take a more passive role. This was noted in a Year 12 religious studies lesson. As a result of unsatisfactory teaching in art and design, students were working below their potential and the quality of their discussion on the artistic expression of emotion was shallow. Teachers show a good awareness of the needs of any students for whom English is not their mother tongue.

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

43. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is good. It meets the statutory requirements for teaching all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. All students are also given enhanced opportunities through the provision of drama and a second foreign language. Overall provision for the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is sound. Students have a wide choice of options in National Curriculum subjects and can also choose courses in psychology, economics and drama. Vocational courses offered by the school are limited to business studies and a new National Foundation for Teaching Enterprise course in Year 10. However, around 30 students in Years 10 and 11 do have the opportunity to attend a variety of vocational courses at the further education college, mainly on a part-time basis. These arrangements mean that some students miss lessons in their subjects taught at school but a change that will put this right has been put in place for September 2003. Statutory requirements for ICT are not fully met because there is no provision for sensing and data-logging. However, the school is aware of this deficiency and the necessary equipment has been ordered.
44. Provision for extra-curricular activities is good and has improved since the last inspection. After-school homework facilities in the Learning Resource Centre, extra GCSE sessions and revision classes in the Easter holidays give students good opportunities to consolidate and extend their learning. Students also have particularly good extra-curricular opportunities in music and drama through participation in concerts, productions, festivals and visits. The physical education department offers a wide range of activities for boys but at the moment opportunities for girls are restricted. Most departments arrange relevant educational visits to extend students' learning. Visits to Barcelona, for example, have given good support for students' learning in both Spanish and business studies.
45. The school's programme for PSHE has improved since the last inspection and is now good. The curriculum is carefully planned and the sequence of topics is well matched to students' learning needs. The programme includes sex and relationship education, issues of drugs misuse, careers education and aspects of citizenship. It makes extensive use of outside agencies and is taught by heads of year and other senior members of staff.
46. The school makes sound provision for work-related education. The careers education element of the personal and social education is planned carefully and ensures that students are well prepared for the decisions they need to take at the end of Years 9 and 11. They have good access to careers guidance and work experience in Year 10 is well organised. Careers material is now available to help students with individual career planning in a newly created resource area but at the moment access is limited to one lunch-time a week.
47. The school's links with the community and its partner institutions are good. Close links with health and welfare agencies ensure that students have good access to information, guidance and advice. The school's strong links with local businesses give good support to students' learning through visits to different firms, speakers coming into school and the provision of mentors for selected students. The school works well with its primary partner schools and effective arrangements to support the transfer of students joining the school ensure a good start in Year 7. Close links with the further education college are important for the provision of vocational courses in Years 10 and 11.
48. Provision for equal opportunities is satisfactory. Results are monitored by gender but not by ethnicity, and this is a weakness. Students of potentially high attainment are identified and supported in some departments, such as mathematics, but a whole school approach to supporting gifted and talented students is not yet in place. All students have equal access to extra-curricular activities.
49. Provision for students with special educational needs is good. The majority follow the full curriculum. A very small number of students in Years 10 and 11 receive good additional support in place of a short GCSE course in French or design and technology. Teaching assistants work well with teachers in supporting students' achievements though they are not always available where

needed, for example in design and technology. A computer based learning program provides good help to students with reading and mathematics. Each week students with a specific learning difficulty (dyslexia) attend a helpful one-to-one lesson with a specialist teacher to improve their ability to identify word sounds. An art therapist visits once a week, providing good support to students with emotional and behavioural difficulties. A support teacher provides a weekly lesson to improve the literacy of identified Year 7 students.

### **Sixth form**

50. The quality and range of learning opportunities in the sixth form is very good and the curriculum meets statutory requirements. The school's very close links with the two other schools and the Further Education College in the consortium enable students to have learning opportunities that could not be provided by the school on its own. Students have access to a very wide range of AS and A-level subjects, and vocational courses at advanced and intermediate level, which meet their individual needs and aspirations.
51. A good programme of enrichment activities, including provision for religious studies and general studies, helps students extend their learning as well as supporting their personal development. The school has a very effective means of teaching key skills through Young Enterprise. All students participate in a mini-enterprise activity and are assessed on this, and the quality of their presentations. There is good provision of information on careers and continuing education. Students have appropriate access to careers guidance and there are good links with higher education institutions. The head of sixth form and sixth form tutors give very good support to individual students over the choices they need to make.
52. Provision for vocational education is good. Students can choose from a wide range of vocational courses from across the consortium. Vocational courses such as AVCE business and GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism are taught at the school. There are good links with local businesses and an established pattern of vocationally based activities in France and Spain. All students take part in Young Enterprise. In planning and managing a range of mini enterprise they develop their key skills, particularly in ICT and in communication.

### **Personal Development**

53. The provision for students' personal development is good. The good relationships in the school help to provide a supportive context for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The commitment and attitudes of staff set a positive example for students. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.
54. Provision for students' spiritual development is sound. Subjects such as English, music and religious studies provide students with good opportunities to develop spiritual awareness and insight. However, planned provision in most subjects is under-developed and this leads to some missed opportunities. Assemblies are carefully prepared and linked to a theme for the week. They encourage students to reflect on topics relevant to their own interests and experience. One assembly made very effective use of a wide range of examples to help students think about ways of overcoming fears and anxieties. The statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met, as reported at the last inspection.
55. Provision for students' moral development is good. The school has worked hard to ensure that students know the difference between right and wrong. Ethical issues and moral dilemmas are considered in subjects such as English, history and geography. Work in PSHE and in religious studies helps students clarify their own moral values and think through some of the choices they will need to make in life.
56. Social education is also good. Students have good opportunities to develop social and collaborative skills in lessons. The School Council enables students to take on responsibility and show initiative within the school. Its members take part in the selection of staff and contribute to decisions about school facilities and policies. The recently developed house system gives

students good opportunities to organise and take part in a range of competitive and other activities. Students also raise money for charity on a regular basis. An annual Christmas concert, for example, has supported a wide range of charities in recent years.

57. Provision for cultural education is good. Opportunities for students to develop an understanding of different cultures are well provided in subjects such as English, music, art, design technology, modern foreign languages and the humanities. Students learn about life in Peru, for example, in their Spanish lessons and about Japanese cultural traditions in geography. Cultural interests and horizons are extended through the school's good programme of extra-curricular programme of sport, music, drama and other activities. Students are also given a wide range of opportunities to go on educational visits in this country, and on trips and exchanges abroad. The take-up of these is good.

### **Sixth form**

58. The provision for students' personal development is good. Subjects such as English and science make a positive contribution to students' spiritual and moral education. In biology, for example, students look at the ethical issues associated with using biotechnology to manipulate reproduction. In general studies students have the opportunity to consider a range of religious and moral issues, such as medical ethics and religious experience. Assemblies are carefully prepared occasions which challenge students' thinking and encourage them to reflect on issues of meaning and value.
59. Students' social and cultural development is well supported and extended through a good range of opportunities. Students are encouraged to support activities within the school. The head boy and girl chair the School Council and sixth form students are involved in the house system as house captains. They take part in school productions and concerts, and help with games. Teachers encourage a good collaborative ethos within the sixth form, which promotes a sense of mutual responsibility and a concern for others. Recently, for example, students responded very positively to an appeal to help young people in Romania by organising a successful money-raising event.

### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

60. The school provides a very good level of care for the health, safety and welfare of all students. There is a clear and efficient focus on matters of health and safety and suitable arrangements are made for students who are unwell. A strong feature of the school is the very good management of Child Protection. Teachers know individual students well, show a good understanding of their needs and respond to students in a positive and supportive way. A good emphasis is given to guiding students in the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and establishing sensible habits for their adult life especially through the PSHE programme. The school make good use of the professional support of a range of agencies in providing very good care for students. For example the Body Zone facility on site is open each week and provides students with very good access to professional advice from the school nurse, other professional support workers and through them to a range of other sources of help and advice.
61. Very good monitoring of attendance has helped to reduce levels of absence from school as well as late arrival and truancy. The school has made good use of support from the local authority and, after a problematic start, has successfully integrated a computerised registration system to help the drive to improve attendance. Attendance and late arrival are very carefully monitored and accurate records are kept which are in turn well used to provide targets for students identified as having attendance problems. Targets are reviewed regularly to provide goals and motivation for students to improve their attendance record and this approach is proving to be increasingly successful. There is a clear whole school policy for attendance which is well supported by a range of rewards and sanctions that are clear, well structured and respected by students.
62. The procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and eliminating oppressive behaviour are good. Pastoral staff keep good records of behaviour and also the personal development of students. The use of targets and involvement of both students and parents in setting targets to

help promote improvement in behaviour or attitudes has made a significant contribution to improving behaviour overall in the school. Students value the rewards for good behaviour, attitudes and contributions to the school. Especially popular and successful in motivating students has been the vouchers which can be exchanged for merit points as they are accumulated. Parents are appreciative of the improved standards of behaviour in the school. The plan to provide an inclusion unit for students experiencing problems with behaviour or attendance is appropriate and will support the strong drive to continue to improve these areas.

63. Assessment is good overall. The school maintains a useful database that includes individual student targets in all subjects. In consequence most students know their targets and areas of strength and weakness. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good overall; they are very good in design and technology but unsatisfactory in art and design and ICT. In mathematics, for example, good use was made of assessment evidence to redress under-achievement by some students following severe staffing difficulties last year. At present most departments do not use national data well enough to be clear about how well students are achieving.
64. Use of assessment evidence to guide curriculum planning is satisfactory, though there is a need for improvement in some subjects – art and design, music and geography, for example. Use is good in mathematics and physical education and very good in design and technology. Baseline information against which students' performance is judged is well established and used well in the preparation of whole school and departmental targets for national examinations. A weakness is that comparison of data with other schools nationally is not at present clear enough for teachers to have a better grasp of students' potential.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Assessment***

65. In the sixth form assessment is good. Sixth form induction now relates students' attainment to course ambitions very well. Precise targets are set for students who have a clear idea of what they have to do, in general terms, to achieve them. Regular reporting helps them to see if they are on target. Information from assessments and results is put to very good use in consortium planning. Faculties are required to make an annual review of results and take appropriate action. Assessment is good in business education, mathematics and science, satisfactory in English and unsatisfactory in art and design. The weakness in assessment is at classroom level, where the assessment of individual assignments does not consistently provide students with a clear idea of what steps are needed to raise their level of attainment.

### ***Advice, support and guidance***

66. Staff show a very high level of commitment to promoting the safety and welfare of students. Led by a very caring head of sixth form, teaching staff and tutors give generously of their time in talking to students and helping with their concerns and problems. A well structured induction programme helps students settle quickly and confidently into sixth form life. As a result of a new appointment there is now good guidance on courses being provided, to ensure that students make well informed decisions about the subjects they will study in the sixth form. Students might well be referred elsewhere if more appropriate and the school liaises well with the local college, for example.
67. Behaviour and attendance are well monitored through the consortium and there is efficient communication between the heads of sixth form to ensure that any emerging issues relating to behaviour or attendance are reported promptly and followed up.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

68. Parents have an increasingly good opinion of the school. They value the fact that their children like school and that they feel comfortable about approaching the school with concerns. The

school has formed good and effective links with parents and has made good progress in gaining the confidence of local communities. There is a very clear and open approach by all staff, who respond quickly and efficiently to parents. Heads of year and form tutors actively seek to involve parents in any concerns and also keep them fully involved in the achievements of their children. Regular newsletters and also the homework planner help keep parents informed about the school and their children's work. The contribution that parents make to their children's learning at home is variable but overall satisfactory. There is an active Parent Teacher Association and parents' attendance at consultation evenings, social and sports events and school productions is increasing. Overall, parents' involvement in the work of the school is sound. Some parents indicated in the questionnaire that they did not feel the school worked closely with them but the inspection did not uphold this view.

69. The school provides a good range of information for parents, including information about students' progress. There is a clear and informative prospectus for parents and information about the curriculum for some, but not all year groups. The meeting for new parents held early in Year 7 is especially helpful and informative. A particularly good initiative has been the tracking system. In consultation with students and parents, students are given targets, which are regularly reviewed by staff mentors. There are regular meetings with parents to discuss targets and the school is pleased with the good attendance at these tracking meetings. Annual reports are well structured and contain helpful information on students' progress, what they do well and what they could do to improve. There is a lack of information about what has been studied in class but overall annual reports are clear and useful to parents. These reports are discussed at a consultation evening each year and provide a further opportunity for teachers and parents to consider students' progress. Although some parents felt they were not kept well informed about their children's progress the inspection found that the quality of information for parents was good.

