

INSPECTION REPORT

OULDER HILL COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Rochdale

LEA area: Rochdale

Unique reference number: 105840

Headteacher: Mr I. W. Rees

Reporting inspector: Mrs J. Tracey
20270

Dates of inspection: 10th - 14th February, 2003

Inspection number: 251944

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11-18 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Hudsons Walk
Rochdale

Postcode: OL11 5EF

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Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr N. Peet

Date of previous inspection: September 2000

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20270	June Tracey	Registered inspector	Educational inclusion	What sort of school is it? The school's results and pupils' achievements How well the school is led and managed
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19452	Anthony Pearson	Sixth form inspection co-ordinator	Religious education	
12825	Niall Carr	Team inspector	Psychology Sociology	
27803	Joseph Clark	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	How well are pupils taught?
32229	Mary Comer	Team inspector	Business studies Citizenship	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
15109	Thomas Comer	Team inspector		
10340	John Lockett	Team inspector	Design and technology	
32340	Peter McKay	Team inspector	History	
11975	Thelma McIntosh-Clark	Team inspector	English	
18676	Roy Meakin	Team inspector	Mathematics	
10308	John Paddick	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
31680	Philip Redican	Team inspector	Art	
3793	John Ratcliffe	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	

8329	Gillian Salter-Smith	Team inspector	Physical education	
27485	Mark Sims	Team inspector	Urdu English as an additional language	
22985	Jacqueline Sparkes	Team inspector	Biology Health and social care	
12671	Marjorie Thomas	Team inspector	Geography	
21866	David Tracey	Team inspector	Science	
20490	Paul Wilson	Team inspector	Music	

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REPORT CONTENTS

Page

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

7

Information about the school
How good the school is
What the school does well
What could be improved
How the school has improved since its last inspection
Standards
Pupils' attitudes and values
Teaching and learning
Other aspects of the school
How well the school is led and managed
Parents' and carers' views of the school

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

13

The school's results and pupils' achievements
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

18

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

20

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

23

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS

25

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

26

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

28

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

29

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

34

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

58

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Oulder Hill School is a larger than average, mixed comprehensive school with 1477 pupils on roll, including 246 in the sixth form. It is a purpose built community school. Large numbers of adults use the facilities, which include a swimming pool and a theatre, during the evenings, weekends and holidays. The school is a specialist language college. It offers eight languages in daylight and twilight courses. The school draws from Rochdale and the surrounding area, embracing a wide range of social backgrounds. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (about 20%) is broadly average. The school is a multi-ethnic community. A third of the pupils are of ethnic origin, mainly Asian. The proportion of pupils with English as an additional language (22%) is high. Forty of these pupils are at the early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils on the register of special educational needs is below average. The school provides for a range of disabilities including physical, learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of pupils with formal statements of need is below average. Attainment on entry is slightly below average because a number of pupils have not acquired the basic literacy skills expected for their age at this stage. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average because some students start with moderate GCSE results.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Oulder Hill Community School is a very effective school that provides a good education for its pupils and students. Standards are average in Year 9 and above average in Year 11. Standards in Year 13 are average. Pupils and students achieve well throughout the school in response to good teaching. The school is very well led and managed and currently provides good value for money. It is meeting its commitment to pay off a large deficit through staged payments over four years.

What the school does well

- Results in GCSE examinations are above average because the overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The school is very effective as a language college. It extends its good practices to other institutions.
- The school provides very well for the personal development of pupils of all abilities. Relationships are very good; pupils and staff work with a common purpose to raise achievement. The school works well in partnership with parents, staff, pupils and the local community.
- The leadership and management are very good. They work in harmony with the governing body and the local education authority.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. Learning support assistants are very effective.
- Provision for extra-curricular activities, including sport, music and the performing arts is very good.

What could be improved

- Standards could be raised further in Years 7-9.
- More use could be made of information and communication technology skills (ICT) across all subjects of the curriculum.
- Pupils' independent learning skills could be developed further, especially in Years 7-11.
- More opportunities could be provided for sixth form students to participate in enrichment activities.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good improvement since its previous inspection in September 2000. The management structure has radically changed, bringing all members of the school community, including parents, into consultation about issues affecting the school. Of major significance is the improvement in the school's financial position. A substantial portion of the previous deficit has been repaid in accordance with an agreed strategic plan. At the same time, the school is investing in learning resources, especially for ICT, and renovating the buildings. Teaching and learning have improved, resulting in higher levels of attainment. The rationalisation of courses in the sixth form, and added rigour in support and guidance, is benefiting all students and enhancing their learning.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils 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	B	C	B	A
A-levels/AS-levels	D	C	*	

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 available

Years 7, 8 and 9

Pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were above average in English, average in mathematics and below average in science. Compared with similar schools, they were well above average in English, above average in mathematics and average in science. The overall trend in pupils' average point score over the last four years is similar to that found nationally. Pupils are achieving well in relation to their attainment on entry. Boys and girls attain similar results at this stage. The overall standard of work in Year 9 is average. Pupils achieve well from their starting point in Year 7. Standards are below average in ICT.

Years 10 and 11

In 2002, pupils' GCSE results were above average. They were well above average compared with similar schools. The proportion gaining five or more A*-C grades was average; pupils from families of Asian origin attained better than the year group as a whole. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-G grades was well above average; it was very high compared with similar schools. Almost all pupils gained at least one A*-G grade. The trend in the pupils' average point score over recent years is above the national trend. Girls attain better results than boys, to the same extent as they do nationally. The school exceeded two of the three targets set by governors. It just failed to meet the target at five or more A*-C grades. Future targets are challenging. Overall, standards of work are above average in Year 11 and pupils achieve well. Standards are well above average in music and drama. They are above average in English, history, modern foreign languages, including Urdu, and religious education. Standards are below average in ICT.

Throughout the school, pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make similar progress to other pupils.

Sixth form

The A2(advanced level) results in 2002 showed an improvement on those of 2001 in that there was an increase in the proportion of the higher grades A and B. National averages for 2002 are not available for comparison. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the overall standard of work in Year 13 is average. Students achieve well.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils grow in self-confidence as they progress through the school and respond well to the many opportunities provided. They respect each other.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The vast majority of pupils behaves well in lessons and respects the school's disciplinary code. Occasional incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with swiftly. The rate of exclusions is about average for a school of this size.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils work well together. The school's strategies for encouraging initiative and self-responsibility are effective. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds mix harmoniously to create a welcoming atmosphere in the school.
Attendance	Attendance is well above average. The amount of unauthorised absence is well below average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Overall, teaching and learning are good throughout the school. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection, particularly in Years 7-9 and with respect to the amount of very good teaching observed in lessons.

A significant factor in the improvement of teaching is the developmental work that has been carried out and practised since the previous inspection. An intensive programme of in-class support, focusing sharply on lesson planning and what pupils are expected to achieve, has highlighted pupils' involvement in measuring their own degree of success and progress towards their targets. The strengths in the teaching lie in teachers' good subject knowledge and their ability to keep lessons moving at a pace that sustains pupils' interest. A greater emphasis on developing pupils' independent learning skills would transform good lessons to very good. At present, some pupils are too dependent on the teacher to guide their learning. Also, not enough use is made of ICT to support learning in other subjects. Written work is generally well marked with useful comments showing how it could be improved. The very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching that was observed was due to inadequate planning and weak discipline. Pupils did not have the incentive to work to optimum capacity and lost interest, sometimes distracting others. Where teaching was satisfactory rather than good, lessons lacked clear aims so pupils were not challenged enough to extend themselves intellectually, physically or creatively.

Teaching is very good in business studies and music in Years 10 and 11 and in drama throughout the school. It is satisfactory overall in ICT and geography and good in all other subjects. Basic literacy skills are being developed effectively through all subjects of the curriculum. Numerical skills are taught well in mathematics. A coherent policy for teaching numeracy across the curriculum is in draft form but has not yet been implemented.

Teachers have high expectations of students in the sixth form and face them with challenging demands. Most students respond well, demonstrating intellectual curiosity and a willingness to take risks in their independent learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum is well planned and provides a rich educational experience for all pupils, regardless of background or ability. The provision for modern foreign languages is very good. The provision is enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular activities, including sport, music and the performing arts. The programme for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is very good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Teachers and learning support assistants create relationships based on trust and expectancy, giving pupils the confidence to succeed.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. Pupils progress well within the framework of the staffing available. There are insufficient support workers to fully meet the needs of all pupils in every lesson. The school is flexible in approach, responding to need, and makes optimum use of the resources available.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Provision for pupils' cultural development is outstanding. The school pays very good attention to pupils' awareness of moral and social issues. Pupils' sensitivity to spiritual matters is good, as demonstrated by their response to religious ideals and aesthetic appreciation of art, music and drama.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. The school cares well for its pupils, nurturing their individual talents and aspirations. Pupils' progress is monitored well on a regular basis; the information gained is used to guide planning for lessons and to inform pupils how they can improve their work.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The leadership group provides very clear direction. It has high expectations of itself and others, which result in good working relationships across the school and within faculties. There is a good team spirit amongst staff and pupils which generates an air of optimism about the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a firm grasp of issues affecting the school. They work very closely with the school and are effectively involved in strategic planning. Statutory requirements are met, except for the provision of religious education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship throughout the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school's analysis of its performance in examinations is thorough and self-critical. The information gained is quickly used to precipitate remedial action if necessary.
The strategic use of resources	The campus is well used by the school and as a community resource. Finances are used prudently, enabling the school to invest in provision for current pupils as well as making staged repayments on the previous budget deficit. The school successfully practises the principles of best value through consultation and comparison in financial and educational matters.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils make good progress because the teaching is good. • Pupils are expected to work hard and give of their best. • Leadership and management are good and have brought about effective change since the previous inspection. • Parents are comfortable about approaching the school with their concerns. • Parents are actively encouraged to become involved in school affairs. • Good interaction with the local community. 	<p>A small number of parents expressed concerns about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality and consistency of homework, particularly in Year 9. • Information on pupils' progress. • The disruptive behaviour of pupils in a few lessons. • The effect of discontinuity of staffing in some subjects. • Opportunities for pupils to learn Urdu at an earlier stage than Year 9.

Inspectors endorse the positive views expressed by parents. With regard to homework, inspectors agree that there are some minor concerns, mostly related to the setting of homework on specified nights. In considering the working partnership between parents and the school, inspectors found there to be a plentiful amount of information and opportunities to discuss pupils' progress. There is a minimal amount of poor behaviour in lessons. This is generally handled well through the systematic application of the discipline policy. This is sometimes not as effective when pupils are taught by temporary staff who do not know them well. The school is currently involved in a whole-school curriculum review, into which parents have an input. Provision for languages will be considered alongside that for other subjects and courses.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is larger than average with 246 students. There are slightly more female than male students and numbers in Year 12 are slightly higher than in Year 13. Numbers are fewer than they were at the time of the previous inspection, largely due to a change in policy. The school has rationalised the curriculum on offer to cater for a wide range of GCE AS and A2-level courses. These include two languages, together with a much smaller number of vocational courses. Students are guided onto courses where they have a reasonable chance of success. Nevertheless, students with relatively modest GCSE grades, which might otherwise restrict their opportunity to follow advanced level courses elsewhere, are welcomed at Oulder Hill. Around a quarter of students in the sixth form have joined from other schools. Overall, attainment on entry to the sixth form is below average. A significant number of students come from ethnic minority backgrounds, in most cases, from the Pakistani heritage community. The vast majority of students leaving at the end of Year 13 go on to higher education courses. Few students drop out.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an effective sixth form, which, since the previous inspection, has successfully maintained average standards and results through a period of financial, management and staffing turbulence. It is now well placed to improve the service that it provides to the local community. Standards are average overall in Year 13. Students achieve well because of good teaching, and because they have very positive attitudes to learning. They receive very good academic and personal support. They are mature, sensible and responsible young adults. Leadership and management are good. The sixth form is cost-effective.

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good and students achieve well.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good, as are the relationships between the students themselves, who come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds.
- Students have very positive attitudes to their work.
- Teachers provide very good academic and personal support to students.
- The school provides a wide range of academic GCE A2 and AS-level courses.