#### **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

70. The school has gone through turbulent times in the last four years, with an acting headteacher, then a permanent one, then an acting headteacher again, and now from September 2002 a new permanent headteacher. Besides such turbulence at the top, the considerable difficulties in recruiting permanent full-time staff and the huge turnover of temporary staff made it even more difficult for the governors and the local authority to bring about the developments required. It is to the credit of all concerned that the school has steadily improved so that it now provides a satisfactory standard of education. The roll is increasing next September as many more parents have indicated they wish to send their children to the school; standards are rising, both of work and behaviour, and achievement is satisfactory and improving.
71. This is because good leadership has never lost sight of the goal, summed up in the school's motto: "Achievement, Opportunities, Support and Success for all". It was recognised that this could only be fulfilled by improving the quality of teaching and learning in order to raise standards. The current headteacher has taken up the challenge with determination and clarity of purpose, in the knowledge that he has the backing of a very committed group of governors and a very supportive local education authority. He also has the strength of a well balanced and experienced senior management team who have worked hard in challenging circumstances to make things better. He is clarifying roles and responsibilities and ensuring effective delegation to and by his colleagues. He has left nobody in any doubt of his own commitment to the school, winning co-operation and support from the local community. Other roles are being created to improve provision, such as coordinators for literacy, numeracy and ICT. In general, heads of departments are coping well but have often been caught up with crisis management. This has prevented some from developing their leadership roles, including their responsibility for the continuous professional development of staff. Heads of year work well with form tutors to monitor students' performance and they have done much to improve students' attitudes and behaviour.
72. The co-ordinator for special educational needs gives a clear lead and management of this provision is good. Efficient communication ensures that teachers have up-to-date information on students, though there are some occasions when this information is not used to guide lesson planning. The local education authority gives good support. Several teaching assistants are



engaged in professional training. The governing body is keenly involved and has already satisfied itself that resources are used efficiently. The provision is also well managed for any students whose mother tongue is not English.

73. The governing body has maintained its faith in the school and many governors give willingly of their time to provide support. Two governors regularly help with the teaching of mathematics, working as unpaid support assistants when, at times, there were no qualified mathematics teachers available. Working with the local education authority, the governors have also helped to create a much improved learning environment, with good accommodation and resources, especially computer resources. This has helped to change the ethos of the school so that it is an attractive place to work and learn in. They have not put in place required policies for the curriculum and for promoting race relations. Because they regularly visit the school and report their findings, the governing body is well informed about many aspects of its life. However, it has not been clear enough about how well the school is doing compared to other schools.
74. The school is rich in data but not so confident about what it means. Assessment data is being well used to set individual students' targets and to facilitate tracking of individual's achievement. But there is not enough clarity about how national benchmarks, particularly for achievement, can assist in knowing whether standards are really rising or not, and most importantly of all, whether students are achieving well. Both governors and staff are not yet clear about which measures of success give a true picture of the school's progress. Analysis of some important aspects needs more attention, for example, the achievements of students from different ethnic backgrounds.
75. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is sound overall. Effective training in school self-evaluation techniques, including lesson observation, has been put in place for many heads of department and faculty. But because of staffing difficulties it has not always been possible to put this into practice with enough rigour or consistency to enable the school to meet its targets. Similarly, a structure for performance management has been put in place, but implementation has been uneven because of so many staffing changes. In consequence, performance management is not yet an effective instrument for improvement.
76. The school's development plans focus on the right priorities. They are not always quite sharp enough or broken down into small enough, measurable steps with clear success criteria that can be measured and evaluated effectively. The relationship between financial planning and educational priorities is well understood by governors and management. Despite the lack, until recently, of a business manager, grants and additional funds have been spent in an appropriate manner, with an eye to best value principles. The build up of a budget surplus at one point was because major spending on refurbishment and resources was not able to be completed in one year. The school is aware of the need to challenge existing ways of delivering services and to ensure fair competition in securing contracts. For example, the school now manages its own catering arrangements and these do much to contribute to the pleasant atmosphere during the lunch break, as well as providing hospitality at other times. Governors consult widely before making major decisions, for example, about specialist school status. However, they do not compare costs and standards sufficiently with other schools.
77. The school has a very good team of administration and support staff who do invaluable work in assisting the school in using its resources well, supporting students' needs and presenting a good face to the community, including parents.
78. The severe problems of recruiting and retaining teaching staff are referred to many times in this report. On average over one third of posts at the school have been subject to change in each of the last four years, some repeatedly. There are signs of improvements more recently as a result of the impact of a range of strategies for both attracting staff and retaining them - by contributing to resettlement costs, addressing housing difficulties and by creating additional posts of responsibility that help retain staff. Even so, the match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is unsatisfactory. There remain a number of teaching posts unfilled, the proportion of temporary and supply staff is still high and this adversely affects standards in a number of subjects in the main school. These currently include English, science, design and

technology, ICT and girls' physical education. However, the staffing of mathematics has recovered well from a very difficult period. In the sixth form, the match of specialist teachers to course needs is good. The school effectively draws on the expertise available across the consortium as well as from within its own staff to ensure highly qualified staff teach advanced and vocational courses.

79. Arrangements for the induction of staff new to the school and for newly qualified teachers are good. The deputy headteacher overseeing this aspect has devised a comprehensive programme of support and guidance. All newly qualified teachers are closely monitored and supported, with training carefully planned to meet their needs, including visits to other classes and schools to learn from good practice. The school also provides effectively for teacher trainees through its well-developed partnerships with three higher education institutes.
80. The devolvement of training funds to faculties is helping the school to match training to faculty and school priorities. Whole school training has also focused closely on priorities in the school's development plan, for example, in implementing the National Strategy for 11 to 14 year-olds. The 6<sup>th</sup> form consortium has good arrangements for training and supporting 6<sup>th</sup> form teachers. However, the dissemination of training outcomes to relevant colleagues is not yet consistent across the school. Neither is the impact of training and professional development on the school's provision evaluated systematically to determine the extent to which it achieves value for money.
81. Overall, accommodation is good and the premises staff look after it well, encouraging good attitudes by students towards public property. In the last four years there has been substantial investment in extensive improvements and refurbishments to provide an environment conducive to learning. Library provision is good and the good range of books and ICT resources is housed in an attractive and well-used environment, encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning. The governors have established a sensible programme of on-going refurbishments. The school is aware of students' concerns about the unsatisfactory state of the toilets, which is undermining the positive ethos being achieved so successfully elsewhere.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Leadership and management***

82. Leadership and management are good. The consortium arrangements are well managed and as a result of regular meetings between the co-ordinator and the heads of 6<sup>th</sup> forms, there is a good awareness of areas for improvement. The role of the head of 6<sup>th</sup> form has been clarified by the new headteacher and as a result she is able to be much more pro-active in providing clear and effective leadership. Already she has recognised the need to ensure that students, many of whom do not have very good GCSE grades, are given added support as they make the transition from Year 11 learning to 6<sup>th</sup> form studies in the consortium. For example, she has introduced a six-weekly planning diary and all teachers are expected to provide information about what lies ahead in the courses they are teaching, assisting students to manage their time and workload efficiently. Good lines of communication have been established to ensure that any problems are quickly picked up and dealt with. Students reported that when they raised any problem, for example about the teaching in another school, no time was lost to resolve it.
83. Monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning takes place through discussions with students and through some lesson observations. Despite this, procedures need to be tightened up and integrated into performance management arrangements to ensure that any weaknesses in teaching are addressed. The governing body takes an active interest in the 6<sup>th</sup> form and is well placed to clarify how data is collected and presented, with a view to bringing performance measures in line with national data.

### ***Resources***

84. 6<sup>th</sup> form students have access to good resources, including ICT, and they use them well. They use the same specialist accommodation as the main school but also have their own small but well appointed block of accommodation which provides good study and recreational facilities. In

managing the overall costs associated with the 6<sup>th</sup> form, the school generally exercises the principles of best value, but as in the main school, does not make enough use of comparative data to help challenge any complacency. Because of the very good range of provision made possible through the consortium, the 6<sup>th</sup> form is cost-effective.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

85. The governors, headteacher and staff should continue to work together with the local education authority, parents and students to continue to raise standards through:-
- a. \*Extending the improvements that have taken place in English, mathematics, science and other subjects by
    - continuing to give high priority to developing the quality of teaching and learning;
    - breaking down improvement targets into manageable steps;
    - ensuring that performance management is in place and is well focused on raising standards;
    - ensuring that the statutory curriculum for ICT is met.*(paragraphs 7-17, 29, 44, 76, 77)*
  - b. Improving provision for art and design and for girls' physical education  
*(paragraphs 111-115, 161-167)*
  - c. \*Improving the quality of teaching by recruiting and retaining more qualified permanent staff and by more regular and consistent monitoring of teaching and learning, to
    - minimise the unevenness of provision in some areas;
    - give more attention to literacy and numeracy in all subjects;
    - improve marking so that it provides more guidance to students;
    - ensure that appropriate homework is set regularly by all teachers.*(paragraphs 29-38,55,76,79,80 )*
  - d. \*Using data more effectively to enable subject performance to be better compared to other schools to
    - achieve greater clarity about where improvements are needed;
    - improve accountability at every level.*(paragraphs 33,64, 74, 75,77,85)*

### Sixth form

- a. \*Increase the regularity of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and ensure that it is focused to ensure that
  - lower attaining A level students are well included in all lessons;
  - higher attaining students are fully challenged in all lessons.*(paragraphs 43,84)*
- b. Ensure that students are given the information that will enable them to improve their day to day work more effectively and exceed their targets.  
*(paragraphs 42, 66)*

*Minor issues that the governors should also include in their action plan:*

Complete statutory policies for the curriculum and for promoting good race relations; disseminate staff training outcomes and evaluate how well training achieves value for money; improve the state of the students' toilets.  
*(Paragraphs 74,81,82,143)*

*\*These issues are already in the school's development plans, though some of the detail is not*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7– 11	121
	Sixth form	29
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		112

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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#### Years 7 – 11

Number	4	20	49	36	12	0	0
Percentage	3.3	16.5	40.5	29.7	10	0	0

#### Sixth form

Number	0	10	15	3	1	0	0
Percentage	0	34.5	51.7	10.3	3.5	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 here as each lesson represents more than three percentage points.

### Information about the school's students

#### Students on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	807	89
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	112	0

#### Special educational needs

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	18	2
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	89	4

#### English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	16

#### Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	32
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	29

**Attendance**

**Authorised absence**

	%
School data	6.7
National comparative data	7.8

**Unauthorised absence**

	%
School data	2.3
National comparative data	1.2

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	83	85	168

<b>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	52	50	50
	Girls	67	41	45
	Total	119	91	95
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	71 (n/a)	54 (41)	57 (49)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (n/a)	29 (16)	26 (16)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

<b>Teachers' Assessments</b>		<b>English</b>	<b>Mathematics</b>	<b>Science</b>
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	37	54	62
	Girls	48	53	43
	Total	85	107	105
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	51 (54)	64 (49)	63 (46)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	15 (17)	37 (17)	25 (19)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	71	42	113

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
	Boys	18	57	63
	Girls	9	27	30
	Total	27	84	93
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	24 (27)	74 (78)	82 (82)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	27.5 (25.8)
	National	39.8 (39)

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 students who achieved all those they studied	School	42	75%
	National		n/a

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	6	19	25
	Average point score per candidate	7.3 (7.4)	12.4 (20.3)	11.2 (12.4)
National	Average point score per candidate	* (16.9)	* (18)	* (17.5)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	6	19	25	1	5	6
	Average point score per candidate	7.2	12.1	10.9	1.0	1.2	1.2
National	Average point score per candidate	*	*	*	*	*	*

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



**Ethnic background of pupils**

**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	784	69	5
White – Irish	1	0	0
White – any other White background	12	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	10	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	4	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	6	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	6	1	0
Chinese	5	0	0
Any other ethnic group	1	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	48	0	0

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

**Teachers and classes**

**Financial information**

**Qualified teachers and classes: Y7– Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	55.65
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.7

**Education support staff: Y7– Y13**

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	251.25

**Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.1
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**Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11**

Key Stage 3	24.5
Key Stage 4	21.4

Financial year	2001-02
	£
Total income	2827039
Total expenditure	2852988
Expenditure per student	3518
Balance brought forward from previous year	171152
Balance carried forward to next year	145203

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

**Recruitment of teachers**

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	47.45
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	56.45

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	5
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	5

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	646
Number of questionnaires returned	75

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	33	56	4	5	1
My child is making good progress in school.	28	61	3	5	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	18	53	16	4	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	16	52	19	9	4
The teaching is good.	18	62	12	4	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	11	57	22	9	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	32	55	5	5	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	40	49	3	5	3
The school works closely with parents.	12	57	16	9	5
The school is well led and managed.	19	55	11	4	12
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	24	62	11	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	39	47	5	4	4

### Other issues raised by parents

Parents attending the parents evening were keen to explain how much the school has improved recently and that it was becoming the first choice of many parents. One parent wrote: "There is a pride growing in the school, which is the reverse of even 5 years ago. We feel the improvements need to be acknowledged."