What could be improved

- Information on students' prior attainment could be collected and analysed more effectively in order to improve target setting, monitoring of progress and curriculum planning.
- More enrichment activities could be provided.
- Greater use could be made of ICT in many subjects.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Teachers' subject command together with students' positive attitudes result in good achievement. Standards are improving.
Chemistry	Good. Teaching is consistently good. Students' very positive attitudes contribute to their good achievement.
Biology	Good. Teaching is good and students are well motivated. More use could be made of ICT. Independent learning skills could be further developed.
Business education	Good. Standards are rising as a result of good teaching and now that staffing problems have been resolved. Students are highly motivated and hard working.
Physical education	Good. Good teaching and students' positive attitudes lead to good learning and achievement. Results are above average.
Health and social care	Very good. Teaching is good. Teachers are enthusiastic and assessment, monitoring and target setting are very good. Students are highly motivated and benefit from the very good links with external agencies.
Art and design	Satisfactory. Teaching and learning are good. Relationships are very good. However, small numbers take the subject, which restricts opportunities for the students to learn from each other. Students receive less taught time than in other subjects. Their achievement over time is satisfactory.
Music	Good. Standards and results over time are average and represent good achievement. Performing is particularly strong. Teaching is good.
Geography	Satisfactory. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Current students achieve average standards.
Psychology	Very good. The teaching of psychology is scholarly. Students understand psychological methodology and use a range of research methods. Skills that enhance the ability to participate in research work are well taught.
Sociology	Very good. Lessons have an accessible layout and a clear style. Activities and questions reinforce theory. The issues studied highlight points from real life and students are acquiring knowledge of contemporary processes and structures.
English	Good. As a result of good teaching, students achieve well and standards are improving.
French	Good. Students achieve as expected from their GCSE grades. Teaching is good.

Lessons were seen in fourteen other subjects. Very good teaching and learning was observed in further mathematics, drama, dance, history and German. In statistics, physics, design technology, law, Urdu, English literature and the combined English language and literature course, the teaching and learning was good. It was satisfactory in ICT and media studies.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are provided with good information about the courses available and life in the sixth form. The induction process is very well organised. Students receive very good academic and personal support and guidance. Recent improvements to the procedures involved the students themselves well in the assessment process. The procedures ensure that form tutors are well informed about students' progress and, consequently, are well equipped to monitor students' performance effectively.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Continuity in the development of the sixth form has been adversely affected in recent years by a rapid turnover of its senior management personnel. Stability has now been established and leadership and management of the sixth form are good. There is a good vision for improvement, now being translated into action through effective planning encompassing both academic and pastoral provision. Entry to the sixth form is open to students of relatively modest attainment and the school is very responsive to students' requirements.

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"> • The choice of courses suits their needs. • The induction process into the sixth form is good. • The quality of teaching and support for independent study are good. • Teachers are readily accessible to provide academic support. • Their work is assessed in a way that helps them to improve. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of advice about what to study in the sixth form. • Advice on careers and higher education courses. • The way in which the school listens to the views of students and the way in which it treats them as responsible adults. • The range and quality of enrichment courses.

Inspectors agree with all the positive comments expressed by the students. They also agree that the quality and range of enrichment courses is too narrow and could be improved. With respect to the other points raised, inspectors found contradictions between the comments on students' questionnaires and discussion with students. Inspectors judge that the quality of advice now offered is good and that students are treated with respect as young adults.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Overall standards of work are average in Year 9 and above average in Year 11; they are average in Year 13. Pupils and students achieve well throughout the school. The school has gained School Achievement Awards in the last three consecutive years.

Standards in Years 7, 8 and 9

2. Currently, overall attainment on entry to Year 7 is slightly below average. A significant minority of pupils does not have the basic skills expected of pupils of their age. The school tackles this from the outset through its highly focused programme for developing literacy skills.

3. In 2002, pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were above average in English, average in mathematics and below average in science. Compared with similar schools, they were well above in English, above average in mathematics and average in science. The proportion of pupils that exceeded the level expected for their age was above average in English. Boys and girls attain similarly at this stage but boys' achievement is better than that of girls compared to boys and girls nationally. The overall trend in results over the last four years is similar to that found nationally. The targets set by the governors for future years are challenging but information from regular updates on pupils' progress suggest that they are achievable.

4. Evidence from the inspection, including lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work indicates that the overall standard of work is average. Standards are average in all subjects except ICT where they are below average.

Standards in Years 10 and 11

5. Pupils' average point score in GCSE examinations in 2002 was above the national average. It was well above average compared with that of similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-G grades was very high when compared with their prior attainment in Year 9. Compared with all schools, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades was average, Pakistani girls achieving particularly well; the proportions of pupils gaining five or more A*-G grades/ one or more A*-G grades were well above average. Overall, girls attain more highly than boys, to the same extent as they do nationally. Girls from families of Asian origin achieve significantly better than boys from the same background, but the gap lessened in 2002. The trend in the pupils' average point score taken over the past four years is above the national trend. In 2002, two of the three targets set by governors were exceeded. The third, for five or more A*-C grades, was just missed. Almost all pupils gained at least one GCSE grade. Future targets are challenging but are soundly based on information obtained from the school's assessment procedures.

6. Overall standards of work in Year 11 are above average. Standards are well above average in music and drama. They are above average in English, history, modern foreign languages, including Urdu, and religious education. Standards are average in other subjects, except for ICT where they are below average. Staffing difficulties have affected pupils' achievement over time in some subjects, particularly science. A good start has been made in establishing citizenship as a new subject this year. The average standard at this stage represents good achievement. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in ICT and at least good in all other subjects.

The school as a whole

7. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as they move through the school. This is largely due to the very good quality of help that they receive from the team of dedicated staff, particularly the learning support assistants and learning mentors. Great emphasis is placed upon overcoming weaknesses in reading and writing, enabling almost all pupils to become genuine GCSE candidates by the time they reach Years 10 and 11. Examination results are impressive, given pupils' relatively weak literacy skills on entry to the school. For example, in 2002, the vast majority of the pupils on the special needs register achieved at least five GCSE results in the range B to G.

8. Pupils with English as an additional language achieve well overall. Most of them speak and write English with reasonable fluency and they progress at the same rate as other pupils. Thoroughly detailed profiles of attainment are kept from entry. In 2002, the proportion of Pakistani pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE was higher than the whole school's attainment in this category. This represented a significant increase on the previous year's results.

9. Standards of literacy are average overall. The school has a sound policy for promoting literacy skills which focuses on writing and the development of pupils' competence in reading for understanding. Speaking and listening skills are developing well; they are of a higher standard than reading and writing. The quality of some pupils' writing is reduced by lack of attention to spelling and punctuation.

10. Pupils' numerical skills are average. Most of the direct teaching takes place in mathematics but the transference of skills is clearly evident in subjects such as science, design and technology, geography and art. However, the lack of a consistent approach to the use of units and methods of tackling arithmetic, algebraic and graphical problems holds pupils back at times. The school is aware of this and has plans to overcome it through the introduction of a whole school policy, which is currently in draft form.

11. Overall, pupils' ICT skills are not as well developed as they should be for their age. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to use ICT in other subjects. This is because the provision of computers has been restricted due to the school's financial situation in recent years. Investments are now being made in the infrastructure for ICT and there are already signs of its impact, for example, in the sixth form and as a resource for all pupils in the library.

Sixth form

12. The school has done well to maintain overall average examination results in recent years at a time of significant turbulence in school management, staffing and finance, all of which have affected the sixth form. Given their relatively modest starting points on entry to the sixth form, based on their GCSE results, and the relative lack of consistency in the teaching force and curriculum arrangements in some areas, students' achievements have been good during this time. However, the school does not have detailed information on the prior attainment levels of a significant minority of these students, notably those joining the sixth form from other schools and so is unable to determine students' overall achievement with precision.

13. In 2001, female students achieved better results overall than males and by a slightly wider margin than that found nationally. Females outperformed males again in 2002 but the gap narrowed. In the vocational subjects in 2002, male students' performance was better than females, reversing the 2001 situation. The strongest subjects in the 2001 A2-level examinations were psychology, biology and physical education. In 2002, significant improvements in comparison with the 2001 performance occurred in art and design, English language, and mathematics. These coincided with changes to recruitment policies or significant changes to staffing within the subject area. In 2001, in the majority of subjects, students obtained a lower than average proportion of the higher A-B grades. In 2002, in most subjects, this proportion improved. In the majority of subjects, all students who took the examination obtained a grade.

14. At AS-level in 2001, the pass rate was very close to the national figure although results overall were slightly below average. The pass rate fell sharply in 2002, particularly in general studies. Results have been consistently strong in media studies, drama, music, sociology and Urdu. Female students' performance has been better overall than males.

15. Evidence from the inspection indicates that standards in Year 13 are average overall and that students achieve well in relation to their starting points on entry to the sixth form. In the thirteen subjects inspected in detail, standards are above average in biology, health and social care, psychology and sociology. They are below average in art and average in mathematics, chemistry, business studies, physical education, music, geography and English.

16. Few students drop out once they have settled into their sixth form courses, although a significant proportion of those who started current courses in art have failed to complete the course. The few students who have special educational needs make good progress. Around seventy per cent of students go on to higher education. Realistic targets are set for students in both academic and vocational courses, based on available information on their attainment prior to entry to the sixth form. Students themselves are very well involved in the process of monitoring the progress made towards meeting these targets, which can be adapted in order to ensure that an appropriate challenge is maintained.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17. Pupils have very good attitudes to school. The large majority of parents who completed the inspection questionnaire say that their children enjoy school and are making good progress. Pupils are proud of their school and they feel happy, secure and confident. They enjoy the many good opportunities to take part in drama, music and sport and participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities, trips, visits and community activities. Pupils readily take on new challenges such as when a group that had been practising and developing circus skills entertained the community playgroup with a performance of stilt walking and juggling. This was enjoyed by the audience and participants alike. In a Year 7 dance lesson, pupils developed their own interpretation of boxing moves, boys and girls both working with great energy and commitment and presenting their work for each other with confidence and a developing sense of performance.

18. Behaviour, overall, is good and sometimes very good. Occasional incidents of poor behaviour are dealt with firmly and swiftly so that pupils can make good progress in class, working well individually or in groups. Exclusions are used as a last resort as a signal of the school's robust stance against disruptive behaviour. A small minority of parents does not consider that behaviour is good but evidence from the inspection shows that the new procedures to promote a good climate for learning in class and throughout the school are working well.

19. The attitudes of pupils with special educational needs are good. They enjoy coming to school and attend just as frequently as other pupils. Even where they exhibit behavioural and emotional difficulties the very good quality of the support they receive enables them to overcome problems and work in an atmosphere of calm and industry. They relate very well to staff in lessons, in small groups in the enrichment centre, and in extra-curricular activities. Relationships with the staff are particularly strong and productive. Pupils value the attention they are given and usually make great efforts to follow instructions and improve their work.

20. Pupils with English as an additional language mostly have very good attitudes to learning. They are highly motivated and make rapid progress when they have the necessary support in lessons. Occasionally they lose interest in lessons where additional support is not available and they cannot access the work.

21. During the lunchhour the large majority of pupils make good use of their time, socialising with friends and taking part in extra-curricular activities. The dining room provision has improved since the previous inspection and pupils continue to behave in a civilised and orderly way. Some pupils take the opportunity to catch up with work and homework and the library is used well.

22. Pupils are keen to take responsibility. They take turns to sit in the foyer to welcome visitors to the school. Some are proficient librarians. A group of pupils provides a very good service by supporting and

listening to any pupil who has concerns about bullying or relationships. Pupils say that this service is used well and with due regard to confidentiality. The pupil counsellors are well supported by staff responsible for pastoral care. All pupils have good opportunities to raise ideas and concerns with their year council. They say that the councils' views are respected and they have achieved improvements such as the provision of lockers. The annual experience week provides a wide range of enrichment activities including residential visits, some of them abroad. This week is a highlight of the school year and for many pupils an unforgettable experience. As a result of their activities pupils develop self-confidence and extend their team and social skills.

23. Relationships in school are very good. Pupils know that the school management is often keen to consult them and their parents about major school changes. In response to the recent introduction of a new school uniform pupils are neat, smart and business-like. The form tutor system works well and pupils trust their teachers to help them with any problems. Pupils are particularly proud of the good relationships between the different groups of pupils in the school. They know that any hint of racism is not tolerated. The school's policy for racial equality is very effective.

24. Attendance last year was well above average. The amount of unauthorised absence was below average. Many students achieve 100 per cent attendance each term. Punctuality during the day is good. The school has very good procedures to support the small minority whose attendance level gives cause for concern.

Sixth form

25. Students have very good attitudes to their work and to sixth form life. They enjoy being in the sixth form and say they would recommend it to others. Students are pleased with the range of courses and the opportunity to make a careful choice of programmes that suit their individual attainments and aspirations. They respond well to the teachers' high expectations of them. The climate encourages them to work at a good pace and gain the necessary qualifications for higher or further education or their choice of employment.

26. They are given every encouragement and opportunity to develop good personal study skills and learn to work independently. They have good access to information technology and to library facilities and use these opportunities very well. Most work well individually in an atmosphere of quiet concentration. They also work very well together in groups, contributing and exchanging ideas. Consequently they develop very good teamwork skills which will contribute well to their future working life.

27. Students respond well to the school's expectation that they should use their time productively. Most students make the most of their study time, and also have enough time to socialise with their friends. Relationships throughout the sixth form are very good. Students are proud of the school and like the friendly atmosphere in the sixth form. They know that the school sets the highest standards of behaviour and that bullying and racism are never tolerated. Students set a good example of responsible and mature behaviour to younger pupils. They respond well when they gather together in assembly demonstrating good rapport with their teachers.

28. Students have very good attitudes towards the responsibilities of a sixth former. They know that good levels of attendance and punctuality are crucial to their studies. Attendance is above average. Students show care and concern for each other so that all are included in the supportive atmosphere of the sixth form community. The sixth form council members discuss ideas and concerns brought to their notice and they have raised funds for charity. Most sixth formers are involved in extra-curricular activities. Some take the opportunity to train as lifeguards in the swimming pool, others learn to drive. Students benefit from work experience and the Youth Awards scheme. They have taken part in a range of very successful special events held during the year including the multi-cultural Winter celebration, the Eid party and the Leavers' Ball. Some students who have moved on to higher education return to school to share their experiences and offer information and advice.

29. Students know that their work and experience in the sixth form will contribute to the way they take on challenges in their future life. They show confidence in their ability to follow their chosen path and in their ability to support each other.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

30. Overall, the quality of teaching is good throughout the school. Teaching is equally good in Years 7-11 and in the sixth form. This is an improvement on the previous inspection when teaching in Years 7-9 was satisfactory. Of the 207 lessons observed, 77 per cent were good or better. The proportion of lessons judged to be very good or excellent, 21 per cent, was a significant improvement on the 12 per cent in this category in the previous inspection. A small proportion of lessons was judged to be unsatisfactory, mainly due to weak management in the classroom. Teachers have consistently high expectations and use a wide range of teaching methods. They use information from assessment procedures effectively to monitor pupils' progress and to provide guidance on how pupils' work could be improved.

31. Teaching is very good in business studies and music in Years 10 and 11, and in drama throughout the school. It is good in music and geography in Year 7-9 and in all other subjects in Years 7-11. Teaching is satisfactory in ICT in Years 7-11 and in geography in Years 10 and 11.

32. The improvement in teaching since the previous inspection is principally due to the developmental work that has taken place on key aspects of teaching and learning. An intensive programme of in-class support has begun, working through the faculty structure and focusing on planning lessons that set clear targets for learning at the outset and review what has been learned at the end. This, along with other teaching and learning initiatives, has resulted in an improvement in teaching, particularly in science, art and design, and religious education.

33. In English, lessons are very well planned with a range of interesting challenges that capture pupils' interest and lead to good learning. In one excellent lesson in Year 8 on Romeo and Juliet, probing questions at the start reminded pupils of the subtleties of the plot. Very good use of a video for explanation ensured that pupils developed a thorough understanding and awareness of how the opening act prepared the reader for the tragedy that was about to unfold.

34. Where teaching is good, pupils are very well managed so that little time is wasted getting down to work and keeping pupils' attention focused on the task. They are expected to work hard and they generally do, acquiring new knowledge and skills in the process. Aims of the lesson are shared with pupils at the outset and reviewed at the end. This was a good feature in most science lessons. In a Year 10 science lesson, for example, the teacher clearly laid out at the start the emphasis on understanding the chemical properties of limestone. A good range of practical activities led to greater knowledge and understanding of limestone properties. The 'brainstorming' conclusion to the lesson enabled pupils to test each other and provided the teacher with a clear understanding of what had been learned. Teachers have good subject knowledge and expertise; they teach enthusiastically and effectively. Good emphasis on the practicalities of experimental and practical activities, such as the illuminating explanation of the workings of a centre lathe in design and technology, ensure that pupils recognise the importance of good working practices for their own and others' safety.

35. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are taught well. Teachers and support assistants use their subject knowledge well to provide effective support for language, especially when pupils are at an early stage of learning English. In some lessons they work with the whole class, not just the targeted learners. This promotes a good sense of community spirit.

36. The school provides pupils with special educational needs with teaching of good quality. In the most productive lessons, teachers skilfully adapt the work so that it is fully accessible even to the pupils with weak literacy skills. Examples of this good practice occur regularly in English, modern languages, design

and technology and religious education. Learning support assistants, learning mentors and teachers working with small groups all provide pupils with very good quality support for their learning. They ensure that pupils concentrate fully and prompt and challenge them, often with great skill. Sometimes, however, pupils' progress in lessons is slowed because teachers do not provide sufficiently adapted materials for the learning support assistants to use with their designated pupils. In history and geography, teachers' marking of pupils' work does not offer enough support to those with weak literacy skills.

37. The teaching of pupils with behavioural difficulties and low self-esteem is of a particularly high quality. The whole area encompassing the enrichment centre has an air of calm and industry. Pupils are constantly supported through difficulties with great understanding and professionalism whilst they are persuaded successfully to continue to make progress in their academic work. The staff often uses innovative methods to enthuse some of these pupils and improve their confidence. An example is the way that they teach them conjuring tricks which they then perform well to very appreciative audiences of younger children.

38. Assessment and day-to-day marking of pupils' work are generally good. They help pupils to move on. For example, in a Year 11 GCSE dance lesson, pupils were learning to use choreographic devices to improve composition pieces. The teacher provided very good guidance in the form of what needed to be done to achieve each GCSE grade, ensuring that pupils knew exactly what to include in their motifs to gain their target grade.

39. Where teaching is satisfactory rather than good, lessons lack clear objectives and sometimes drift along without really challenging pupils to extend themselves intellectually, physically or creatively. In most ICT lessons, for example, aims are not sharp enough. Pupils then spend too many lessons working on long-term projects and lose sight of what it is they are supposed to be learning in each lesson.

40. The very small number of unsatisfactory lessons observed had common features. Planning and preparation were inconsistent and there were weaknesses in the management of pupils. Where classes are shared between two or more teachers, lesson plans are not always co-ordinated to guard against repetition. In one Year 9 ICT lesson, for example, a significant minority of pupils repeated work on desktop publishing that they had done in the previous lesson with their other teacher. Where classroom management is weak, pupils do not learn enough; pupils talk too much amongst themselves and are inattentive.

41. The overall quality of teaching could be improved from good to very good through a higher focus on three key areas. Greater emphasis could be placed on developing pupils' independent learning skills. Many good lessons fall short of being very good because pupils are too dependent on the teacher to direct them onto the next stage of learning. They lack the confidence and proficiency to take the initiative themselves. The use of ICT to support learning could be extended to help pupils learn more effectively, particularly in science, mathematics, history, design and technology, art and music. In addition, teachers need to ensure that regular opportunities are provided, in all subjects, for pupils to apply, reinforce or extend existing literacy and numeracy skills.

42. Some parents expressed concern about the provision of homework. Inspectors found that homework was set regularly, but, in some year groups, not always to a fixed weekly schedule. This sometimes leads to inconsistent amounts of homework each day, which in turn creates problem for pupils who are committed to regular extra-curricular activities.

Sixth form

43. Teaching is good in the sixth form, as it was at the time of the previous inspection. In the subjects focused on during the inspection, teaching was judged to be satisfactory in geography and good in all other subjects.

44. Inspectors support the view of students and teachers that relationships are never less than good and, overall, are very good. Students come to lessons expecting to learn and the atmosphere in nearly all lessons is conducive to productive learning. In one outstanding Year 12 English lesson, the teacher communicated very directly with students, focusing on promoting high levels of learning. Here, the sheer quality of interaction resulted in students making excellent gains in knowledge and understanding of the incongruity of language and situations in, for example, 'Plough fields and scatter' in relation to towns.

45. Teachers have very high expectations of their students and are not afraid to place challenging intellectual demands on them. In psychology, for example, penetrating questioning, referring students back to previous work, ensured that they understood how statistical inference was used in psychological research.

46. Teachers have very good subject knowledge that they use to enthuse and inspire students. Subject expertise enables teachers to plan lessons that move students on in developing their ideas and increasing their understanding. Students know how well they are doing and what their target grades are because their teachers have very good procedures for assessing their work and keeping them informed.

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

47. The curriculum is well planned and provides a rich educational experience for all of its pupils, regardless of background or ability. It is subject to regular review to ensure that it meets the pupils' needs effectively. All pupils take the full range of National Curriculum subjects. Statutory requirements are met.

48. Time given to various subjects is well balanced and reflects, in the case of English, the ethnic backgrounds of the pupils. Modern languages, music and art also have a generous time allocation in Years 7 – 9.

49. The school provides a wide choice of GCSE subjects. All pupils take two modern languages, currently taking their first language at GCSE in Year 10 and their second in Year 11, as part of a pilot project. This is in line with the school's special status as a language college. All pupils take both dance and drama throughout Years 7 - 9. Able mathematicians can take GCSE in statistics as an extra subject.

50. The school has made raising boys' achievement a priority. Programmes designed to challenge and stretch gifted and talented pupils through extra-curricular work are extensive, highly regarded in the locality, and still improving.

51. Pupils with special educational needs have access to the whole of the school curriculum. This is due to the very good quality of support that they receive in and outside normal lessons in all subjects when they work with learning mentors or learning support assistants. The school pays particular attention to the development of weak literacy skills, enabling all pupils to produce work of GCSE standard in several subjects by the time they reach Years 10 and 11. Pupils facing challenges connected with visual or hearing impairment or emotional or behavioural difficulties all receive sufficient support to enable them to reach their potential. However, the school does not currently cater fully enough for the pupils with the weakest numerical skills.

52. The school caters well for its ethnically diverse population, for example, in its teaching of Urdu. It reflects the school's specialist language college status well, and also its particular strengths in performing arts subjects. Teachers consciously plan their lessons with the needs of all learners in mind. The school does not have enough support teachers to meet all the needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language in every lesson. The support is mainly targeted at English and the humanity subjects, with less in, for instance, mathematics and science. Consequently, there are occasions when new arrivals to the school find difficulty in understanding the work.

53. The school's strategy for developing pupils' literacy skills is sound. Successful strategies are demonstrated by specialist teachers who work alongside other teachers in different subjects of the curriculum. The strategy for developing numeracy skills is well-established in mathematics and there is satisfactory evidence of the transfer of mathematical in science, design and technology and art. The lack of a consistent approach to the teaching of these skills across all subjects slows progress at times.

54. Careers education and guidance are good. Year 9 pupils follow a commercial programme that provides for active and enjoyable learning about careers and involves role-play. A small minority of pupils takes fewer GCSE subjects than do other pupils in order to pursue a course of work-related education in Years 10 and 11. They achieve well and show interest in this avenue of learning. Pupils are taught to use computers to access information that will help them choose GCSE options. Pupils are carefully prepared for their two weeks of work experience at the start of Year 11; some students subsequently gain further work experience, sometimes during the summer holidays. The school has very good procedures to provide careers education and support for pupils who have special needs. A careers evening specifically for pupils of Asian origin and their parents was very successful.