**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 **satisfactory**.

**Strengths**

- Effective leadership of the department is driving up standards especially at the end of Year 9;
- Relationships between students and teachers are good and underpin learning.

**Areas for improvement**

- Standards students reach by the end of Year 11;
- Staffing, to ensure continuity and consistency.

87. The 2002 National Curriculum tests for students at the age of 14 were in line with the national average and above average when compared with similar schools. Results in English were better than in mathematics and science and reflect an improving trend. There is no significant difference in the standards of boys and girls. In the GCSE examinations in 2002, English results were well below the national average but close to the national average when compared with similar schools. This reflects a consistent trend of improvement. There is no significant difference between the standards of boys and girls.

88. At the end of Year 9 standards of work seen during the inspection are average, reflecting test results. This represents good achievement, because when the students joined the school their standards were below average. Higher attaining students make good progress because work is matched specifically to their needs. Literacy skills, in particular, have improved. This is partly because of the work done by the school on the National Literacy Strategy. Not only is reading and writing a focus in subjects but also lessons are planned to incorporate a range of learning activities. The school and the department take this seriously and higher standards in reading and writing are emerging. There are weaknesses in writing skills, however, and most students' written work contains errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Wide reading is developing because the department recognises the need to broaden and extend students' reading ability. Students' oral skills are developing in classroom discussion and they are keen speakers in informal situations. A Year 10 speaking and listening lesson was planned so that the students could develop persuasive speaking and understand questioning techniques. Middle and low attaining students express themselves more briefly and find it difficult to explain their meaning. Writing standards are below average; students have grasped key skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar but express themselves inconsistently and inaccurately in many cases. Their work is generally well presented except for a small minority. High attaining students write successfully in an historical context. The work of a small minority of students is less well presented. Recent initiatives to improve boys' standards include a sensitive choice of texts and rigorous teaching focused on test criteria and high expectations. These are beginning to have a positive impact in improving the reading and writing skills of the students. Use of new technology to aid the presentation of work and research skills is developing because of access to a new technology suite. Students with special educational needs make good progress because of the effective links with the special educational needs department and close support by classroom learning assistants.

89. At the end of Year 11 standards of work seen during the inspection are below average. This is an improvement on previous national results because the students are taught by permanent, specialist staff using schemes of work that are directly related to syllabus requirements. It reflects satisfactory achievement, given their starting points. All students write with understanding of Shakespearean texts and a range of poetry; higher attaining students write with appreciation and enjoyment. They also read a wide variety of texts and can make inferences. A key feature in these students' work is their ability to place texts in a social context and then compare them with modern society. Students discuss injustice, inequality and race but cannot always transfer this to

writing. Overall, except for a small minority, presentation of work is careful, reflecting pride in it. Students can examine media texts and research references. Lower attaining students do not always use standard and non-standard English appropriately. A minority of students relies too heavily on the teacher and their work is brief, lacking in detailed understanding and insight. Inaccuracies in spelling, punctuation and grammar mar the work of middle and low attaining students. The reading and understanding of more complex literature is limited to high attaining students. Most students in the school enjoy taking part in speaking and listening activities but lack confidence and speak briefly except for the high attaining students. A few students do not listen attentively and interrupt each other and their teacher.

90. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, and there are examples of good, very good and excellent teaching and learning, particularly in Years 7 to 9. In a small minority of lessons students learn less because the pace is too slow and students are too reliant on their teacher. Effective classroom management strategies are lacking and consequently the behaviour of a small minority of students is unacceptable. Work is not matched closely enough to their needs, so some can flounder and take up unnecessary amounts of the teacher's time asking questions. In the good, very good and outstanding lessons there is a brisk pace, students are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed. Students enjoy exchanging ideas with each other and their teacher in an atmosphere of achievement and respect. Students respond well to their teachers' care for their achievement and this helps develop the good relationships evident in the department. In a Year 7 lesson on Macbeth's use of language, the students appreciated working to produce a structured well-informed discussion. They consciously shaped language for a purpose because they had analysed how effective and rich our language is, owing to the influence of playwrights such as Shakespeare. This is because the teacher sensitively drew out their ideas and encouraged their thinking by asking challenging questions and precisely targeting group work. In a Year 10 lesson preparing for a media assignment, high attaining students learned very well because of the variety, pace and high expectations of the teacher. They produced a large amount of work and enjoyed it immensely. The teacher's enthusiasm infected the students and careful and sensitive analysis encouraged and developed their love of the subject. As in most lessons, students' standards of literacy were developed by a focused, relevant activity. Drama is not a strong feature of the planning of English lessons and therefore students miss out on opportunities to develop skills by such activities as role-play and improvisation. Most students' work is marked regularly and the department makes satisfactory use of assessment information. Because of a series of temporary teachers, marking of a small amount of work is not up-to-date and is incomplete. Consequently the students affected show less pride in their work and knowledge of their progress. A more detailed analysis of data that targets individual students is beginning to help raise standards.
91. The leadership and management by the temporary head of department are effective and well supported by the second in department. Staffing problems have caused inconsistencies in teaching and learning because some students have been taught by a succession of temporary staff. The head and second in department share the preparation of schemes of work and departmental responsibilities; as a result, they regularly discuss what is best for the students. Procedures for assessment are clear but are not used sufficiently rigorously to set individual students' targets. Students' work is beginning to be cross-checked for progress, standards and capability. The increased use of ICT improves students' research and independent learning skills.
92. Progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Standards have risen for students at the age of 14 and literacy teaching has been used effectively to target further improvements in English language. Standards are rising and the department has the capacity to improve even further.

### **Drama**

93. The provision of drama, taught as a separate subject, is good. This is because the verve and commitment of the head of department have developed learning and provided an excellent contribution to extra-curricular activities. Except in a small percentage of unsatisfactory lessons the quality of teaching is good, resulting in similar learning. The teaching of drama not only broadens the curriculum but also improves standards because students are able to transfer the

skills they have learned. For example, the head of department successfully emphasises decision-making skills, providing opportunities for students to think for themselves. Students learn well overall because the vast majority of lessons are well prepared and maintain a brisk pace. Consequently, most students gain the maximum insight into the subject as well as gaining knowledge of a wide range of sophisticated drama skills. Emphasis on varied activities, personal development and collaborative work enhances enjoyment and motivation. In a Year 10 lesson, rehearsals were professional, carefully planned and executed and skilful. This was because of the high expectations of the teacher and carefully targeted lesson planning. Students relish the subject and their enthusiasm and enjoyment is evident in all lessons. Very good relationships between the staff and students create an atmosphere of high achievement and mutual respect. In a Year 12 lesson students dramatised duty and war and expressed sadness, anger and fear in a moving manner. Effective use of lighting, supported by a learning assistant, created dramatic tension and a theatrical atmosphere in most lessons. Teaching was unsatisfactory when classroom management strategies were lacking and the teacher's approach was too threatening. The school is working to rectify this. The contribution made by the department to the social and moral development of the students is also partly responsible for their success. They are able to discuss serious issues such as race, war and justice in an informed and sensitive manner.

94. A wide range of extra-curricular activities contributes to the positive ethos of the school. In the prestigious annual production, staff and a large number of students work with many departments, which encourages collaboration in different disciplines and develops relationships. Accommodation is very good as students are taught in a two well equipped drama studios which encourage a professional approach to learning.

## MATHEMATICS

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

### Strengths

- Fast rising standards and achievement;
- Good monitoring of the department, with appropriate action for improvement;
- Good teaching leading to improving achievement;
- Very good leadership to secure improvement.

### Areas for improvement

- The arrangements for the teaching of gifted and talented students in Year 7;
- Planned delivery of the National Strategy for numeracy.

95. In the 2002 national tests at the end of Year 9, results were well below the national average for all schools. The number of students reaching the level expected for their age was also well below average and the trend was below the national trend. Standards were very poor in comparison to similar schools and were not as good as in English or science. In the 2002 GCSE examinations, the proportion of students with grades A\*-C was well below and the proportion with grades A\*-G was below the national average. There was no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. Standards were below those of 2001 and achievement was unsatisfactory. This was caused by severe staffing difficulties within the department. The lack of stability caused by the rapid turnover of temporary teachers with little expertise in teaching mathematics took its toll.
96. However, in the work seen in the inspection, a much improved staffing situation has made a huge difference since September 2002. New teachers have been well supported by good leadership and standards in Year 9 are now fast approaching the national average. Average attaining students can solve simple linear equations and have a secure basis in algebra, although they have some difficulties with the order of operations in arithmetic. Low attaining students can measure angles accurately and perform well arithmetical operations such as doubling and halving. However, their knowledge of percentages is not secure.

97. The sharp upturn in standards noted in Year 9 is also seen in other years. Standards in Year 11 are above those of the previous two years but are below average. There is a small group of students successfully tackling the higher-level course. They take part in lessons for the average attaining students but are set appropriately challenging work on a regular basis within these lessons. New learning in arithmetic is proceeding well and standards are improving, though they are still below average. A number of low attaining students have reached higher standards than expected, again due to some excellent teaching which has continued the best elements of the National Strategy for Years 7 to 9 through both Years 10 and 11. These students can apply definitions of probability accurately and well in their new learning. They have confidence in the use of fractions and thoroughly enjoy their work.
98. Achievement is now satisfactory throughout Years 7 to 11. In Year 8, for example, higher attaining students can now use electronic calculators accurately to draw straight-line graphs. Their work in geometry with parallel lines and polygons is neat and accurate. Low attaining students can determine the median from a list of numbers. However, more advanced work with number is not progressing so well. In Year 10, average attaining students in particular are learning well because of good teaching. They now have a secure basis in algebra and geometry, although their understanding of bearings is not sound. Their diagrams are good in statistics, in work on cumulative frequency, for example, where basic definitions are used well.
99. Teaching is good overall in all years. This is why standards have risen so quickly and why achievement is improving so much. Some of the teaching is very good or better and only a small minority is unsatisfactory. The strength of the teaching overall lies in the planning of lessons and the subject expertise of the teachers, which provide a good framework for lessons, giving both a direction to learning and a sense of purpose to students' work. The excellent teaching showed elements of the National Strategy for Years 7 to 9 at its best. For example, students closed their eyes to listen to a description of a complex geometrical shape, which they then had to sketch on a board for checking. This provided a very good challenge both to their listening skills and to their geometrical knowledge. In those lessons that were satisfactory overall this quality was missing. Questions were not always sharp enough. Where there are focused summaries at the end of lessons, again through targeted questions, students remember what they have done. Practical work is handled very well in lessons, including examination coursework in Year 11. The best examples are where teachers have encouraged the use of ICT, resulting in good presentation with extended and sometimes difficult calculations. Teachers ensure that summaries are clearly set out, showing thorough understanding, as in the study to find the best shape for a fixed length of fencing. Lessons provide equally well for boys, girls and students of all ethnic backgrounds. New initiatives are in place for gifted and talented students, meeting separately for more advanced study in trigonometry, for example. Governors take an active and good role in this work. Where there is still unsatisfactory teaching, it stems from unsatisfactory management of students leading to a lack of progress. The teaching of numeracy in other subjects is satisfactory and reflects the National Strategy but a lack of planning results in uneven provision.
100. Throughout the school provision for students with special needs is good, through the teaching arrangements and the good use of the learning support staff. They liaise well with the teachers and individual plans for students are effective. The support is very good in Year 7. These students have difficulty with some of the simplest arithmetical processes and make satisfactory progress in lessons only because of this support. The teaching arrangements in Year 7 for the gifted and talented students have resulted in some under-achievement, as the teaching is not sufficiently targeted on their needs. The good teaching of basic skills contributes appropriately to the numeracy skills of students in other subjects, though a whole school numeracy policy is not yet in place.
101. Overall, learning mirrors the teaching; it is good overall with some excellent features and a minority of unsatisfactory ones. Learning is best when attitudes are very good because good levels of interest result in a good rate of learning. Students show good understanding in lessons and increasing skills, as in practical work in measuring the diameter and circumference of different circles to estimate pi. Some students concentrate very well, as in a practical lesson on probability

in Year 11, where the students were so engaged in their individual learning that hardly a sound could be heard.

102. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The head of department has held the department together when staffing difficulties threatened to overwhelm standards completely. She has monitored and developed the work quickly and effectively as matters improved and achieved a remarkable turnaround in the success of teaching and learning. The monitoring of the subject's performance is good, forming the basis for the development of teaching and learning to secure the raising of standards. Improvement overall is satisfactory and very recently good, because of the hard work and personal example of those with responsibility in the department and the very good commitment of the new staff team to raising achievement.

## SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is **satisfactory**

### Strengths

- Higher attaining students achieve well throughout and all students' achieve well in biology related topics;
- Students enjoy science, show positive attitudes and behave well because lessons are stimulating and relationships good;
- Teachers place a strong emphasis on the correct use of technical terms and as a result, many students apply them appropriately.

### Areas for improvement

- Students' scientific enquiry skills are not developed enough;
- Lower attaining students sometimes do not receive enough attention in class;
- Sensors and data-loggers are not yet used to gather and display data from experiments.

103. The results of the 2002 standard national tests for 14-year-olds show students' overall standards below the national average and well below those of similar schools. The proportion of students' achieving higher levels was close to the national average. At GCSE in 2002, about two-fifths of students in the year were entered for the Double Award and a similar proportion for Single Award. The remainder took non-related vocational courses. The overall proportion of students in the year achieving at least one GCSE in science at grade A\*-C was well below the national average. There was a good proportion of higher attaining students achieving A\* and A grades. These results are an improvement over the previous year for both 11-14 year-olds and at GCSE.
104. Inspection findings confirm that standards in science are continuing to improve throughout the school. While students in Year 9 are reaching below average standards, they are closer to those expected nationally than last year. In Year 11, students' standards are also improving and are now below average rather than well below. There are variations in standards both across the subject and between particular groups. Most students achieve well in biology and to some extent in physics topics throughout the school but their scientific enquiry skills are not as well-developed. Overall, most students, including the lower attaining and those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress and higher attaining students achieve well.
105. There are several reasons for these patterns of achievement. The head of science, in post for two years, is providing good leadership that has changed the climate for both staff and students, reflected in closer teamwork and a strong commitment to succeed. Teaching is closely monitored and supported so that there is now little that is unsatisfactory. There are particular strengths in biological sciences and physics amongst the staff's expertise that is helping raise standards in these areas. A change to modular courses for GCSE has improved students' motivation and teachers' ability to monitor their achievements in relation to individual targets for the subject. Curriculum plans have also improved throughout. However, the use of temporary and supply staff for extended periods continues to interrupt the flow of some students' work and adversely affects their progress, particularly in lower ability sets.



106. By Year 9 most students acquire a sound understanding of key concepts such as the features of chemical change and they know how to make salts from acids. Higher attaining students describe these changes in the form of word equations, and relate the type of salt to the acid from which it is made. Most understand features of series and parallel circuits and about half are secure in understanding how the flow of current can be altered in each. While many describe features of solids, liquids and gases in terms of their particle motion and spacing, few can use this to explain observations such as heat transfer by conduction and convection. One reason is that teachers miss opportunities to use models in their demonstrations to bring their explanations to life, to help students visualise theories and to use them to make predictions in their experiments. By Year 11, most students can name and describe key features of organs such as the eye and those that are higher attaining understand energy flow in food chains and key ideas in genetics such as the role of chromosomes in passing on inherited characteristics.
107. By Year 9, students develop sound enquiry skills when devising and carrying out fair tests and their practical skills are good. However, their acquisition of higher skills such as those of predicting using models and theories, devising strategies for obtaining a range of measures, and evaluating their experimental data and methods, are under-developed because teachers are missing good opportunities to practise these skills in their teaching. Students are sometimes provided with instruction sheets without first being involved in predicting or making decisions about their practical work, for example, when making a salt from an acid or without using particle theory to speculate about the flow of convection currents when water is heated. This weakness extends to students in Years 10 and 11.
108. Students practise their numeracy skills in science, by estimating, measuring, calculating variables such as pressure, speed and density and displaying information graphically, although a department strategy for developing numeracy skills is not yet in place. Teachers pay close attention to introducing new technical terms, often displaying them prominently and referring to them regularly throughout lessons and, as a result, students quickly assimilate these into their language. However, students do not speak or write extensively about their science, partly because less demanding tasks such as sentence completion and 'cut and stick' activities are used too frequently and without sufficient regard for students' different abilities. ICT is used well to process and analyse data in spreadsheets, research and present information from the Internet and to explore models and simulations. However, the use of sensors and data-loggers does not yet feature in science experiments, an important omission, but plans are in place and equipment ordered to address this weakness.
109. Both teaching and students' learning are satisfactory and there are some good features in many lessons. Lessons are well planned around clear objectives that are shared with students from the start. Teachers use questioning well to remind students of their prior learning and to encourage them to explain their reasoning. Students are usually attentive, interested and behave well because lessons are stimulating, relationships throughout are good and teachers consistently promote good codes of behaviour. Practical and group tasks are managed well but the closing plenary sessions are sometimes omitted or are ineffective because insufficient time is given to re-enforcing the key points of students' learning. In the weaker lessons, teachers do not use assessment information sufficiently to plan for students' different abilities. They place too much reliance on the correct responses to questions from a few students to assume understanding by the rest so that the needs of lower attaining students' within a set can be over-looked. Occasionally students lose interest and behaviour deteriorates where the teachers' exposition is too long and not brought to life by well chosen illustration and demonstration. Homework is regularly and appropriately set and most marking is effective in providing correction and guidance on how to improve.
110. The head of faculty provides clear leadership and direction, for example, in changing the curriculum for GCSE to a modular scheme. Teaching is monitored and supported and has improved as a result. Assessment is used well to monitor students' progress in relation to their targets but it is not yet analysed sufficiently to help guide the focus for improvements in the curriculum, especially of 11-14 year-olds. Improvement is satisfactory.

## ART AND DESIGN

Overall the quality of provision for art and design is **unsatisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Students are keen to do well in their art lessons;
- The art and design studios are pleasant, spacious and well organised;
- There are regular visits arranged to major galleries and museums.

### Areas for Improvement

- Drawing, which needs to be based on first hand observation;
- Assessment in Years 10 and 11 is not at present related to examination criteria and in consequence students are unclear about what is needed to improve;
- Students are not taught enough about the work of artists and craftspeople in western and other cultures;
- The work planned for higher attaining students does provide adequate challenge;
- Lack of literacy strategies adversely affects the standard of critical studies in all years;
- ICT is not used creatively to develop students' ideas;
- The use of different media is too narrow to encourage more individual responses in Years 10 and 11.

111. In 2002 teachers assessed students' standards at the age of 14 to be above the national expectation. This was not confirmed by work seen during the inspection. The proportion of students gaining GCSE A\*-C in 2002 was significantly below the national average, as it had been the previous year. There were no A\* or A grades and few B's. Students perform better in every other subject they take, gaining on average a grade lower in art and design than in other subjects they take at GCSE.

112. At the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11 standards in work seen during the inspection are below the national average. There are some higher attaining students in all years who draw with sensitivity and understand how to use tone skilfully. However, there is far too little drawing from observation. Colour is not used extensively and lack of experimentation does not improve understanding. There is some reference to the work of artists and art in other cultures but students generally do not make the connection - either in practice or in writing - with their own work. One higher attaining student in Year 11 has produced some interesting personal responses to a theme but generally students are not encouraged or enabled to pursue a wide variety of personal responses to themes. Final outcomes are not well supported by documentation recording the development of ideas, making much work in sketchbooks appear random. ICT is used mainly for research and for recording work in conjunction with a digital camera. Despite having adequate facilities and specialist software it is not used at present for developing work creatively.

113. Achievement by the end of Year 9 is satisfactory when taking into account standards of work when they entered the school, with gradual improvement in control evident in sketchbooks. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is unsatisfactory with over half of students achieving less well than expected in GCSE art in 2002. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to others, although no consideration is given to their needs in lesson planning. Work is not planned specifically to challenge higher attaining students, with the result that work is pitched in the middle and no high grades are gained at GCSE.

114. The quality of teaching and learning is overall unsatisfactory. Lessons were good where work was pitched at a level suitable for the group, where class management was good, where practical demonstrations were informative and helped students to understand and where a good pace resulted in good productivity. However, principal weaknesses recur in all years. Teachers are unclear about what the learning objectives are. Aims appear in planning as tasks, making the process of evaluating what they have learnt difficult for students. Visual aids are not used to inspire and guide students with the result that time is wasted and resulting work is at best, pedestrian. Students do not know or understand much about other artists' work and fail to relate it to their own

work because teachers do not tell them enough about it. Research homework is too often downloaded from the Internet and stuck straight into books. In one Year 9 sketchbook this was marked as excellent when it was obviously not the student's own work. Such lack of care does not encourage students to make more of an effort. The quality of written work is low throughout. This is because there are no strategies in place to help either lower or higher attaining students. Lower attaining students copy from notes. Higher attaining students in Year 11 who are working around grade B in English produce work around grade D when writing critically about artists' work. Students are not aware of the level at which they are working. In Years 7 to 9 this is because links to the National Curriculum levels are not explained clearly. In Years 10 and 11 this is because assessment is not clearly linked to examination criteria and work is not marked relating it to GCSE grades. Teachers completely disregard predicted grades based on prior attainment. This has led to a large proportion of students not achieving as well as expected.

115. The curriculum now fulfils requirements but in practice work is not as varied and personal as expected. Computers are not used to expand and develop ideas. A good contribution is made to the cultural education of students through visits to major galleries and museums, but much of the value of this is lost through inadequate follow-up work. Management of the department is sufficient to keep it running smoothly but because of ineffective monitoring of teaching and learning leadership is unsatisfactory. Despite considerable regular support and guidance being provided by the school, points to be improved since the last inspection have not been acted on. Standards have deteriorated. Progress since the last inspection is therefore poor.

## CITIZENSHIP

Overall, the quality of provision for citizenship is **satisfactory**

### Strengths

- A thorough analysis of existing provision has taken place;
- Enrichment activities, including the school council, successfully involve students in the practical aspects of the subject;
- The humanities and the PSHE programme make a good contribution;
- The appointment of a senior member of staff to take charge has given leadership and direction to the subject.

### Areas for development

- A structured programme of monitoring and evaluation is needed to ensure the coverage of citizenship;
- Structured assessment procedures are now needed to check students' progress.

116. Citizenship has only very recently been introduced as a specific and required element of the curriculum, although some features of the subject have been cross-curricular aspects for some time. Standards are average and what could be expected at this stage by the end of Years 9 and 11.
117. In work seen during the inspection, students are beginning to acquire knowledge and understanding of different aspects of society, for example, human rights and conservation issues. They are developing discussion skills in pairs and small groups as well as developing their skills in justifying their opinions orally and in writing. Achievement is satisfactory.
118. Humanities subjects make a strong provision for citizenship. Year 7 students plot car theft on Ordnance Survey maps. They discern patterns and suggest preventative methods. Students taking GCSE history show good understanding of the American civil rights movement. Year 8 students show a good appreciation of the issues related to slavery. Year 9 students cogently argue economic and environmental issues, like the location of industry. Year 11 students discussed environmental issues successfully in a French language lesson, enhancing both language and understanding of present day global issues. In Year 10 physics, students consider the environmental impact of ozone depletion and its effect upon the world. However, some subjects

like art and design and mathematics have yet to contribute to citizenship. The recent analysis of citizenship across subjects has enabled the programme for PSHE to take on the areas not covered across the curriculum. The head of each year and the PSHE coordinator create a team of established staff to teach PSHE lessons with good consistency. Students respond well to the different approaches. Year 9 students have a secure understanding of the laws relating to drinking and driving. They begin to understand the reasons for gambling and the related moral and social issues. By the end of Year 11, students work successfully in pairs when discussing issues like consumer awareness and living away from home.

119. Practical applications of citizenship are being successfully developed. For example, the year and school councils now provide good and effective forums for debate of issues. School council members are involved in such projects as the Welwyn and Hatfield local council re-generation and assisted with the selection of the recently appointed headteacher. Students initiate a range of good charity work; for example, a large sum of money raised for National Children's Homes following work in a Year 7 PSHE lesson. Year 11 students take responsibility for the coordination of fund-raising like Red Nose Day and for leavers' functions. Teamwork is well developed through drama productions where students take responsibility for "front of house" organization. Students involved in inter-school matches are well involved in taking responsibility as team members or captains. All students, including those with special educational needs, are well-integrated into lessons and make similar progress to their peers.
120. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers plan lessons with clear aims and objectives that are shared with students. A wider range of teaching methods, especially in Years 7 to 9, will enable students to be more actively involved. Students have positive attitudes to citizenship; many, especially Year 10 and 11 students enjoy discussing and debating major issues in society. When varied teaching methods are used to support students' learning and, in particular, when students are encouraged to work in groups and learn from each other, the pace of learning is good. This was particularly successful in a Year 11 lesson when students examined substance abuse. ICT and the Internet are used.
121. Citizenship is well led and managed. Methods of monitoring and assessing have been identified and are now a priority in the development of citizenship. There is a good commitment to the development of the subject. Lessons are enriched through a programme of extra-curricular events extending citizenship in to the real world. As the subject has only just been introduced it is too early to judge improvement, but it has made a satisfactory beginning.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Above average standards in food technology;
- Teaching is good, especially in Years 7 to 9;
- Monitoring of students' subject performance guides curriculum planning well;
- Good leadership and management copes well despite staffing difficulties;
- Excellent accommodation and very good resources enhance the learning environment.