55. A very good programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is taught for which the teachers are trained and which includes sex education and the dangers of smoking, alcohol and drugs. Central to the success of this programme are the school's excellent working relationships with outside agencies, such as health promotion bodies, the community police and a local theatre group, who regularly contribute through lessons, activities and talks. The school's involvement with the Rochdale Teenage Pregnancy Strategy resulted in the pupils' design of its 2003 calendar. In 2001, the school gained the National Healthy Schools Award. The programme is an interesting one with the emphasis on pupils' active and independent learning.

56. Provision for extra-curricular activities is very good. It caters well for a wide range of interests, for example, an Asian dance club, drama and sport. The rate of pupils' participation is high. Sports provision is very good and includes lacrosse, for which there is a visiting coach; basketball, with Year 10 boys helping; and a very popular Year 10 inter-form soccer competition. In music, an above-average number of pupils play instruments; and music contributes to an extensive calendar of events throughout the school year. The events include Rochdale Music Festival, Music for Youth, Arts Evenings in collaboration with art, dance and drama, and workshops and concerts at local primary schools and homes for the elderly.

57. The school has outstandingly good links with the community and other institutions. For example, links with primary schools enable pupils to make an early start in learning a modern foreign language. The school has received an award from the British Council (School International Dimension) and has links with schools abroad; for example, with a school for street children in Puebla, Mexico, where the school is sponsoring a child's education. Very good links with primary schools provide Year 6 pupils with the opportunities to spend a day in school, attend performances at the theatre, use the swimming pool and have a visit from the school band. Long-standing links with a nearby special school enrich the curriculum in science and physical education in both schools, and the personal development of all the pupils involved. Last summer, a very successful mini-Commonwealth Games was organised for local primary schools. Master classes in English, mathematics and science for gifted and talented pupils are working well. Local links are underpinned by the school's commitment to community provision. Community activities continue from early morning until late at night. Many pupils and students benefit from the drama and music groups, the playgroup and the chance to attend family swimming sessions and to learn alongside their parents, for example, at a German evening class. Pupils with specific needs have benefited from a summer playscheme. Very good links with local industry and businesses, through the local training provider, have provided a wide range of work experience for pupils in Year 11. The school, in response, has arranged for French classes for employees of a local French owned company.

Sixth form

58. The sixth form curriculum is still in a state of evolution after the wide-ranging review that took place after the previous inspection. The school does not yet meet the requirement for provision of religious education in the sixth form. Changes already made have had a substantial impact on the overall provision. Whilst some students are entering the sixth form with relatively modest GCSE performance, they are now only embarking on advanced level courses for which they are suited. Improvements to the breadth of courses offered make this easier to accomplish. To its credit, and despite stringent financial restraint, the school has also been prepared to respond to student demand for courses. Currently, courses in art and history are taking place for this reason, though not originally planned to run as AS-level courses during the current academic year. This has resulted in some temporary curriculum and timetabling arrangements, which are less than ideal but which, nevertheless, do allow students to follow their preferred choices. Despite the difficulties, the school still offers students a choice from over twenty academic advanced level courses, including four languages, together with a much smaller number of vocational courses. The number of these is smaller than usually offered in sixth forms of a comparable size but reflects local demand. The school is also very committed to a local education authority initiative that aims to rationalise sixth form provision in Rochdale. This is likely to have some effect on the range and type of courses offered in the next academic year. Current arrangements for students to take general studies and communication skills courses are also under review, particularly in the light of the most recent results of examinations and tests. Students themselves feel that they do not get as much from these courses as they should.

59. A relatively small number of enrichment courses is provided, many of which are related to physical education and do not provide the means of broadening students' horizons as widely as they might. Students' willingness to participate in activities is indicated by the numbers who volunteer to work alongside learning support assistants to help pupils in Years 7 and 8. Induction procedures for students entering the sixth form are good and the school provides good additional support for those students who have come from other schools. There is a very good programme for developing and supporting students' knowledge and understanding of the further and higher education courses they might aspire to choose. The week of activities provided in school for all Year 12 student includes visits to universities so that they can gain a first hand view for themselves.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural education

60. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall.

61. Pupils' spiritual development is good and is strengthened by the school's ethos, though statutory requirements for daily worship are not fully met. Assemblies are planned to meet the requirements for worship, having regard to the religious diversity of the school's population, but pupils do not have an assembly each day. Thought for the Day, a series of planned themes linked to the assemblies and supported by Bible readings, forms part of tutorials. The quality of these is inconsistent and often lacks the emphasis envisaged in the whole-school planning. The themes are successfully explored further in dance and drama lessons. The school's recent and hugely successful Winter Celebration and Carol Service contained a strong spiritual element, with readings from the Qu'ran. There are good arrangements for daily prayers for the school's Muslim community, and subjects such as religious studies and Urdu celebrate religious festivals, for example, Eid, and teach pupils about the Haj. Year 11 pupils' paintings based on established artists' examinations of life and death have a strong spiritual dimension. Religious education lessons use meditation to develop pupils' spiritual awareness by making them reflect, for example, on their own experiences and understanding of nature.

62. Provision for pupils' moral development is very good. The school has strong policies for behaviour, ethos, and to combat bullying and racism. The policies are very effective, consistently implemented and are reinforced by the good tutorial programme, PSHCE, measures such as the Anti-bullying Council and the very good work centring on moral issues in other subjects. In physical education, teachers place great emphasis on fair play within competition. In English lessons, pupils consider bullying and give presentations that explore structured systems for helping victims. Business studies teachers discuss business ethics with their pupils, and in art, the atrocities of war are used as a starting point for

sketchbook work. Anti-bullying and anti-racism messages, and statements of the school's ethos and moral values are everywhere displayed about school, reinforcing the school's stance on these issues.

63. Pupils' social development is very good. PSHCE lessons are planned progressively to include relationships, peer pressure, smoking, drugs and alcohol, sex education, personal financial management and citizenship. The school has good sports facilities. An average of 5000 people from the wider community use the school's facilities each week. Children from local special schools are welcomed and make use of the school's provision. Joint ventures with one of the schools in particular, such as environmental activity days, encourage the pupils to have respect for each other and to work co-operatively to their mutual benefit. The tutorial system is designed to develop social skills and to provide counselling. Good contributions to pupils' social development include peer assessment in art, the Junior Sport Leadership award course in physical education, group presentations in business studies, the many opportunities to work together in dance and drama, and school musical and dramatic productions. In all subjects, role-play gives pupils very good opportunities to develop empathy, and group work fosters the development of co-operation and team spirit.

64. Provision for pupils' cultural development is excellent. The international dimension is crucial to the school's work as a language college and European culture is central to its study programmes. For example, one project focuses on what it is like to be a European citizen. In art, bright, lively silk paintings have been produced by Year 10 pupils based on a study of oriental and Indian art. Pupils learn a good variety of dances from different cultures; the modern foreign languages, dance, drama and music departments recently collaborated to produce an international awards night in which the audience was treated to a Japanese tea ceremony, folk tales from other countries, and an Asian fashion show. The school ensures the international flavour of its provision reaches pupils and parents through its language college newsletter and regular international days and open mornings. Teachers dress in international costumes and a wide range of international activities is enjoyed, such as origami, a demonstration of Asian food and culture, and Russian plate painting.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

65. The school has very good procedures for ensuring pupils' welfare. It has gained the Healthy Schools' Award for good provision across a range of areas including the physical and social environment, food and nutrition, healthy living and education in substance abuse and sex education.

66. Teachers and non-teaching staff are trained in risk assessment and health and safety has a high profile in every department. The governing body satisfactorily monitors provision for health and safety. Procedures to provide for child protection are in place and all staff know what to do if they have any concerns. The school makes good provision for first aid and professional advice is available from the school nurse when needed. Teachers organising school trips are fully aware of the latest safety guidelines provided by the Department for Education and Skills.

67. The personal, social, health and citizenship programme is comprehensive and well designed. It helps pupils to gain knowledge of important issues, including their rights and responsibilities and those of others. As they become older, they discuss issues in greater depth and learn to modify their opinions in the light of reasoned argument. Very good relationships within the school community itself are indicative of those expected when pupils move into wider society. Procedures to counter the effects of bullying and any oppressive behaviour have a high profile in school. Pupils say that the peer group counselling is very effective and well supported by senior teachers and pastoral staff.

68. The school provides very well for the welfare of the pupils with special educational needs. Their needs and targets are defined well in their individual education plans. The team of professionals working with the pupils is extremely caring but firm when necessary. It provides them with effective support on an individual basis and in small groups, enabling them to reach their potential. Pupils with weak literacy skills have their reading and writing capability monitored regularly. Those facing emotional and behavioural

challenges are particularly well supported. These characteristics are monitored rigorously, and challenging but achievable targets are set for the pupils who display them. Pupils with formal statements of special educational needs have the targets in their individual education plans monitored regularly and thoroughly. Other pupils on the school's special needs register would benefit from the same level of review.

69. A significant proportion of pupils comes from different ethnic backgrounds. Their needs are considered well alongside those of other pupils. Progress is thoroughly monitored from entry through detailed records that are updated each year from entry.

70. The school provides very well for pupils' welfare. Pupils can rely on their form tutor and head of year to support them through any difficulties. Families who speak English as an additional language have very good help and support from a member of the language college staff. Pupils' additional specific needs are well met by the staff of the enrichment centre. The co-ordinator, learning mentors and learning support assistants provide very good help for pupils who need to catch up with their work or who need support by reason of other concerns. The centre has very good links with outside agencies so specialised help can be called on when needed.

71. The school has very good procedures to promote good attendance. Many pupils receive awards for 100 per cent attendance at a special presentation evening. The school actively supports families where pupils' attendance records give cause for concern. Similarly, procedures to encourage good behaviour are very effective. Pupils are eager to gain the rewards for good work and behaviour. Sanctions against unacceptable and disruptive behaviour are robust and pupils consider them to be fair. The pupils' year councils meet every half term to discuss a range of issues. Pupils are proud of the way they are involved in discussions and decisions that affect the life of the school.

72. Assessment procedures are good and improving. A new whole school policy has recently been formulated and subject departments are adapting their existing policies to match its principles and values. This has already had an effect in English where assessment procedures are now very good. In other subjects procedures are good except for geography where they are unsatisfactory and religious education where they are at an early stage of development. The marking of pupils' work is generally constructive. Pupils know what standards they are achieving, usually by reference to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades, but teachers' comments do not always focus on what they need to do to improve. The school recognises that teacher assessments in Year 9 were over optimistic in a number of subjects in 2002. In these subjects teachers are not yet secure in matching the criteria for National Curriculum levels to the quality of pupils' work.

73. The analysis and use of data is good. Information about pupils' attainment and progress is gathered and used to set pupils targets for their end of Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations. This information is shared with pupils and parents. The monitoring of pupils' academic progress as they move through the school is good. Pupils' progress is tracked through regular progress reports, full reports and annual review days. Regular monitoring of pupils' academic progress by form tutors has been introduced but is not yet established in all tutor periods. Results in national tests and GCSE examinations are carefully analysed by both subject leaders and senior managers to ensure that expectations in relation to pupils' achievement have been fulfilled. Results are analysed by subject, within subjects and by teacher group. Where pupils fail to fulfil their potential every effort is made to identify what went wrong. Suitable action is then taken and its impact is monitored regularly by senior staff.

Sixth form

Assessment

74. Procedures for monitoring students' academic progress are very good. The on-going review system across Years 12 and 13 is thorough. The school has very effective systems for monitoring, evaluating and setting targets for students. In Year 12, AS level coursework is reviewed regularly to provide predicted grades and recommendations are given about how higher grades might be achieved. Work is marked

thoroughly and constructively with helpful comments on how to improve. Students spoke appreciatively about this aspect of their learning. In addition to regular individual monitoring of progress by form tutors, review days are held in which students, teachers and parents come together to ensure that target grades are realistic and achievable, and that students and teachers are working together to realise students' aspirations.

Advice, support and guidance

75. The school provides good educational and personal support and advice for students. Students' attendance and punctuality are closely monitored. The school works well with parents to support and encourage students to complete their studies. Students' academic progress is regularly assessed by subject teachers, form tutors and the senior staff so that difficulties can be resolved before they magnify. Students evaluate their own progress and, together with their teachers and tutors, set future targets. Students feel comfortable about approaching staff if they have problems with their work. An Urdu speaking member of staff is always available to support discussions with families where English is an additional language.

76. Students are provided with good information about sixth form life and the courses available. Advice starts with an open evening in November when pupils are still in Year 11. Opportunities are provided for them to hear presentations from students already taking the sixth form courses. Students are well advised by school staff and qualified advisers from the careers service. This enables them to make an informed choice about their courses of study and to consider the options that they may lead to on leaving school.

77. Students' progress towards independent learning is central to the sixth form programme. Students are encouraged to develop good habits of personal study. They receive useful help and advice on study skills from a university graduate. Students make good use of the library and are proficient in the use of ICT. Provision for personal, social, and health education is very good. Students show that they can discuss important issues in a thoughtful and sensitive way. They are well prepared to take their place in the adult world.

78. Students participate well in the school's extra-curricular activities but the range of enrichment activities for the sixth form alone is somewhat limited.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

79. Partnership with parents is very good and has some outstandingly good features. Since the previous inspection the school has introduced new ways of strengthening communication with parents and of extending their involvement in school. Parents, in their turn, have positive views about the school. The large majority of parents says that their children like school, make good progress and are helped to become mature and responsible. They support the teachers' high expectations of their children. Parents are pleased with the innovations and changes made since the previous inspection. They say that staff, pupils and parents are now working together and that parents are much more involved.

80. A minority of parents does not think that their children have the right amount of homework. Some consider that they are not well informed about their children's progress. Inspectors consider that the homework policy is generally effective. There are some minor concerns, mostly related to setting of homework on specified nights. Provision is monitored regularly and the policy and planning team is currently discussing the policy and suggesting refinements. With regard to information about children's progress, inspectors found that good provision was made for the exchange of information. Parents have termly opportunities to talk to staff. In addition, parents are asked to sign the weekly diary. This enables them to monitor their child's achievements, targets and any sanctions that have been applied so that successes can be celebrated and problems can be discussed before they grow. The school works closely with parents to provide for any pupils' specific needs. Parents who do not speak English as a first language have the opportunity to talk with the Urdu language teacher who is always ready to support

families and discuss any particular needs or concerns. Some parents are concerned that their children do not have an early enough opportunity to learn Urdu as a part of their languages curriculum. The school is aware of these concerns and is taking them into account in the curriculum review that is currently underway.

81. Parents are fully involved in reviews of formal statements of special educational need. All statutory requirements are met. Effective contacts are maintained with parents when pupils exhibit extreme emotional or behavioural characteristics. However, all pupils on the school's register of special educational needs would benefit from regular reviews of the targets in their individual education plans with subsequent communication of progress to their parents.

82. Parents are invited to discuss a range of major issues with staff in the Parents' Forum, which meets every half term. The forum is open to all and has discussed the outcomes of the school's own questionnaire, the behaviour policy and parents' perceptions of behaviour, the curriculum and the school development plan. Parents are well represented on the governing body and take a full part in discussion at meetings. Parents are invited to meetings to discuss pupils' choice of subjects at transition points, such as from Year 9 to Year 10. A careers evening specifically designed for pupils of Asian origin and their parents was very well attended. Parents are kept well informed through letters and newsletters from school; letters are written in other languages when appropriate.

83. The format of reports is, at present, being revised. The school intends to continue the good practice of asking pupils to comment on their own attainment and progress in each of their subjects in addition to the teacher's evaluation of their progress. Parents are given a clear idea of their child's targets and the progress made towards attaining them. The school is keen to keep in touch with all parents.

84. The Parent Teacher Association is lively and active. Parents who attend the monthly meetings plan a calendar of events and receive a report from the head teacher. They raise substantial funds for various specific items throughout the school. Parents have commented on the good spirit in school that includes them in the community and recognises the important part they play in their children's education.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

85. Substantial changes in the whole management structure have resulted in very good improvement since the previous inspection. The current headteacher took up appointment in September 2001 and, together with key staff, has managed change very successfully. The school operates very effectively and provides a good quality of education for its pupils and students. The very good leadership and management, combined with commitment from a dedicated team of teachers and non-teaching staff, is driving the school forward at a fast pace. The staff is closely involved in consultation about major issues and development plans and there is a clear line of delegation of responsibilities. Working groups have been established, including a powerful policy and planning group, that ensure all stakeholders, including pupils, students and parents have an opportunity to discuss major issues before decisions are made. Parents are particularly pleased to have this avenue open to them through the Parents' Forum.

86. The leadership team has established a good ethos for learning. The school serves the diverse school population well, and also the wider community. Pupils, students and adults integrate well in the many opportunities opened up to them in and out of school hours. The headteacher and senior staff have very high profiles in school. They make it their concern to be 'out and about' throughout the school day, and later. This provides opportunities to sound out opinions and to ensure that pupils, staff and visitors to school feel partners in it. The leadership team has high expectations of itself and others, with the result that there is an air of optimism about the school. New policies and practices have been put in place since the previous inspection. Strategic plans for the school's short and long-term development are realistic and challenging; they provide the framework within which all areas of provision operate. Systematic systems of monitoring are in place, some at a more advanced stage than others at present; all are based on the understanding that the ultimate target is the raising of pupils' and students' achievement. The results of

national tests and public examinations are analysed in detail and pertinent action is quickly taken to remedy areas of deficiency. Teachers and pupils are left in no doubt as to what is expected of them. Arrangements for the induction of new teachers and teachers' professional development are very good. The latter are closely aligned to the school's priorities.

87. Management of special educational needs is good. The quality is clearly demonstrated by the smooth running of all the procedures connected with this aspect of the school's work even though there is currently a vacancy for a co-ordinator for special educational needs. There is a real sense of purpose and achievement in the department and staff morale is high. Good improvements have been made since the previous inspection. Pupils with special educational needs now have enough support from a very strong and active team. Leadership and management of work to support pupils with English as an additional language are good. They lead to effective use of the limited resources, particularly in staffing.

88. The governing body is very effective in carrying out its responsibilities, although it does not fully provide for religious education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship throughout the school. Governors are fully involved in strategic planning. They match finances to priorities in the school development plan and closely monitor results to check that spending is effectively producing the desired aims. Monies are spent prudently and thoughtfully to provide equally for pupils and students of all abilities. Following the previous inspection when the school had serious weaknesses due to a very large deficit, governors became deeply involved with measures put in place by the local education authority. The school now has a business and financial manager who works very closely with the headteacher and governors. Outstanding management of a difficult situation has resulted in a substantial reduction of the deficit, by over £300,000, and a realistic programme for repayment of the remaining monies. At the same time, the annual income is being managed well, allowing for investment in buildings and resources. Parents are pleased that provision for the current generation of pupils is not being overly restricted by the remaining deficit. Principles of best value, including consultation, comparison and challenge, are stringently applied. Finances are extremely well managed and the administrative system runs very efficiently.

89. There is an adequate number of teachers but the recruitment of suitably qualified teachers in some subject areas, such as English and science, is becoming increasingly difficult. The employment of a succession of temporary teachers has affected standards in a few areas of the curriculum. Learning support assistants are very effective. They work very closely with subject teachers and help to raise the confidence of pupils with specific difficulties. Less support is available for the large number of pupils with English as an additional language. Most of these pupils manage well because subject teachers plan at the right level for them. However, there are times when new arrivals to the school do not have sufficient support to enable them to fully access the content of lessons.

90. The school campus is extensive. It is also a well-used community resource. Some of the buildings are in need of maintenance and redecoration. A programme of renewal is underway; visible effects are the new dining facilities and refurbished practical areas in science and design and technology. In addition, considerable investment has been made in the infrastructure for ICT, which will extend the availability of new technology to all subject areas.

91. Taking into account the standards achieved, the very good improvement, the quality of teaching and the balanced annual budget, the school currently provides good value for money. However, there is still a large deficit to be repaid from the excess expenditure prior to the previous inspection.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

92. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The sixth form has changed considerably in character since the previous inspection, taking its share, as has the main school, of the results of the difficult financial decisions, which had to be made. Its development has also been affected by changes in

management, which have seen four sixth form directors in as many years. Clear direction for the future development of the sixth form has been set by the school's senior managers and governors. This is now being successfully translated into action by the current sixth form director who has created a good agenda for improvement based on a clear understanding of strengths and areas requiring development, and successfully building on the improvements initiated by his immediate predecessor. High on the agenda are further improvements to monitoring processes, curriculum development in order to make it more responsive to the needs of the local community and better meet the needs and aspirations of current students, and improvements to facilities for students to study independently. Well-targeted training is being provided in order to enable sixth form tutors to be more effective in their role.

93. Financial management of the sixth form is very good; the principles of best value are rigorously applied. The sixth form is cost-effective.

Resources

94. There is a good match of experienced and qualified teachers to meet the demands of the curriculum. Resources for students are generally good with specialist resources and facilities available where courses require them. There is good provision of social areas. The accommodation for private study and access to ICT in the sixth form area is satisfactory with improvements planned.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

95. In order to consolidate and the school's work and further improve standards, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) Raise standards in Years 7 - 9 by;
 - setting higher targets for those pupils in Year 9 who are capable of exceeding the National Curriculum level expected for their age (level 5) in mathematics and science,
 - setting sharper aims in ICT lessons,
 - putting into practice a whole-school numeracy policy that ensures consistency in the use of numerical and mathematical skills across all subjects of the curriculum,
 - ensuring that teacher assessments of pupils' attainment in Year 9 more accurately match the criteria for National Curriculum levels in all subjects.

(Paragraphs 4,10,39,41,53,72,121,124,157,161,163,183)

- (2) Provide more opportunities for pupils and sixth form students to use ICT in all subjects of the curriculum.

(Paragraphs 4, 6,11,41,142,145,155,169,185,221,227)

- (3) Develop pupils' independent learning skills by providing more opportunities in lessons for them to work independently and to take initiative for planning the next steps in their own work.

(Paragraphs 41,148,154,157,160,165)

Sixth form

- (1) Arrange for the collection and analysis of information on students' prior attainment at GCSE in order to;
 - provide relevant guidance about the choice of courses,
 - improve curriculum planning,

- provide realistic targets and improve the monitoring and support for students as they progress through the sixth form.

(Paragraph 12)

- (2) Provide for religious education.

(Paragraphs 58, 88)

- (3) Make better provision for, and encourage students' involvement in, enrichment activities.

(Paragraph 78)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7– 11	144
	Sixth form	63
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		71

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	4	26	76	35	3	0	0
Percentage	3	18	53	24	2	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	1	14	39	9	0	0	0
Percentage	2	22	62	14	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1231	246
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	254	41

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	18	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	140	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	324

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	22
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	15

Attendance

Authorised absence

%

Unauthorised absence

%

School data	6.5
National comparative data	7.8

School data	0.4
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)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	110	129	239

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	69	81	73
	Girls	99	93	88
	Total	168	174	161
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	71(73)	73(72)	67(69)
	National	66(64)	67(66)	66(66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	32(35)	42(51)	27(31)
	National	32(31)	45(43)	33(34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	56	84	66
	Girls	102	90	72
	Total	158	174	138
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	67(78)	73 (72)	58 (65)
	National	67(65)	70(68)	67(64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	31(24)	45 (42)	22 (26)
	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 pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	108	123	231

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	49	101	107
	Girls	71	122	123
	Total	120	223	230
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	53(54)	97(93)	100(97)
	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	School	41.3

per pupil	National	39.8
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Males	Females	All
School	Number of candidates	58	67	125
	Average point score per candidate	13.5 (13.2)	14.8 (15)	14.2 (14..3)
National	Average point score per candidate	* (16.9)	* (17.7)	* (17.5)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Males	Females	All	Males	Females	All
School	Number of candidates	45	62	107	18	11	29
	Average point score per candidate	14.35	15.16	14.82	7.89	4.9	6.76
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	965	24	1
White – Irish			
White – any other White background	82		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean			
Mixed – White and Black African			
Mixed – White and Asian			
Mixed – any other mixed background	1		
Asian or Asian British - Indian	1		
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	413	2	
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2		
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2		
Black or Black British – Caribbean			
Black or Black British – African			
Black or Black British – any other Black background	4		
Chinese	11		
Any other ethnic group	6		
No ethnic group recorded			

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7– Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	85.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.24

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	25
Total aggregate hours worked per week	659

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72%
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Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	26.8
Key Stage 4	22.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001/02
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	£
Total income	5393052
Total expenditure	5175030
Expenditure per pupil	3253
Balance brought forward from previous year	-842043
Balance carried forward to next year	-624021

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	22.6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	15

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

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1140
Number of questionnaires returned	118

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	30	60	9	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	37	55	6	2	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	17	63	12	3	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	51	24	5	1
The teaching is good.	21	64	9	1	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	23	56	18	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	38	47	8	5	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	46	46	7	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	23	56	13	5	3
The school is well led and managed.	29	52	8	3	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	26	63	5	2	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	28	44	10	3	15

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Standards of attainment are above average in Year 11.
- The quality of teaching in all year groups is good.
- Procedures for assessing pupils' progress and attainment are used effectively.