### Areas for improvement

- The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum.

122. Overall results in GCSE technology have been below the national average for several years. However these results are above average when compared with those in other subjects. Girls generally do better than the boys. Results in food technology are generally above the national average.

123. Standards at the end of Year 9 are below the national expectation overall, particularly in design work. Manufactured items are well developed and demand increasing skills. The students enjoy

this aspect of their learning so that by the end of Year 9 their skills are in line with national expectation. By the end of Year 11 the standards attained by the most able and those studying food technology are above average. Overall, however, most students are still below average. Average numeracy skills are seen in food technology when quantities are being considered. Students do not make enough use of ICT to improve presentation.

124. Standards in design and technology are well below average on entry to the school. However, students make good progress in Year 7 and steady progress through Years 8 to 11, so that achievement overall is satisfactory.
125. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and sometimes very good to produce this achievement. This is because lessons follow a planned structure and because teachers are aware of the time needed for each activity. Students respond to being challenged and to being required to meet short-term goals. Work is marked when appropriate in addition to the end of module assessment. Keywords are displayed on the whiteboard at the beginning of each lesson and contribute to the development of literacy. Homework is set at regular intervals and is well embedded in the planned structure. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning are satisfactory because they depend critically on the experience of the teacher. Where the teacher demonstrates enthusiasm for the subject, learning is good but where the lesson content is not seen to be relevant, students rapidly lose interest. Students behaved well at all times in lessons seen but where the teacher was perceived to be temporary or to lack confidence they became lethargic and failed to listen. Students with special needs are well integrated into classes. Citizenship is well understood by the head of department who encourages all technology staff to teach conservation of resources and to assess the implications of the products they design. Those who show aptitude in a technology subject are quickly recognised and given extra encouragement. All students are made well aware of their learning and progress. Most have a good relationship with the staff, show initiative and develop a sense of responsibility.
126. The department is well led by a co-ordinator who ensures clear direction for the subject. Good teaching methods had been established and are encouraged in all areas. A comprehensive departmental database is being used to record and analyse students' results, to guide curriculum planning. Excellent accommodation and very good resources facilitate every aspect of the subject. However the difficulty of appointing suitably qualified and experienced staff has been a problem for several years and it has directly affected the continuity of learning and the consistency of standards. It is the single most significant factor holding the department back. Nevertheless improvement since the last inspection is good.

## GEOGRAPHY

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

### Strengths

- There is some very good teaching in Years 7 to 9;
- In the majority of lessons teachers motivate students' interest so that they concentrate and behave well.

### Areas for improvement

- Teaching, so that the very good teaching observed becomes the norm in all lessons and drives up standards;
- Use of assessment data so that curriculum and lesson planning take greater account of students' learning needs.

127. Standards are below what is expected for the majority of students. Teachers' assessment of students at the end of Year 9 in 2002 showed that the proportion of students attaining National Curriculum level 5 and above was below average. At the end of Year 11 in 2002 all students gained GCSE A\*-G grades, which is above average. Their points score was below average, however, because the proportion awarded grades A\*-C was well below average. Significantly, the highest

proportion of those grades was A\* (well above average), all gained by boys. The majority gained D or E grades. Students performed better in geography than other subjects they studied by about a third of a grade. Their achievement was in line with similar schools. Up to 2001 GCSE attainment was improving but it fell in 2002. These students suffered when a teacher left and three classes merged into two. Boys and girls have similar attainment overall. In the past, targets set have been over optimistic.

128. At the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11 standards in work seen are below average. Average and lower attaining students in Year 9 tend to rely on teachers to prompt their answers and are slow to recognise links or develop them, for example, in using a photograph and sketch to explain why Japanese industry is based on the coast. Year 11 students largely show interest and accept information, but do not challenge it often to gain greater understanding. A few higher attaining students show awareness of current news and relate it to geography. For example, they point to the risks of locating a large electronics factory in a country that abandons a nuclear weapons agreement. Standards of literacy hinder other students from expressing their knowledge and understanding clearly enough in speech and writing. They use satisfactory numeracy skills to extract information from statistics and graphs.
129. Achievement is satisfactory at both key stages because a high proportion of students started in Year 7 with below average attainment. In Years 7 to 9 students develop their ability to locate places using maps of varying scale. They increase their understanding of physical processes and features, such as the work of rivers in Year 8. In Years 10 and 11 students show greater confidence in using evidence to link cause and effect. For example, Year 10 students study the global effect of climate on vegetation and farming. Higher attaining students achieve more because their comprehension is better and they move quickly on to additional tasks. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress with appropriately matched tasks.
130. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, although examples of very good teaching were observed in Years 7 and 9. Students with special educational needs learn as well as other students. Lesson planning is a consistently strong feature that provides students with clear learning objectives in every lesson. Students respond positively to thoughtfully chosen resources. For example, students in another Year 9 lesson on Japanese industry gained much relevant knowledge and understanding from a video film. They made detailed notes because the teacher had provided a sheet of headings that followed the film sequence. Students learn effectively when challenged to think individually or in pairs. For example, students in a Year 7 lesson learned new map skills for locating the incidence of crime in a locality from police statistics. Lower attaining students lose concentration when teachers rely too much on one resource, such as a book. The attention of a few students wanders when the teacher's introduction is over long. This can lead to misbehaviour by a few students. Marking is regular, but it does not help students to improve more by providing targets for future tasks. Students in Year 9 did some good research on Japanese culture using the Internet, but ICT is underused because of the unsuitable design of the humanities' ICT room.
131. Leadership and management are satisfactory overall. The head of department is giving a clear lead and managing resources effectively. Regular assessment is generating data on attainment. A start has been made on analysing these statistics and comparing with similar schools. This work needs development so that it is used to inform curriculum decisions and to identify where teaching could be targeted to further improve learning and achievement. Since the last inspection satisfactory improvement has been made.

## HISTORY

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

#### Strengths

- Students usually respond well in lessons and enjoy the subject;
- Teaching is good, students learn well as a result and standards are rising;
- Effective leadership and management have led to good improvement.

#### Areas for improvement

- Teaching is not consistent enough to achieve the highest standards;
- Students are not given sufficient opportunities to use ICT to enhance their work.

132. Standards attained by students at the end of Year 9 in teacher assessed work in 2002 were well below average. Results at GCSE have also been well below average in recent years. Students have performed less well in history than in their other subjects although in 2002 their performance improved. Overall, students have been under-achieving in recent years, mainly because of constant changes of staff teaching history. However, staffing for the subject has now become more stable and this has led to much improved attainment and achievement.
133. At the end of Year 9 standards in work seen during the inspection are below average, which is an improvement. Students in Year 9 demonstrate a sound understanding of different historical topics in class, such as the changes introduced in Russia as a result of the 1917 Revolution. They find written work difficult and need considerable help in selecting and organising material to produce successful historical accounts. However, higher attaining students in Year 9 do produce some good extended writing, as in some work on the First World War. Standards at the end of Year 11 have also improved from well below to below average. Students have a generally sound knowledge and understanding of the GCSE topics. Year 11 students work well with historical sources. In work on the Blitz, for example, students successfully used a series of posters and pictures to develop an understanding of the role of propaganda during the Second World War. However, skills of writing critically and analytically with strong supportive evidence are less developed. Lower attaining students in particular find it difficult to write in sufficient detail and depth.
134. As a result of these rising standards, achievement is now satisfactory by the end of Year 9. Students extend their knowledge of different periods of history and develop relevant skills. Their written skills, for example, are improving because most teachers are now giving students more help in structuring their historical accounts. The achievement of students by the end of Year 11 is also satisfactory. They are mastering the content of the GCSE course and they are more confident in their use of sources. Their historical writing is improving because teachers are focusing more directly on the demands of examination questions. Higher attaining students and those with special educational needs achieve as well as other students.
135. Teaching is now good and students learn well as a result and this is what is improving learning, attainment and achievement. Teachers' enthusiasm and knowledge of the subject are used successfully to engage students' interests. They have high expectations of what students can achieve. In the best lessons a good range of activities promotes good progress, as in a Year 10 lesson on how and why Hitler became Chancellor in 1933. Students' understanding was carefully built up through a series of activities, including skilful questioning by the teacher, discussion work in pairs and well-judged written tasks. Occasionally, however, students find topics difficult when teachers use an insufficient range of methods before tackling a written assignment. The marking of students' work is generally good, although teachers are not always consistent in providing specific targets to help students improve. Homework is planned well, which enables students to consolidate and extend their learning. Teachers give good attention to developing students' historical vocabulary, but help on structuring written work is not yet sufficiently consistent across the department to ensure sustained improvement in standards. Teachers manage students successfully and this ensures good behaviour and positive attitudes. Students usually respond well in lessons and enjoy the subject. The use of ICT to enhance students' learning is under-developed but there are good plans to address this issue.

136. The department is led and managed well, with an appropriate focus on improving teaching and raising standards. Although a large number of staff teach history the overall quality of teaching is now good and in consequence achievement has improved. The department is now in a good position to develop its practice and raise standards further. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Achievement is good in Years 7-9;
- Teaching and learning are good in all years in discrete ICT lessons;
- Good leadership and management focuses well on developing teaching skills;
- The accommodation and resources are good.

### Areas for improvement

- The frequency of monitoring students' performance;
- The analysis of assessment results to identify areas for improvement;
- The co-ordination of cross-curricular ICT;
- The development of sensing and data logging to meet National Curriculum requirements.

137. Teachers' assessments show standards at the end of Year 9 to be in line with national averages. From 1999-2001 the results in the GNVQ examination fell from near average to below average. However in 2002 the results improved again so that all the students taking the full award examination gained A\* to C grades.

138. In work seen during the inspection standards at the end of Year 9 are close to average. In Year 9 a major coursework assignment provides the opportunity for students to demonstrate their skills by preparing the documents needed to manage a hotel business. By the end of Year 11 a significant number of GNVQ students are producing above average work. In particular students are well able to assemble text and pictures from a variety of sources to produce an effective communication..

139. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 because although students are below the national average on entry to the school, they are nearing average by the end of Year 9. They develop skills in word-processing, desktop publishing, drawing programs, control, databases and spreadsheets. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory overall, with good progress by GNVQ students.

140. Teaching and learning are generally good in all years. Where students were challenged to produce specific results in a given time teaching was very good. Well established teachers were more able to motivate the students. The teachers have sufficient knowledge to cover most aspects of the curriculum. Planning and management are generally good and often very good. Students are willing to learn when provided with tasks that they recognise as being useful. Most students behave well and have a good attitude to learning. However students in some classes would benefit from tasks providing short term goals to increase their motivation. Staff make effective use of interactive white boards and students enjoy the challenge of learning ICT skills. Many are able to choose appropriate software for a specific task from a wide range. Homework forms an important part of the learning process. Students can access the set work on the school website. Higher attaining students in particular develop their work well in their own time. Many students show initiative and develop responsibility for their own learning. The use of keywords and the marking of students' work helps to develop literacy. Numeracy is developed as students learn to use spreadsheets and databases. By discussing the implications and effects of using ICT teachers contribute to students' social and moral development. National curriculum attainment levels are assessed for each student at the end of specific modules of work. This is appropriate for some classes but others would benefit from more frequent assessment. Self-assessment by students is an important feature of the process. There is insufficient assistance to support students with special educational needs.



141. The use of ICT to assist learning in other subject areas is satisfactory. Many faculties have their own ICT rooms and are developing methods for using the computers to assist learning in their subject area. English, music, maths and the special needs department make good use of ICT. Further development is needed in languages and humanities. There are plans for further development in the organisation of cross-curricular ICT. In particular, there is no co-ordinated approach to monitoring students' progress. The statutory requirements of the National Curriculum are met except in the areas of sensing and data logging and as a result students are missing an important area of learning. This omission was reported at the time of the last inspection.
142. The department is well led by a co-ordinator who contributes effectively to the development of teaching skills and identifies appropriate targets for improvement. However, there is too much reliance on the analysis of results by senior management. Although staffing is now more stable, it has for some time been necessary to rely on temporary and less experienced teachers thus reducing the continuity of learning and holding back further progress. Resources and accommodation have improved considerably since the last inspection and there is good provision of technical expertise to ensure operational efficiency. Overall improvement is good.

### MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

#### Strengths:

- Students show good understanding of basic grammatical concepts and can apply them when using the foreign language;
- Teaching for all students is good, resulting in good progress and a positive attitude to language learning;
- Leadership is good, resulting in a shared commitment to improve standards;
- An increasingly high profile for modern languages resulting in an increased number of students choosing the full course GCSE in years 10 and 11.

#### Areas for improvement:

- Standards in GCSE at grades A\*-C;
- The use of ICT to support learning and encourage higher achievement;
- Teaching strategies to encourage more extended speaking and independent reading;
- Consistency in assessment so that all students have a clearer understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

143. Teachers' assessments in 2002 in at the end of Year 9 show standards are below national expectations. In GCSE French the proportion of A\*-C grades is well below the national average; the proportion of A\*-G grades is average. However only 20 students were entered. In Spanish there were too few candidates to make a judgement. Standards in the GCSE short courses are low nationally and the results in the French and Spanish short course reflect this.
144. In Year 9 in French, standards of work seen during the inspection are in line with national expectations. Higher and middle attaining students are starting to use the past tense in writing and higher attaining students are able to write accurately and independently. They respond well to a range of listening and reading activities covering different topics and have a good understanding of grammatical concepts. Lower attaining students, including students with special educational needs, contribute orally with good pronunciation and can write short sentences with support.
145. In Year 9 in Spanish, standards observed are below national expectations; however, students have only been studying the language since the summer term of Year 8. Students make confident oral contributions in lessons, show good comprehension skills over a range of familiar topics and are able to adapt language learning skills from their first foreign language. Higher attaining students are able to write short paragraphs in accurate Spanish.

146. In Year 11 in both French and Spanish, standards observed are below national expectations, which is an improvement on the previous year's standards. Higher attaining students can produce more extended speaking and writing and are making good preparations for written coursework over a range of topics such as holidays, the world of work and the environment. In French, students can use a range of tenses, but not always accurately. In Spanish, students are able to use the past tense to describe holidays. In both French and Spanish, students can give opinions but more extended speaking was not seen and students often rely on written support. They show understanding of main points and details from a range of listening and reading tasks, but mostly at GCSE Foundation tier level and with no independent reading.
147. In French and Spanish in Years 7 to 9, achievement is good, given students' starting point and the time they have been learning, in the case of Spanish. Students use language in an increasing range of contexts, with increasing confidence and develop good understanding of grammatical concepts. They respond well to explanations and instructions in the target language. Students with special educational needs in Year 7 are able to respond quickly to familiar instructions and games in French. Higher attaining students in Year 7 are able to write short descriptions of famous people independently and mostly accurately.
148. In Years 10 and 11, achievement is satisfactory. Students are able to comprehend a range of spoken and written texts, including authentic speaking from the foreign language assistants. By Year 11 all students are preparing for written coursework over a range of topics, using a widening range of language structures with higher attaining students writing at length.
149. Teaching and learning are good and in consequence standards are rising. Teachers have good subject knowledge and provide good models for students' pronunciation and intonation in both French and Spanish. They provide clear explanations of grammatical concepts and structures, so that students can use the new structures themselves. Lessons are well-planned with opportunities for students of different abilities and with clear objectives, shared with students so that they know what is expected of them. Homework is clearly linked to the learning objectives, providing opportunities to consolidate and practice new language. Teachers have good classroom management and all students are able to learn languages in a positive learning environment. However, there are few opportunities for more independent learning and the use of ICT in languages is limited. Although lessons contain a good range of activities covering listening, reading, speaking and writing, speaking activities are usually question and answer with the teacher, with few opportunities for students to produce more extended speaking in for example pairs or groups and this slows up their achievement in Years 10 and 11. Marking and assessment are carried out regularly, but not in a consistent way so that all teachers have a common understanding of national curriculum levels and so that all students know what they have to do to improve their achievement even more.
150. The department is well led and managed. It works as a team with a commitment to improve standards and there is effective monitoring of teaching and learning through planned lesson observations. Department documentation and schemes of work are clear. However, links with the National Curriculum are not fully developed and opportunities for independent learning, ICT and assessment are not incorporated regularly into teaching. Since the appointment of the head of department three years ago, the department has worked efficiently to develop strategies to improve behaviour and attitudes to language learning.. This has resulted in an increased number of students choosing to study a full course GCSE in French or Spanish.
151. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards and achievement in Years 7 to 9 have improved and language learning takes place in a positive learning environment with students of all abilities making confident, if limited, oral contributions. Numbers taking the full course in GCSE have improved and standards are rising.

## MUSIC

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

#### Strengths

- Standards of teaching and learning are good;
- Leadership is strong and management is efficient;
- Provision for specialist instrumental tuition and extra-curricular music making is good;
- Accommodation is very good and encourages positive attitudes to music.

#### Areas for improvement

- Attainment, particularly in performing skills;
- The range of instruments provided for group work in lessons;
- The use of ICT to support and encourage the learning of younger students.

152. Teachers' assessments for students at the end of Year 9 show that standards in 2002 were below average. Too few candidates took GCSE in 2002 to enable any viable comparisons with national averages to be made. Three of the ten candidates entered, however, gained an A\* to C grade and all but one achieved A\* to G grades. The number of students choosing to take GCSE, although still not substantial, has increased. At present, about 20 students from Years 10 and 11 are involved.
153. From work seen during the inspection standards are now closer to average in Years 7 to 9. Well over half the students observed in lessons attain levels that match or exceed national expectations. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. Higher attaining students create satisfying musical structures by adding chords and other improvised sections. All students learn to read music and know how to describe it in the correct terms. Most students' performing experience is, however, confined to work on keyboards that have to be shared.
154. Standards by the end of Year 11 are average. Although students have a wide range of solo instrumental and vocal skills, relatively few achieve really high performing standards. Work seen and heard in lessons and other musical activities during the inspection confirmed that standards of individual playing and singing are generally below average in both instrumental and vocal skills. Most students' compositions, however, are coherently structured in conventional styles and make use of a limited range of chords. Some good examples were heard of composing enlivened with the help of computers and midi-linked keyboards.
155. Most students in Years 7 to 9 achieve well and make good progress in playing and improvising short melodies with some confidence. In Years 10 and 11 achievement overall is satisfactory. Students develop a satisfactory knowledge of the language of music and this enables them to discourse with their teachers and with each other in the correct musical terms. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls. Those with special needs are helped to achieve suitable targets and are rewarded for their success.
156. The quality of teaching and learning is good. A good range of musical expertise is shared and made readily available to students. This enables them to learn music as a living language. They are frequently exposed to a good range of musical styles and cultures and learn to read music sufficiently to work out how to play and improvise short pieces for themselves. Their behaviour is satisfactory and they respect the good routines that are established for looking after the instruments they use. Most are enthusiastic and take responsibility for their own practicing. Teachers are sympathetic to individual levels of musical skill and understanding and in consequence students are keen to perform what they have learnt. Most work collaboratively and have good relationships with each other and with their teachers. A few find it difficult to concentrate for any length of time and teachers are quick to respond to their needs. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives. Students make use of course books specially designed by the department. These have been introduced since the previous inspection and have contributed significantly to the improved standards of teaching and learning. These booklets contain all the musical information that students will be taught in each topic throughout Years 7 to 9 and provide a very effective focus for their learning. They also include information that helps students to understand how to evaluate their achievements. Teachers are confident in the use of computers and music technology to support learning but do not make enough use of this resource to promote learning in Years 7 to 9.

157. This busy department is well led and efficiently managed as part of the school's provision for expressive arts. During the inspection a recorder ensemble and brass group were heard playing with musical confidence and rehearsals were under way for the school's production of *Grease*. The work of the team of eight visiting specialist instrumental and vocal teachers is particularly valued. Several make positive contributions to help in the running of concerts and preparing students for examinations. Accommodation for music is very good. A well-sited suite of rooms provides sufficient performing space for all activities. Resources are good in general and particularly good in the number of computers and the range of software available but there is a need for a richer variety of instruments for both solo and ensemble work.
158. Music is an increasingly popular subject in the school and standards are rising. This is because of good standards of teaching that encourage a positive response from students and create enthusiasm to perform in public. The school keenly supports the arts and music is fulfilling an important ambassadorial role in this respect. A good range of concerts, stage productions and other opportunities to perform are organised each year. Nearly 100 students have extra instrumental and vocal lessons from visiting specialists each week, more than at the time of the previous inspection. Improvement overall, therefore, is good.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **satisfactory**

### Strengths

- Participation in a range of extra-curricular activities is good;
- Leadership is good; teachers work well as a team with a strong commitment;
- Assessment procedures are good;
- Lesson planning is a good feature of teaching.

### Areas for improvement

- Staffing, to raise both standards and participation levels in girls' physical education;
- The introduction of additional certificated courses in Years 10 and 11;
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy through the subject.

159. In the 2002 GCSE examination results standards were well below average. Below average literacy levels meant that students did not perform as well in the written paper. This was similar to the 2001 results. It has been the trend for few girls to study physical education; this makes any gender comparison invalid. Overall students do as well in physical education as they do in their other subjects.
160. Standards of work seen in all years are below average overall. However, standards reached by boys in physical education are higher than those reached by girls. The difference is confirmed by teachers' assessments in 2002. Boys' standards are rapidly approaching average. However, those students who successfully compete in the good range of extra-curricular sport, inter-school teams and individual sports and those who are at area level show at least average levels of performance. By the end of Year 9 most students know the purpose of warm-up and take some responsibility for it. They have simple trampolining skills like the straddle jump, tuck jumps and they know basic safety points. Many know the progressions through which to work when combining jumps. Higher attaining students are successfully beginning to link together seat drops incorporating a twist. However, at present, the lifting of the hips is insufficiently developed to produce a refined movement. Many lower attaining students as yet do not have the confidence to develop and link together the basic jumps.
161. Standards by the end of Year 11 in work seen are below average but, especially in the case of boys, are improving. This is a consequence of experienced full-time teachers who are providing regular and consistent teaching. Students following the GCSE course show a basic understanding of systematic training. Higher attaining students start to show understanding of progression and

overload in training. Year 11 students are well able to collate sports data from a range of newspapers. However, many had difficulty with the analysis of the data. Overall, students' oral skills are better developed than written skills. GCSE students make some use of computers mainly for presentation of work but they do not make enough use of ICT to support their learning.

162. Achievement in all years is satisfactory overall. In Years 7 to 9 students learn to play games fairly. The achievement of boys is significantly better than girls, for example, in learning passing skills, as seen in a Year 7 bench ball lesson and in a Year 9 hockey lesson. Most teachers are aware of students with special educational needs and give appropriate support to ensure they make similar progress to their peers. In Years 10 and 11 up to a quarter of girls do not take part in some lessons, which inevitably has an adverse affect on their progress. These low participation levels are a consequence of a lack of continuity caused by staffing difficulties. Where classes are taught as mixed sex groups, boys and girls make good progress because they experience good routines, good expectations, consistency and motivation. Year 10 students learn that different team positions require different training disciplines. This was well exemplified in a basketball lesson where both boys and girls improved both dribbling and shooting on the move. All students, including those with special educational needs, are well-integrated into lessons and make similar progress to their peers.
163. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory throughout the school and results in satisfactory learning – a judgement that reflects the balance of strengths and weaknesses. Unsatisfactory teaching is a consequence of a succession of temporary teachers who have insufficient specialist knowledge and cannot provide consistent teaching. On the other hand, permanent teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge as seen in a GCSE lesson on sport and the media. Most teachers have high expectations of both the effort and behaviour of students and as a result they work hard. For example, in a Year 9 trampoline lesson the teacher and students worked well to develop a seat drop half twist to seat drop. Where teachers have high expectations, they ask challenging questions to reinforce students' knowledge and understanding. This was well shown in a Year 7 football lesson where students' basic ball control skills were extended. However, there is not enough reinforcement of technical words, like quadriceps and cardio-vascular, during warm-up and students are not given enough responsibility for leading aspects of warm-up.
164. The leadership and management of the department are good; there is a team commitment to success and the raising of standards. The head of department has a good clear vision for the subject and its development. Teachers provide a good range of extra-curricular activities. Good assessment procedures have been developed to track students' progress effectively. Both long- and short-term planning are good and successfully support teaching and learning but do not give enough attention to literacy and numeracy.
165. Since the previous inspection staff changes and turbulence led to a decline in standards. Under new leadership there is already good evidence of recovery. However, lack of permanent staffing is constraining development in girls' physical education. Because of this, improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Overall, the quality of provision in religious studies is **satisfactory**.