Areas for improvement

- The attainment of boys could be improved.
- Discontinuity of staffing adversely affects the progress of some pupils.
- Higher attaining pupils could be challenged more in some classes.

96. In 2002, pupils' results in national tests in English taken at the end of Year 9 were above average compared with all schools, and well above average compared with similar schools. Although girls' attainment at this stage is higher than that of boys, boys achieve better than girls compared with boys and girls nationally. In 2002, pupils' overall results in English were better than in mathematics and science. The overall trend in recent years matches the upward national trend.

97. Standards of work in Year 9 are average, accurately reflecting the spread of abilities in the year group. Girls are currently attaining at a higher level than boys. When compared with pupils' attainment on entry to the school, which is slightly below average, achievement is good. By adopting a closely structured approach to the teaching of literacy skills the department has enabled its pupils to make good progress. Spelling is reasonably accurate, although pupils do not check their work for errors sufficiently carefully. Standards of punctuation are variable. Pupils' analytical skills are good. At all levels of ability pupils apply these skills well to produce perceptive responses to literature, and to identify genre in a variety of non-fiction text. Pupils are aware of the effect of using effective description, and most make a determined effort to make their writing interesting and expressive. Higher attaining pupils do so very successfully by the judicious and appropriate use of connecting words and phrases. However, a significant number of pupils use a limited range of devices and their writing, although well organised, lacks fluency. Most pupils read and understand a wide range of texts, and readily support their impressions and opinions with reference to appropriate quotations. Attainment in speaking and listening is good, although the attainment of girls is higher than that of boys, except for pupils of higher ability. Most girls readily explain their ideas in full sentences, giving justifications for their opinions, but many boys, in spite of having the correct information, are reluctant to extend their answers unless prompted. This is particularly noticeable in those mixed ability groups that contain more girls than boys of higher ability. Pupils listen well to each other, and recognise this as an important contribution to learning and knowledge.

98. Standards of attainment in Year 11 are above average. Most pupils achieve well at this stage. The more able pupils write well in a variety of styles, maintaining coherence and consistency. An essay on 'Twelfth Night' competently linked the themes of authority and subversion to traditions associated with the festival itself, and one pupil's personal account of a tragic family situation was compelling and moving. Both the vocabulary and the forms of construction the more able pupils use are becoming increasingly stylish, and many apparently delight in crafting their use of language to an increasingly higher standard, by drafting and re-drafting. Most pupils are developing habits of good scholarship with useful note-making and annotation of text; both boys and girls show an ability to understand the development of character and plot, responding with insight and compassion to particular predicaments. A group of pupils in Year 11, discussing themes in Steinbeck's 'Of Mice and Men' demonstrated very good understanding of the 'American dream' that sustained its characters. Lower attaining pupils understand the development of character and plot and produce properly organised work, but their writing is less perceptive and lacks

consistency of style. Frequently, familiar terms or colloquialisms intrude into a piece of formal writing. Syntax errors occur, and spelling is unreliable. However, all are entered for the GCSE examination, and very few fail to obtain a grade. In 2002, pupils' overall performance at GCSE in English language and literature was average.

99. The achievement of pupils who are gifted or talented is satisfactory. Within lessons there is little to challenge them to work in greater depth or at a faster pace except in discussion sessions, which they tend to dominate. Pupils with English as an additional language make good progress in English. Asian boys make noticeably better progress than other boys of the same age.

100. Where pupils with special educational needs have the support of learning assistants in lessons, their progress is very good. Although their writing skills are relatively unsophisticated they write accurately, and one or two develop good levels of perception and insight, and contribute with poise and confidence to class discussions. When these pupils are not supported in lessons they are reluctant to take initiative, lose confidence and make unsatisfactory progress.

101. Pupils are well motivated, and, in response to the well-organised atmosphere of most lessons, they come prepared to work hard. Relationships are very good. Pupils are good at listening to the ideas of others, and are prepared to discuss and offer personal opinions in a courteous manner. They show good levels of responsibility for their own learning and progress: they arrive punctually to lessons, and homework is generally completed properly and returned on time.

102. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. The department has rightly put great emphasis on pupils' development of reliable literacy skills. They also recognise the importance of confidence in examination techniques, and ensure that pupils are well prepared for both the form and the formality of the examination situation. As a result, pupils cope well with examinations, but for some the enjoyment of the subject for its own sake can be lost. Most teachers manage classes very well, and relationships are good. As a result of very good knowledge about pupils, teachers plan not only the content of lessons but also the best method of ensuring effective learning. In one excellent lesson, the teacher provided a very effective frame for pupils' essay writing; in another, looking at Shakespeare's portrayal of Juliet in the family vault, the teacher's energetic and economic use of time, coupled with clear objectives and irrepressible enthusiasm, ensured that pupils not only understood Shakespeare's language but were able to identify with the plight of a girl of their own age. Given the broad range of abilities represented in almost all classes, pupils' different needs are not always fully considered. The very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching observed resulted from lack of sufficient preparation for pupils' different abilities. Pupils became restless and unco-operative. In general, pupils need to be encouraged to use a dictionary and a thesaurus more frequently, and to make greater use of ICT.

103. Management and leadership in English are very good. An unprecedented number of changes in staff in recent months has led to several temporary appointments, some on a 'job-sharing' basis. In addition, because of the constraints of a two-week timetable, several classes have two teachers. These factors have adversely affected the progress of a small minority of pupils but the effect has been mitigated by the very effective collegiate style of management. Communication is good, and there are good systems, linked to performance management, to ensure the quality and consistency of teaching and learning. The department makes very good use of extensive information about pupils' prior attainment in order to set targets for further progress and to identify areas for improvement. Pupils' work is carefully marked, their strengths and weaknesses identified, and the outcomes evaluated against national levels of attainment. In addition, pupils themselves maintain a record of marked work, and are expected to evaluate their efforts and suggest reasonable targets. As a result, the department has already identified the need to raise the attainment of boys, and to increase the challenge for its most able pupils.

Drama

104. Drama, which is taught as an independent subject, makes a very effective contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils develop self-esteem and useful social skills as a result of the opportunities to work together in groups and to comment constructively on each other's presentations.

105. Pupils' results in the GCSE examination in 2002 were well above average, and were matched by standards seen in lessons in Years 10 and 11 during the inspection. The quality of teaching is very good. As a result, pupils become confident in a range of performance skills. Most work co-operatively to devise plots and develop characters, and know the importance of gesture, body language and timing in communicating with an audience. Their written records are properly extended, showing a good depth of perception. One more able pupil, researching the 'darker side of innocence', had discovered the origins of several nursery rhymes and had acquired a quantity of knowledge about the effects of the Black Death on village communities. The drama department is very well led and managed, and pupils are supported by very good assessment of their work, which includes very helpful marking of written pieces. Pupils have regular opportunities for visits to professional productions, from time to time drama workshops take place in school, and in collaboration with other departments a large-scale musical production takes place annually.

106. Improvement in English since the previous inspection is good. There is now an effective system of target setting, standards of attainment are improving, and the quality of teaching remains a strength of the department.

Key skills across the curriculum - Literacy

107. Standards of literacy throughout Years 7-11 are average. The school had identified this as a priority in anticipation of the national strategy and all staff have completed in-service training. The responsibility for the development and implementation of the policy is shared between two members of staff, one of whom works within each faculty in turn, team-teaching, working with department representatives and monitoring pupils' work.

108. A variety of strategies has been successfully introduced, with emphasis on spelling and private reading for all pupils, and guided reading for pupils with special educational needs. A weekly lunch-time session, involving twelve teaching staff and five learning support assistants, provides help for pupils in Year 8 who have not yet reached average attainment in English. Extra sessions are held before national tests, and before GCSE examinations. Pupils' attendance is voluntary, but an identified group of pupils is invited to attend. Such is the confidence of pupils in the system that many volunteer to take part at different times of the year, and often as many as 200 pupils may attend in a week. After school, there are support sessions for younger pupils whose attainment on entry was below average.

109. The school's librarian is closely involved in these initiatives, and provides good support for pupils' different ways of learning. A particular focus on increasing the amount of reading by boys is currently planned.

110. The implementation of the policy is satisfactory in most departments. Technical terms are usually prominently displayed; in some subjects pupils compile glossaries of essential vocabulary. However, not enough attention is paid to the correction of technical errors such as spelling and punctuation. In most subjects, pupils are given good opportunities to develop their competence in reading for understanding, and, by working in small groups, pupils develop their speaking and listening well. Particularly good practice was noted in science, where Year 7 pupils, discussing evidence, formed theories and came to conclusions. Literacy targets are included in individual education plans but these are not always incorporated in lesson planning in all subjects and this is a weakness.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Overall, teaching is good and teachers are committed to raising standards further.
- Positive relationships between teachers and pupils result in a purposeful atmosphere in lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Standards could be raised further by adopting a more rigorous, structured approach to the presentation of written solutions to mathematical problems.
- ICT could be used more frequently to enrich and support learning.
- Good practices could be shared to achieve greater consistency in the provision.

111. In 2002, pupils' results in the national tests taken in Year 9 were similar to the national average. They were above average compared with similar schools. A significant proportion of pupils attained the highest National Curriculum levels (levels 7 and 8). Boys' results were higher than those of girls by a slightly greater margin than that found nationally. The overall trend in results over the past four years is similar to the national trend.

112. All pupils are entered for GCSE examinations. In 2002, almost every pupil attained a grade within the A*-G grade range. Results in the A*-C grade range were similar to the national average. The proportion of boys that attained grades A*-C was above the national average, whilst the proportion of girls was below it. Overall, pupils' relative performance in mathematics was not as good as in many of their other subjects.

113. Evidence from the inspection, including scrutiny of pupils' books and lesson observations, indicates that standards of work are average in Year 9. Overall, pupils achieve well from their starting point in Year 7. In Years 7-9, all pupils study similar topics at levels that are suitably matched to individual needs, reflecting the positive effect of newly developing schemes of work. The highest attaining pupils are appropriately challenged with work that enables them to reach the highest National Curriculum levels; for example, in Year 9, they competently apply their knowledge of area and square numbers to derive the theorem of Pythagoras. A similar group of Year 8 pupils show that their grasp of co-ordinates, gradients and intercepts is such that they understand the connection between the different values in linear equations and their graphs. Lower attaining pupils demonstrate their understanding of multiples and square numbers, but weaknesses with mental arithmetic slow progress and sometimes result in basic errors. All pupils are benefiting from the use of the National Numeracy Strategy and fluency with basic arithmetic has improved since the previous inspection.

114. Standards of work are average in Year 11. This represents good achievement from pupils' starting points at the beginning of Year 10. There is clear evidence of continuity and progression. Topics are revisited and extended at regular intervals so that pupils gain in confidence as they apply their knowledge to more complex situations. Additional, voluntary arrangements are in place to provide the highest attaining pupils with even greater challenge, for example, the study of trigonometry is extended to include the sine and cosine rules. The quality of pupils' work thus meets the requirements for attainment at the highest GCSE grades. Effective arrangements are in place to raise the sights of a group of lower attaining pupils. Through additional support and encouragement this group is making sufficient progress to exceed their predicted grades, and possibly achieve grade C at GCSE.