#### Strengths

- Standards in the full course GCSE are above average;
- Teaching is improving. Lessons are enthusiastically taught and enable students to make clear progress;
- The new head of department has made an effective start in identifying priorities and in taking action to achieve them.

#### Areas for improvement

- The match of work to the needs of all students, particularly the less able and those with special educational needs;
- Use of books and ICT to support teaching and learning.

166. Standards of attainment are below the expectations of the Hertfordshire agreed syllabus for religious studies by the end of Year 9. Standards in the GCSE full course, taken by a small number of students in 2002, were above average in terms of A\*-C grades and inspection evidence confirms that these standards are being maintained.
167. Current work seen in the inspection is below average overall. The standards of students who opt for the full GCSE course, however, are above average. By the end of Year 9, students are able to describe some of the key beliefs and teachings of the major world religions. They do not, however, have more than a basic understanding of denominational differences. Higher attaining students understand some of the similarities as well as the differences between religions. All students understand some of the connections between moral and religious issues. By the end of Year 11, students studying for the full course GCSE option have a detailed understanding of, for example, key Jewish festivals and they have a coherent understanding of the roots of monotheism. Students on the short course express their opinions on a range of moral issues but they are often unable to provide detailed explanations for their views.
168. Achievement is satisfactory overall. In Years 7 to 9, students develop their knowledge and understanding of religious language and principles soundly. They learn about major world faiths and come to appreciate some of the ways in which such faiths affect daily life. Teachers make good links between everyday experiences and religious values so that students are beginning to make sense of what they study and can relate it to their own lives.
169. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Students expand their horizons by further probing of beliefs and values and through exploring religious perspectives on issues such as animal experimentation. They explore their feelings sensibly and, although a few lack confidence, most are able to express their own opinions. Higher and average attaining students studying for the full course GCSE are developing a good understanding of some of the similarities and links between religions. Students increase their skills in writing at length. Students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make similar rates of progress to those of their peers.
170. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall with many good and some very good features. Specialist teachers, who deliver most of the lessons, are very knowledgeable in all aspects of the subject. This means that explanations are clear with good quality questioning which builds effectively on students' responses. Non-specialist teachers are enthusiastic and committed to the subject, although occasionally they make mistakes with specialist terminology. All teachers work hard to build students' self-confidence and to create a positive work ethic in the classroom. Students learn to think for themselves and to consider a wide range of moral and ethical issues. A particular strength of the teaching is the way in which teachers make use of relevant modern examples to develop multi-faith understanding. This was evident in a Year 11 lesson where students considered the concept of *jihad* in Islam. Religious artefacts and display of materials such as photos and advertisements of *kosher* food or *bar mitzvah* ceremonies are used well. As a result students are well motivated and able to build a coherent understanding of religious belief and

tradition. Students develop a respect for other cultures and faiths because of the way in which other religions are studied.

171. Teachers work hard to establish clear expectations of how to behave and activities are well structured so that students maintain levels of concentration and feel more confident about their work. Homework is used well, for example, designing a Muslim prayer mat and writing to a headteacher as the parent of a Muslim child explaining some of the religious requirements of a Muslim student. However, strategies are not fully developed for ensuring that work is well matched to meet the needs of all students, particularly lower attaining students and those with special educational needs. Although the department makes good use of religious artefacts, teachers tend to use photocopies rather than textbooks. They do not expose students to a wide enough range of print resources or make enough use of ICT to support learning. The department is working hard to improve literacy skills but there is scope to develop these strategies further.
172. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The new head of department has made a good start. Staffing is now more stable. There is a clear sense of purpose and direction in the department and a commitment to raising standards, which are rising. A new scheme of work has been produced which provides clear guidance on priorities and methods. Statutory requirements to teach religious education to all students are now met through the introduction of a short course GCSE for all students. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

### VOCATIONAL COURSES

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

#### Strengths

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and teach well;
- Skills in the use of ICT are being developed as an integral part of the course;
- Good use is made of the local area as a resource for learning;
- Teachers have recent experience in business or industry.

#### Areas for development

- Some aspects of teaching and learning to further raise standards;
- Students' management of their time so that they complete tasks;
- Option choices that make it difficult for higher attaining students to choose business studies.

173. GNVQ business, at intermediate and foundation level, has been introduced since the last inspection. In 2001 and in 2002 standards were significantly below the national average, although the number completing courses was too small for a statistically valid sample. Standards and completion rates were adversely affected by staffing problems and lack of computer resources.
174. In work seen during the inspection standards are higher in Year 10, although attainment in Year 11 is below that seen in other centres. The subject recruits from the lower range of attainment because of the option choices at the end of Year 9 and sometimes students are entered at the foundation rather than the intermediate level. Students in Year 11 have a secure grasp of basic business related vocabulary because teachers focus on this well. They can use terms such as customer service and most understand the difference between the internal and external customer, although lower attaining students find this concept difficult. They can all use web sites to access information about different business organisations and individuals can evaluate promotional literature with confidence. Year 10 students show sound understanding of some aspects of human resources management and the role of trade unions in protecting the rights of workers, particularly with regard to pay and working conditions. However, some lower attaining students have difficulty in organising their new knowledge into appropriate answers about the range of trade union activities. They all have at least sound skills in using computers but are impeded by weaknesses in literacy and numeracy. Most coursework meets the examination board criteria, at least at a lower level, because students are well supported by their teachers, the requirements are made very clear and extra classes are available after school.

175. Achievement is satisfactory. The majority of students achieve appropriately because of their sound attitudes, the clear vocational bias of the course and the good quality of teaching and learning. More girls take this course but there is no clear overall difference in their achievement and attainment and that of boys. Students with special educational needs are making secure progress because of the effective use of computers and other resources.
176. Teaching and learning are good, and are the cause of the rising standards in Year 10. Teachers have a thorough knowledge of the vocational area and have experience in business or industry, which enhances their authority in teaching about commerce. Lesson structure, range of activities and the pace of activity promote a good level of learning in the majority of lessons. There is a good use of ongoing assessment through questioning and a good balance between consolidating existing skills and knowledge and the introduction of new information. However, some lessons would benefit from a review of learning at the end and more careful monitoring of students' progress throughout. Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are being well developed but in the lessons observed only limited use was made of the interactive whiteboard. Existing video equipment is difficult to access because it is shared across the faculty. Students are taking some responsibility for their own learning because of the vocational approach and the focus on assignments. Students enjoy some aspects of their work and look forward to visits, for example to a local safari park to study aspects of customer relations. However some fail to use time in class well and are not effective at organising their work in order to complete tasks.
177. Leadership and management are good. Staffing problems have now been resolved and the vocational studies department has new accommodation and resources. Resources are used well to support learning and the working environment does much to create a positive attitude to learning. Planning is good and newly qualified teachers are well supported. Computers are used effectively to link in with the world of business, as is the local business community that provides such a valuable resource for learning. Good leadership has ensured the development of a new course at a time when the school has had considerable staffing problems. Because the subject has been introduced since the last inspection a judgement about improvement since that time is not possible.



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

In the inspection, five 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 tables below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. National comparisons for AS/A data are not yet available.

**GCE AS level courses**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	3	66		66		2.7	
Biology	16	43		0		0.9	
Chemistry	4	75		0		1.5	
Physica	3	33		0		0.7	
Design and technology	3	66		0		3.0	
Business studies	2	0		0		0	
Computing	2	100		0		1.5	
Physical education	12	100		16		2.7	
Art and design	5	100		20		2.4	
Music technology	1	100		0		1.0	
Media studies	1	100		0		2.0	
Geography	2	50		0		1.0	
History	2	50		0		1.5	
Religious studies	1	100		0		3.0	
Law	2	50		100		1.5	
Psychology	10	40		0		0.7	
English literature	12	74		8		1.9	
Modern languages	1	0		0		0	
German	1	100		100		5.0	

**GCE A level and AVCE courses**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	3	100		0		4.7	
Design and technology	1	100		0		2.0	
Business studies	7	86		0		2.5	
Economics	1	100		100		10.0	

Information technology	2	50		0		3.0	
Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
Physical education	4	75		25		4.5	
Art and design	4	100		0		3.0	
Music technology	1	100		0		6.0	
Media studies	5	100		0		4.4	
Geography	2	100		0		3.0	
History	1	100		100		8.0	
Religious studies	1	100		100		10.0	
Law	7	71		0		2.7	
Sociology	1	100		0		4.0	
English literature	11	100		27		5.5	
German	1	100		1		10.0	

#### *Intermediate vocational qualifications*

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
GNVQ Leisure and tourism	12	75	n/a	17.5	n/a	0	n/a

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

178. In mathematics the focus was on the GCE A level and AS level courses in Years 12 and 13. In Year 12, the school offers modules in pure mathematics and these were inspected. Students have the option to study mechanics through the consortium arrangements. In Year 13 two further modules in pure mathematics and one in mechanics were inspected. In sciences, the focus was on A level and AS level courses in biology in Years 12 and 13 but A and AS level physics was also sampled in Year 12.

179. No students took A level physics in 2002. The school is this year teaching A and AS level jointly with another school within the consortium for the first time. One lesson of Year 12 AS level physics was observed. Teaching and learning were good and students were making good progress in their understanding of the characteristics of low voltage power supply.

#### Mathematics

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

#### Strengths

- Well above average standards now being sustained;
- Good teaching leading to good achievement;
- Students' very good attitudes helping them to learn well.

#### Area for improvement

- Alternative methods in the solution of statistical problems.

180. The number of students studying mathematics is small, following the severe staffing problems experienced by the department in the recent past. There are no results to report for 2002. The quality of students' written and oral work in Year 13 is well above average. They achieved the higher grades A and B in the A/S level examinations at the end of Year 12. This represents good achievement from their above average levels of attainment in GCSE at the start of their course. Students have a very good understanding of calculus and solve problems, in finding areas and volumes, for example, explaining their methods with confidence and understanding. This provides a very good foundation for further learning. In mechanics students know the laws of motion for particles travelling with constant acceleration and can apply them well in the solution of problems. Year 12 students are good at sketching cubic equations, using computers appropriately in their learning. They find statistics more difficult, particularly in using their notes to solve problems. Their learning would benefit further from discussion of alternative solutions to problems in class. In discrete and decision mathematics students have enjoyed graph theory. Their standard is well above average, representing good achievement given their above average levels of attainment in GCSE at the start of their course.
181. The teaching is good. Good subject expertise and good teaching methods provide a good rate of learning by varying students' activities within the lesson. Setting an A level standard problem to be completed in a set time provides a good challenge at the start of lessons, revising earlier work well and forming an appropriate introduction to the new work that follows. Discussion of the solution clarifies any misunderstanding well, as in the use of the formula to find the volume of a solid by integration, for example. New learning is assessed by students' own solutions written on the board for further discussion. This technique makes the introduction to new work enjoyable and easy to understand, in differential equations for example. Good independent learning tasks are set and marked well on a regular basis.
182. Students have very good attitudes to their work. They use private study well, showing a responsible attitude to their learning. They concentrate very well, asking and answering questions and keeping appropriate notes, increasing their understanding. They listen well and can explain solutions to problems to each other. The small number of students in Year 13 restricts learning through discussion but this aspect of learning is enhanced for Year 12 students, as they are part of a larger group of students through the good consortium arrangements. There are ample opportunities for extra support from teachers, including support in those modules taught at other sites in the consortium.
183. The leadership is very good, using test data very well in planning lessons and supporting students. Now that severe staffing problems in the department have eased there are very clear initiatives to raise standards at the end of Year 11 to increase the number of well qualified students continuing into the 6<sup>th</sup> form. The department is improving well and has the commitment and capacity for further success.

## Biology

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

### Strengths

- Higher attaining students achieve well;
- The teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are rigorous in their introduction and use of technical terms in the subject;
- Lessons are enriched by stimulating supporting resources and set tasks that enable students to learn effectively;
- Students have positive attitudes to the subject, relationships are good and they are well informed about how they are getting on.

#### Areas for improvement

- The learning of lower attaining students is sometimes not checked sufficiently in lessons and support provided before moving on;
- Students do not receive enough specific guidance on what they need to do in their independent study to exceed their target grades;
- Insufficient use is made of outside resources such as field study centres to enrich student's learning experiences.

184. GCE AS and A level was taught for the first time jointly by teachers from the school and those at another within the consortium from September 2000. Examination results at A level for 2002 show all the 3 students from the school passed, 2 of them with higher grades. AS level module results for 2002 show that of the 16 students entered, 7 did not gain a grade and did not continue, while the remainder are continuing their studies at A-level. The school acknowledges that it allowed several students to take the course whose low results at GCSE were insufficient preparation. This year, all the students are being taught solely by teachers from the school and the entry requirements have been adjusted to more appropriate levels.
185. The standards of work seen are at least average in both Years 12 and 13. Taking account of their standards on entry to the course, students in both years are achieving appropriately and higher attaining students are achieving well. Most are acquiring a good understanding of key principles and are applying them to explain patterns and to solve problems, although a few lower attaining students sometimes struggle to grasp some key points in lessons.
186. In Year 13, most understand the function of various parts of the eye and can describe how the eye can focus on distant and near objects. Students have a good understanding of the principles underlying the transport of water through a plant. Higher attaining students also take account of gaseous exchange during photosynthesis. All can predict the results of tests for the rate of water loss on different parts of leaves and explain why this happens. They have at least a satisfactory understanding of basic facts and concepts relating to the structure and function of cells, respiration and photosynthesis.
187. In Year 12, almost all know about the basic structure and function of cells and their reproduction. They are acquiring a grasp of the complexity of DNA. Most can describe positive and negative feedback effects of hormones and how reproduction can be manipulated by their bio-technical use. They can reflect on the moral and ethical issues surrounding the biotechnological use of hormones in controlling and stimulating reproduction and in food production.
188. Teaching is good. Teachers plan lessons very carefully and provide a good range of supporting resources such as topical articles, summaries of key processes and sources of further information. They pay particular attention to the introduction and rigorous application of new technical terms so that students quickly assimilate these. Teachers use a range of assessments well to check their students' knowledge and to guide them, ranging from short tests at the beginning of lessons, to more extensive questions and themes that require argument. Marking is regular and constructive in providing feedback on how to improve. Discussions are lively and interesting but there is a tendency for the higher attaining students to dominate these as they develop. Teachers sometimes take their good responses to questions as a signal to move on so that some lower attaining students who are struggling to keep up can be left behind if not checked and supported in other ways. ICT is used effectively to model and simulate key concepts such as mitosis. However, data-loggers are not yet used in practical work.
189. Learning is good. Students are attentive, interested and well-motivated by the stimulating lessons their teachers provide. Relationships between students and with their teachers are very good. They understand how well they are progressing and most students readily approach teachers for advice and assistance. However, lower attaining students are sometimes quiet and reserved in class discussions and questioning when they are less secure in understanding what is being covered.

190. Students in both years keep their personal notes and files well-ordered so that references to particular elements of their studies are readily accessible. Note-taking skills are mainly good. Teachers check these files regularly and provide advice and guidance. The set tasks extend the learning from lessons well. Students use the school's resource centre and particularly the ICT suite well to aid their independent study. They are guided by teachers about further study and reading. However, guidance from most teachers is not yet specifically targeted to each student's need to show them what they should do to achieve their target grades.
191. The good teaching and learning is resulting from close teamwork from the staff, led well by the subject's leader. Schemes of work and resources for them are developing well in most respects. However, insufficient use is made of the wider community to enrich the curriculum, for example, field centres and visits to enrich their studies of ecology.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

No subjects were inspected in this curriculum area.

## **BUSINESS**

Business studies at AVCE level was inspected.

### **Business studies**

Overall the provision in business studies is **good**.

#### Strengths

- Students achieve well;
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teaching is good;
- Management of the department is good;
- The good links with business and industry and with Europe contribute much to students' awareness of the world of business.

#### Areas for improvement

- Groups are small and retention rates have been below the national average
- Students do not have handbooks

192. Standards in the advanced GNVQ course in 2001 were satisfactory although not all students completed the course in that academic year. Three candidates ultimately reached distinction level, seven merit and only two students failed to complete. The number completing in 2001 and 2002 was too small for a statistically valid comparison. In the new AVCE course in 2002 standards were adversely affected by staffing difficulties and a number of students did not complete the course, with only two students completing the full single award. However, the flexible provision within the department has enabled them to continue and four students are now likely to complete the double award qualification as part-time students this year. There are four AVCE students in the present Year 13; standards are similar to those seen in other schools.
193. Achievement is good and many students improve on their target grades. Students adapt well to the demands of a higher-level course after taking the subject at GNVQ intermediate level. There are more male students overall but no clear differences in attainment; individually female students achieve well as do those for whom English is not their mother tongue. The subject does not usually recruit many of the highest attaining students because of the options in Years 10 and 11. However, attitudes to the subject are very good; students respond well to the vocational approach and to the challenge of working independently and therefore they achieve well.
194. Teaching and learning are good. The consistent vocational approach to the subject clearly challenges the average attaining students but also supports those who encounter problems. Students make good use of their part-time employment and a range of business related visits to

inform their studies. Teachers are skilled at questioning, to assess understanding and to encourage students to think for themselves. Although not all teachers have appropriate experience in business and industry, contacts with local, national and multinational companies are used very well. The European context is developed particularly well and students participate in well-planned visits to Barcelona and Paris that provide a very good learning experience. Written work shows a good grasp of both theory and business practice and a clear understanding of the examination board criteria.

195. In Year 13 students have good research skills and they have completed their assignments well. They were observed working confidently on a unit on the European Union. Their written work shows a good grasp of human resource management and of motivational theory. Students in Year 12 show a secure understanding of marketing and of the aims of market research. Young Enterprise encourages students to apply their communication, numeracy and ICT skills well. Resources have improved and they are clearly raising attainment by enabling students to become independent learners. During the inspection students were clearly benefiting from access to good ICT facilities.
196. The department is managed well and students consider that the quality of provision is very good. They clearly benefit from well-planned programme of visits and visiting speakers. Improvement is good. New courses have been effectively introduced, planning is good and assessment information is well managed.

### **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

197. ICT was not a focus for the inspection but the subject was sampled. In 2001 8 students completed the GNVQ Part 1 Intermediate qualification. 6 of them passed and 2 gained merits. There were no entries for 2002. A group of 10 students, 9 of whom are male, is currently taking an AVCE IT course and one lesson was observed. Teaching and learning were good; students were well motivated, learning well and their achievement was good. They are well supported by a new ICT suite with its own vocational area.

### **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

198. There was no specific subject focus although two lessons were sampled in physical education and one lesson in GNVQ Intermediate leisure and tourism. In 2002 a small cohort of students sat AS and A level examinations in physical education. Results are above average but low numbers make any statistical analysis invalid. There is no physical recreation programme for students; however, provision is good for extra-curricular activities. In 2001 and 2002, 12 students took the GNVQ Intermediate leisure and tourism course but no national comparisons are available to judge their success. Two Year 12 lessons were observed, both of which were very good. Students with below average GCSE results in Year 11 were learning well.

### **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

No subjects were inspected in this curriculum area.

### **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

199. No subjects were inspected in detail in this curriculum area, but the work in art and design, theatre studies and music technology was sampled. In art and design the work seen was below average because the quality of teaching, together with the leadership and management of the courses, was unsatisfactory. Students taking theatre studies were benefiting from good teaching as well as from the technical expertise and support provided by a specialist drama assistant. In music, the 2002 examination results of the small numbers of students involved were commensurate with their individual musical skills. One Year 12 lesson was observed in which the teaching and learning were good because the learning was well planned. Progress was good.

## HUMANITIES

200. The focus was on religious studies, but geography was also sampled. In geography, advanced level GCE examination results were below average in 2002, but close to expectations considering students' GCSE attainment. Two lessons were observed; they included well-structured sequences of activities. In one of these a student's report, based on fieldwork evidence, was used effectively by the teacher to show how to structure and develop written work to gain higher marks.

### Religious studies

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

#### Strengths

- Students achieve very well. Year 12 students have made a good start to their course and Year 13 students are able to articulate their views with growing confidence.
- Teaching is very good. Lessons are challenging and they are taught with enthusiasm and skill.
- There are very good procedures for assessing students' work and monitoring their progress.

#### Area for improvement

- The promotion of the subject so that the number of students opting to study the subject in the 6<sup>th</sup> form increases.

201. It is not possible to judge examination results against national standards because too few students study religious studies at AS or A-level. However, over recent years students have either met or exceeded their target minimum grades.

202. Current work seen during the inspection indicates that students are now achieving very well and standards of work are above average. They are developing good skills in the critical analysis of scholarly texts. This is because the teaching has a very clear focus on raising standards in literacy. Students' files are very well organised and are regularly checked by their teacher. Notes are presented in a way that will facilitate retrieval and revision. Students make mature responses to the issues they have studied; for example, the ethical implications of abortion or the concept of a just war. By the end of Year 13, students show evidence of increasing independent thought.

203. Overall, teaching is very good. The teacher has a very good knowledge and understanding both of the subject and of the requirements of the examination. Lessons are taught with enthusiasm and skill. They challenge and inspire the students, expecting a great deal from them, and this is highly effective in deepening their knowledge and understanding. Challenging issues and difficult concepts are introduced with care so that students gain in confidence, maturity and independence. Work is marked with care and written comments help students to know what they have done well and what they need to do in order to improve. As a result of the very good teaching, students are motivated and hard working. They cooperate well with the teacher and with each other. Classroom relationships are positive and the subject is becoming a more popular option.

204. Leadership and management are very effective. The course is well planned, with ethics taught at Sir Frederic Osborn School and philosophy at one of the other schools in the consortium. Procedures for communication between the schools and for monitoring students' progress are very good. Students are very appreciative of the support given to them by their teachers. They have access to a good range of textbooks and other resources to support their learning.

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

205. The main focus was on English. There are only two students studying French in the sixth form and all teaching takes place at another school in the consortium. The teaching of communication skills as part of vocational studies is effective because it is well planned and relevant.

### English

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

**Strengths**

- Good leadership that is driving up standards.
- Very good relationships that inspire trust and respect.
- Good achievement by the students because of good teaching and learning.

**Areas for improvement**

- Increased challenge to involve students more in lessons and to encourage independent learning.
- Clarity of students' targets for improvement.

206. Results in the 2001 GCE A and AS level English Literature examinations indicate standards that are broadly in line with the national average, though few students achieved higher grades. However, these comparisons are based on small numbers and results for 2002 indicate slight improvement. Trends over time are consistent and, generally, standards have been maintained. The retention rate is good.

207. In work seen during the inspection students' attainment in the sixth form is average. Their attainment on entry was below average and they have made good progress. Most students have a secure knowledge and understanding of their work. Their oral skills are good in classroom discussion but falter when speaking in formal situations, especially in Year 12. Students make valid and cogent observation and use technical vocabulary in their writing. Evaluative and critical writing is a problem for lower attaining students largely because their independent research skills are undeveloped. A minority of students, particularly in Year 12, cannot make sophisticated inferences from texts or sustain detailed textual analysis. This is improved by Year 13 so that most students are capable of refined and mature analysis. Recent initiatives are beginning to redress writing problems by careful selection of reading texts to match new syllabus requirements and more variety in writing assignments.

208. The study of a wide range of texts deepens students' understanding of literature, and the extension of schemes of work to cover all syllabus texts should further develop learning. When lessons are planned to include well-prepared student contributions, their comments are sharp and sensitive. Students respond very positively to their teachers and each other. Very good relationships between students from the consortium are a strong feature.

209. The quality of teaching and learning is good and includes some teaching and learning which is very good. All teachers are knowledgeable in their field and the deliberate timetabling of specialist teachers deepens the knowledge and understanding of the students. In the good and very good lessons there is a brisk pace, students are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed. Students enjoy their work, in an atmosphere of achievement and respect. In a Year 13 lesson on "Dr. Faustus" students enjoyed analysing Act 1 because of a detailed and humorous introduction by the teacher, clear direction and shared discussion. Students appreciate the opportunity to receive one-to-one attention and help from their teacher, especially the lower attaining students who have not grasped subtle text distinctions. Group discussion is limited when the teacher makes a lengthy exposition. The teacher's insistence on the use of analysis and explanation is beginning to improve textual analysis. In a good Year 13 lesson on Chaucer the teacher took advantage of the trust and good humour of relationships to engage the students in a well structured, thoughtful discussion on 'The Miller's Tale'. Work is marked regularly and consistently to a high standard, although a minority of comments does not target improvement sufficiently well for the students to know how to improve. Improved use of new technology is developing research and writing skills.

210. Leadership and management are good. Recent initiatives to improve achievement are beginning to have an impact. The introduction of a wider variety of texts addresses syllabus requirements and student preferences. Teachers share the preparation of schemes of work, which encourages equality for the students and the development of staff. Assessment procedures are clear, resulting



in marking and specific targeting to secure individual student improvement and to inform curriculum planning. This is not consistent, as some students' targets are not clear enough for them to know exactly what they have to do in order to improve. The head of department is respected and valued by English teachers for his care for staff and students, his expertise and contribution to their professional development. Current initiatives are bringing about improvements although there is still insufficient opportunity for students to develop their independent learning.