115. Based on evidence from the inspection, there is no discernible difference in the performance of boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs, and those for whom English is an additional language, make similar progress to their peers. A good feature of a number of lessons is the positive, active contribution of learning support assistants. They are well prepared to assist pupils' learning and complement the work of the subject teachers.

116. Almost all pupils are very well behaved in lessons. Teachers respond quickly to the small minority of pupils who find it difficult to sustain concentration on a task for a sufficient length of time to achieve results. Most pupils have positive attitudes to their learning and the very good relationships between

teachers and pupils result in lessons being conducted in a purposeful and harmonious atmosphere. A minority of pupils, mainly in the middle ability groups in Years 10 and 11, sometimes do not complete work and fail to give in homework. The overall volume of their work is insufficient for them to make the necessary progress. There are examples of good quality written work in all year groups. However, the difficulties that some pupils have with retention and recall of mathematical knowledge are sometimes exacerbated by the untidy and unstructured presentation of solutions. Written work frequently lacks rigour and expectations vary from teacher to teacher. This was a concern at the previous inspection, and remains so.

117. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. The quality of teaching in the lessons observed ranged from satisfactory to very good, the majority being good or better. Teachers' thorough preparation, subject expertise and good management of pupils were characteristics of almost every lesson. Differences in quality were related to variations in the overall structure of lessons, the range of approaches and the levels of pupils' involvement in discussion sessions. In the best lessons, the teachers' command of the subject was reflected in the skilful way they framed questions and utilised pupils' responses to identify common problems and promote understanding. Thorough planning reflects the positive and progressive effect of the National Numeracy Strategy on the structure of lessons. A good example was the Year 11 lesson in which lower attaining pupils were introduced to work on cumulative frequency. The teacher shared the aims of the lesson with the pupils and, at its conclusion, involved them in evaluating the extent to which the aims had been achieved. The teacher's vitality and high expectations were reflected in the very good levels of pupils' concentration and interest. As a result, pupils' sights were raised and they worked with enthusiasm. Similar features were highlighted in a Year 8 lesson in which the teacher's effective and competent use of ICT enabled pupils to thoroughly understand work on gradients and straight-line graphs. In less successful, but nevertheless satisfactory, lessons, pupils are not sufficiently involved in the teaching and there is not enough variety in the approach to learning. Consequently, impetus and concentration are lost, particularly in the final stages of the lesson.

118. A very good start has been made in generating and using information about pupils' prior attainment to set targets for each pupil. Analysis of data includes the evaluation of actual performance as measured against targets. Its use in evaluating strengths and weaknesses in the teaching of specific topics in the schemes of work is a developing strength. Pupils' work is satisfactorily marked and assessed but the quality and frequency, and methods of grading work, vary too much from teacher to teacher.

119. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. There is a strong sense of team and co-operative ethos amongst the very experienced department; much is achieved on an informal basis. For example, energetic involvement in a range of curriculum initiatives is resulting in the progressive improvement of schemes of work that also take account of national initiatives. However, the use of ICT to enrich and support learning is not yet being specifically prescribed and promoted in the new schemes of work. Consequently, the current provision is patchy. Monitoring of the work of the department is satisfactory overall, but the potential for sharing the good practice and achieving greater consistency in provision is not being fully realised. Overall improvement since the previous inspection is good with significant improvements in accommodation, schemes of work, assessment, and the analysis and use of performance data. Results have improved at a similar rate to the national trend.

Key skills across the curriculum - Numeracy

120. The school is satisfactorily embracing national numeracy initiatives. All teachers have taken part in a training programme for raising awareness of numeracy issues. A whole school policy for numeracy is currently in draft form and teachers in other subjects are aware of its relevance to teaching across the whole curriculum.

121. The incorporation of the National Numeracy Strategy into curriculum and lesson planning is having a positive effect on standards in mathematics lessons. Pupils' fluency with arithmetic and number work has improved since the previous inspection. Mathematics lessons in Years 7-9 are increasingly

using the structures provided in the national framework and this has improved the overall shape of the best lessons. However, the degree to which mental starters and 'warm-up' sessions are used to stimulate the introduction of lessons requires further development. Currently there is no provision of additional 'catch-up' lessons for Year 7 pupils who join the school with low levels of attainment in numeracy. Their progress is slowed by weaknesses in mental arithmetic.

122. Although the use of numeracy skills is not planned or promoted in every subject there are many examples of them being used well to enhance learning and understanding. In geography coursework for example, they make a good contribution and pupils confidently use a range of statistical techniques. Rank correlation is used effectively to compare sets of data relating to the cost of housing and distances from town centres. A feature of the coursework in physical education is the facility for pupils to competently handle, represent and interpret data. In science, pupils' competence in manipulating formulae and drawing graphs underpins their learning and understanding. Numeracy skills are successfully employed in art lessons when, for example, an awareness of proportion and scale enhances perspective drawings of still-life scenes.

123. Overall, the effectiveness of strategies for teaching numeracy skills across the curriculum is satisfactory.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good. Teachers work well together as a team
- Leadership and management are good.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and pupils' progress are raising standards.

Areas for improvement

- Raise the proportions of pupils gaining the higher levels and grades in national tests and GCSE examinations by making more provision for higher attaining pupils.
- The stability of staffing within the science department..
- The use of ICT in lessons.

124. The pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were just below average. They were average compared with similar schools and represented good progress from Year 7. However, results in science were not as good as in mathematics because a smaller proportion of pupils exceeded the level expected for their age (level 5). There was little difference between the performance of boys and girls. Taken over the past four years, results are similar to the national average.

125. GCSE results in science in 2002 were below average at grades A*-C. They were not as good as in previous years when they were broadly average. Results were broadly average in the range A*-G. The 2002 results represent a degree of underachievement for this year group. Teaching suffered from difficulties with the continuity of staffing, which, in turn, adversely affected pupils' achievement. The department now provides good support for teaching, which is helping to alleviate these problems.

126. Current standards of work are average in Year 9. Pupils achieve well overall because their attainment in science was slightly below average on entry to the school. Standards in each of the separate sciences, biology, chemistry and physics are average for pupils' age. For example, above average pupils have a good understanding of the physics of transference of heat energy in the environment. They successfully use their understanding to test variables that effect the efficiency of insulating materials and relate them to their use in everyday life. Average attaining pupils show a sound understanding of biology when, for instance, they relate the functions of organs such as the colon to the process of digestion. This

improves their technical knowledge of processes such as peristalsis. Below average attaining pupils have some knowledge and understanding of basic scientific principles but they struggle with work that requires a greater depth of understanding.

127. Standards of work are average in Year 11. They are better than the most recent GCSE results suggest. The introduction of a modular science GCSE course in Year 10 is helping to raise attainment and the continuity of staffing has improved. Achievement is good in the Year 10 to 11 age range. This is the result of good teaching from a team of specialist biologists, chemists and physicists, coupled with pupils' good attitudes to the subject. The highest attaining pupils have a good understanding of physical concepts; for example, they satisfactorily relate the rotation of a coil in a magnetic field to the production of alternating current. They are working confidently at GCSE grades A*, A and B. Average attaining pupils' knowledge and understanding of science are improving. Their investigative skills are good, as demonstrated when they made slaked lime from limestone by means of a series of small-scale reactions. These pupils are generally working around grades C and D. The lowest attaining pupils have a basic grasp of scientific principles. They find it more difficult to extend this to complex situations requiring transference of skills from one aspect of science to another. Their work is consistent with GCSE grades F and G.

128. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make good progress in lessons. This is a result of the good support they receive from both teachers and learning support assistants.

129. Most pupils have positive attitudes to their work. They are interested in what they are doing. Pupils in Year 7 demonstrated their enjoyment of science when they extracted red cabbage indicator during a practical session. As a result, they made good progress in their knowledge and understanding of acids and alkalis. Well-managed and structured lessons, with a focus on specific aims in learning, ensure that pupils concentrate well in class. They collaborate well with each other when carrying out experimental work. Pupils usually behave well in lessons; good relationships between pupils and teachers assist pupils to learn more effectively. Consequently, the ethos for learning in science is good. However, when teaching is not as strong some pupils are unco-operative. They distract others and slow the pace of learning for the majority in the class.

130. Teaching and learning are good overall. The majority of lessons observed were good. One very good lesson was observed. One was unsatisfactory, due to a lack of firm discipline and clarity about what was expected of pupils. There is an effective emphasis on the monitoring of teaching and learning, which is helping to improve teaching and raise standards. For example, in most of the lessons observed the aims were made very clear so pupils knew what it was they were expected to achieve. In the very good lesson, the teacher used an ICT Power Point presentation to emphasis the important aspects of chemistry that were to be covered. This was very effective and the pupils made very good progress as a result. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subject specialisms. They explain key concepts and theories with clarity, helping pupils to learn better so that knowledge is retained for future use. The main weakness in teaching is in some mixed ability classes where the work is pitched at the mid-range of attainment without provision for pupils of other abilities. As a result, the highest and lowest attaining pupils in the group do not always make as much progress as they could. Marking of pupils' work is regular but at times cursory. It needs to be more informative about pupils' attainment, for example, in Years 7-9, it could include an indication of the National Curriculum level being achieved. Homework is set regularly and supports pupils' learning well.

131. Teachers promote the development of pupils' numeracy and literacy skills well in science. In Years 7-9, the development of enquiry skills is well supported through the use of a structured writing pattern that helps pupils to plan, analyse and evaluate their experiments. They are satisfactorily taught to interpret experimental data graphically, so improving standards. ICT is not used sufficiently to support and extend pupils' learning in science.

132. The subject is well managed. Teachers and technicians work very well together as a team so that the department operates smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Changes to the science curriculum are leading to improvement in standards throughout the school. The introduction of the National Strategy for science is leading to better teaching. Despite problems with the recruitment of science teachers, progress since the previous inspection is good. Standards are improving and teaching is better.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good; pupils achieve well.
- Leadership and management are good. A clear educational direction has been established in the work of the subject.
- Pupils' work from observation is confident and accurate.

Areas for improvement

- Not enough use is made of ICT in Years 7-9.
- Pupils' knowledge of the world of art is limited; there are not enough opportunities for them to experience artwork at first hand.

133. In the GCSE examinations in 2002, results were above average. Numbers taking the examination were too small to reliably compare the results of girls with those of boys. Most pupils did broadly as well in their art and design as they did in most of their other subjects.

134. Standards of work are average in Year 9. Pupils' achievement is good. They are making good gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject. Higher attaining pupils show a sound grasp of the principles of design, such as when they produce lively clock faces, based on the work of the Pop artists. Average pupils' colour work is bright, and illuminated letterforms show a growing confidence in achieving harmonious effects. Pupils also create lively assemblages, using objects such as seashells, beads and metallic ribbon. These communicate a real sense of enjoyment, and are based on the theme of life under the sea. Pupils' knowledge of the world of art is rather limited; they find it difficult to talk at length about artists and their work. This is because there are not enough opportunities for them to experience art at first hand, for example, by visiting galleries or taking part in workshops. In addition, there is not enough use of ICT to support and extend work in art.

135. Standards of work in Year 11 are average. Pupils' achieve well and make good gains in drawing, painting and construction skills. The highest attaining pupils produce very intricate paintings on silk, based on the study of ethnic art. Their composition work is good, and they make complex pictures, based on the work of Escher, which balance line, shape and tone very effectively. Average attaining pupils' work based on observation drawing is accurate, and shows an ability to observe complex shapes closely, when working from crushed and crumpled drink cans and crisp packets. Pupils' painting is careful and precise, but it lacks a sense of excitement and discovery. The work from Year 10 in Year 11 pupils' folders shows a distinct lack of sustained challenge. This work is of a lower standard than pupils' current work. The lower level of work from last year is preventing coursework standards from rising above an average level overall.

136. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, because they engage directly with materials, making good gains in their colour and pattern work. Pupils with English as an additional language also achieve well, because lessons often feature clear demonstrations, so that all pupils can see what they need to do to succeed.

137. Attitudes and behaviour are good, and pupils try hard in their lessons. They are very good in Years 10 and 11. Without pressure, pupils often work in the art rooms after school and at lunchtimes.

138. Teaching and learning are good. In the best lessons, materials and methods are exciting, and well matched to pupils' interests. For example, in a lesson on silk painting, pupils could work freely with a wide range of brightly coloured dyes, brushing them onto the fabric to create vivid colour effects. They then went on to use outliners to create intricate and delicate patterns, informed by the work of Indian and Mexican art. This created very high levels of interest, pupils concentrated very well, and very good learning was the result. Teachers also give good individual advice, and are very encouraging. In some

lessons, however, materials and methods are not quite as innovative, and this prevents interest levels, and learning, from rising above a level that is good.

139. Leadership and management are good, and there is a clear educational direction set in the work of the subject. There is also a clear understanding of the strengths, and the areas needing further development. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. The quality of teaching and learning is now good in all years, and pupils are achieving well as a result.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- Good planning is in place for this new subject. The interesting course provides very good opportunities for active citizenship.
- The course promotes pupils' independent learning.

Areas for improvement

- Good practices in teaching and learning could be shared to a greater extent.
- Procedures for assessing pupils' standards and progress need to be established.
- More use could be made of ICT.

140. The school has not yet established procedures for assessing pupils' progress. Evidence from group discussion and written tasks indicates that pupils achieve satisfactorily overall in this new subject. Pupils' attitudes towards it are good. In Years 7-9 it is taught through PSHCE, form tutor sessions and, in Year 9, through careers education. In Years 10 and 11, it is mainly covered within the GCSE religious studies course. Overall, standards are similar to those found in many schools at this stage in the subject's inclusion in the National Curriculum.

141. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Lesson planning is good; teachers share aims and objectives with pupils. They use good question and answer techniques and provide many opportunities for speaking and listening. Teachers encourage independent learning through role-play, presentations, discussion and debate. Tasks are well planned to match pupils' capabilities, with a good emphasis on practical learning styles. Teachers are provided with good resource material and a tutor's handbook has been produced which contains useful guidance for planning lessons. Written work consists of short exercises that are assessed informally. A good Year 8 lesson showed the strategy working well. The group, well managed by the teacher and substantially into the programme, examined medical rights through a variety of activities. These included a question and answer session to define terms, discussion of case studies to elicit opinion, written work in groups and role-play centring on an unwanted pregnancy. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good. They foster a good learning environment for this subject based on pupils' appreciation of its importance in their everyday life.

142. Learning is satisfactory. Pupils retain what they have learned about, for example, social responsibility, the role of political parties, voting procedures, laws, how they are made and who makes them. Pupils respond well to group discussions and role-play, sharing ideas and experiences and taking account of definitions and preparatory explanations. They begin to recognise how initial opinions can shift and change as the complexity of a situation becomes more apparent when issues are debated. Pupils are tolerant of others' views. Lower-attaining pupils benefit from working in groups, and, with help from group members and support from the teacher, make similar progress to others. Pupils participate and exercise responsibility as citizens through the abundant events and projects the school offers for active citizenship, for example, year councils, the Anti-bullying Council, Citizen of the Year, community links with a special school, duty in the school foyer, charity work, law debates, environmental projects and so on. There are, however, few opportunities for pupils to use computers in their lessons.

143. Leadership and management give clear educational direction. Much valuable and intensive effort has gone into the planning of the curriculum for citizenship. Teaching and learning are monitored informally on a 'drop in and sample' basis during the faculty observation week and at other times by request. Pupils' work is satisfactorily sampled to check for consistency throughout each year group but systematic procedures for establishing pupils' attainment and progress need to be established. Homework is set but does not yet appear on the official homework timetable. The support of the faculty and of the local education authority has been crucial to the subject's successful introduction into the curriculum. The subject has come a long way since the previous inspection when planning was just beginning. Citizenship has now been incorporated into the aims and values of the school and details published in the prospectus; future priorities for development are listed in a very detailed action plan with deadlines and measures to evaluate what is achieved. For now, a satisfactory start has been made on which to build.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well throughout the school as a result of good teaching.
- Pupils have good attitudes toward their work.
- Leadership and management are good.

Areas for improvement

- More use could be made of ICT.
- More emphasis could be placed on developing pupils' independent study skills.

144. Pupils' design and technology skills on entry are below average. Standards of work are average in Year 9, representing good achievement. In 2002, teacher assessments were above average. These are likely to have been over-estimates because the criteria for National Curriculum levels have not been used precisely enough.

145. Very good booklets are in use in Years 7-9 that guide pupils through design and practical projects. The integration of homework tasks is most beneficial. The booklets are designed well and the language used makes them suitable for pupils of all abilities. However, some of the spaces allowed for responses inhibit the answers of the most able pupils. Opportunities for extended pieces of writing are limited, especially in the evaluation of the projects. The food and textiles area involves itself well in multicultural themes but opportunities to include discussion about other moral and cultural issues, such as the environment, are sometimes missed. Strengths in pupils' work are in the amount of work produced in the booklets and the standard of the products made. Very good pieces of work were seen on display in the resistant materials and textiles area. There is a weakness in the study of structures, electronics, pneumatics and systems and control. Strategies are in place to overcome this deficiency but they have not yet had time to take full effect. Research, using ICT and the department library, is a good feature of the work in food and textiles, but less so in graphics and resistant materials. Greater access to ICT is needed in all areas of design and technology. There is no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls.

146. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations in 2002 were above the national average at grades A*-C and average overall. Standards have improved steadily over a number of years, in line with the national trend. Pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is consistently good in all areas of study. Standards in the current Year 11 are average, which is praiseworthy considering the staffing problems, especially in the food and textiles area. Good use of graphical skills indicates pupils' appreciation of the need for accuracy in mathematical aspects of the work. Initial sketches and ideas are of good quality and some of the detail seen in textiles was very good. Weaknesses lie in the production of detailed working orthographic drawings rather than simple isometric ones. Research and investigation skills are good, especially in food studies. The volume of work in pupils' folders is extensive.

147. The progress of pupils with special educational needs or with English as an additional language is good. They almost all obtain a GCSE grade. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and they receive suitably challenging opportunities to demonstrate their potential and capabilities.

148. Overall, teaching and learning are good. All the teaching observed was at least satisfactory; almost all was good and about a quarter was very good. Lessons are well prepared and materials are readily to hand. Work is marked with reference to a National Curriculum level or GCSE grade. Teachers' enthusiasm is conveyed to the pupils and they are confident in transmitting their very good subject knowledge. Resources and time are used well but little reference is made to the technical words on the walls or the impressive displays. Lessons are well paced, resulting in good productivity. Teachers have high expectations and pupils value the individual help they receive in aiming to reach them. Technicians provide valuable support in design and technology lessons but more help is needed in the food and textiles area. The pupils are good listeners and learners. They follow instructions well and do what is required but are not as confident when working independently. Homework is completed properly. The teachers put a great deal of effort into after-school classes and extra lessons during the holidays for GCSE pupils. Pupils respond well and take increasing pride in their work as they progress through the school. Concentration and perseverance levels are above those usually seen.

149. The management of the department is good. The present system works well and there is a good level of co-operation between staff. Meetings are held regularly and teachers share ideas and practices. The department has interesting plans for a new non-GCSE course in food studies for lower attaining pupils and for the introduction of manufacturing studies. Classes in Years 7-9 are large. Their size inhibits learning and has a negative effect on overall standards. The problems highlighted in the previous inspection concerning the lack of ICT, especially control technology, have only been partially resolved and have still to have an impact. Very recent improvements include the refurbishment of the food studies room and the introduction of more ICT, including some for computer-aided design. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- GCSE results have improved.
- There is a core of good teaching by well-qualified subject specialists.
- Pupils achieve well in Years 7-9.

Areas for improvement

- The marking and assessment of pupils' work could be improved to provide them with more information about their progress.
- The approach to the teaching of literacy skills is inconsistent.
- Not enough use is made of ICT in teaching or for pupils' independent research.

150. Results in the GCSE examination in geography have improved since the previous inspection; they are now average and match standards observed in lessons. However, pupils continue to achieve less well in geography than in their other subjects. There is no significant difference between the achievement of girls and boys, although few girls opt for the subject in Years 10 and 11.

151. Standards of work in Year 9 are average. Pupils achieve well in Years 7-9 in relation to their below average starting point when they join the school. They achieve well because the teaching is good, pupils' attitudes to work are positive and they behave well in lessons. Pupils in Year 9 recognise the links between plate boundaries and the distribution of volcanoes. Higher attaining pupils are challenged by opportunities to work with a degree of independence, and make effective use of the Internet to research topics, such as the study of a volcano, for homework.

152. Standards in Year 11 are average and, overall, pupils achieve satisfactorily in relation to their attainment in Year 9. Where teaching is good and sometimes very good, pupils achieve well. However, the quality of pupils' work is variable, with copied notes, incomplete and scappily presented work in some books. Standards are highest in GCSE coursework. Pupils use a satisfactory range of techniques to collect data in the field. Numeracy skills are well developed as pupils make effective use of statistical techniques to explore correlation, for example between house prices and distance from the town centre.

153. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make good progress, especially when extra support is available in lessons. Their written work is well supported by worksheets to help them to record information. Gifted and talented pupils are identified and generally make good progress, especially when extension tasks and resources are provided. There are, however, pockets of underachievement. Higher attaining pupils in Year 7 mark time when map skills from primary school are repeated.

154. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7-9 and satisfactory in Years 10-11, where it is more variable because of instability in staffing. Teachers have a good command of the subject and their enthusiasm and commitment contribute to pupils' motivation. Discipline is firm, but with a light touch, so pupils feel able to ask for help. They are keen to contribute in oral work. A good atmosphere for learning is established. In some lessons teachers make good use of technical words and helpful prompts to improve the quality of pupils' written work, as in a well-planned Year 10 lesson when well-prepared worksheets helped pupils to find and present relevant information from a video and newspaper articles. Such ways of improving pupils' written work need to be more consistently used to reduce the amount of copied notes. The marking of pupils' work is a consistent weakness. Written comments, whilst encouraging pupils' good efforts and presentation, provide little information about how to improve the quality of their work, especially for higher attaining pupils.

155. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The faculty programme of monitoring and self-evaluation has identified clear priorities for improvement, and has contributed to the good teaching in the subject. Team work is effective and leadership is supportive. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Results in the GCSE examination are now better. Resources have improved, with the exception of access to ICT, which is unsatisfactory. The subject's contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills needs to be built into schemes of work to ensure greater consistency. Weaknesses in the assessment of the National Curriculum have not been adequately tackled. The department needs to use a wider range of assessments, more closely related to levels of the National Curriculum and to moderate work across years to enable more accurate assessments to be made. Some progress has been made in matching the work to the range of pupils' needs, although higher attaining pupils are not consistently challenged in some units of work. The department has had difficulty in raising the profile of the subject, which now attracts fewer pupils in Years 10 and 11. Instability in staffing contributes to inconsistencies in standards, mainly in Years 10 and 11, where continuity of teaching is a problem.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good.
- Overall, pupils behave well and have positive attitudes.

Areas for improvement

- More use could be made of ICT.
- Assessment procedures in Years 7-9 could be linked more closely to National Curriculum levels.
- The work of the department could be monitored more rigorously to ensure that the best

156. In 2002, GCSE results were well above the national average at grades A*-C, continuing a trend of steady improvement. They remained slightly below average at grades A*-G. The number of pupils entered was too small to make valid comparisons between the performance of different groups of pupils.

157. Teacher assessments of Year 9 in 2002 were well above average. Standards in the current Year 9 are closer to average, with fewer pupils working at the higher levels. In Year 7, pupils satisfactorily describe and explain events, such as those leading to the death of Thomas Becket. They can arrange events chronologically. Pupils progress well through Year 8, their knowledge and understanding enabling them to use specialist vocabulary accurately and produce more structured written work. For example, pupils link the quarrel between Elizabeth 1 and Philip of Spain to the wider context of Anglo-Spanish rivalry. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make simple deductions from sources such as native American drawings. By Year 9, most pupils achieve well. Higher attaining pupils successfully analyse events in Nazi Germany and make links to Hitler's political aims. However, they have limited opportunity to demonstrate the use of more subtle thinking skills, such as evaluating and making judgements about conflicting evidence. Standards are above average in Year 11. Pupils handle source material confidently and can explain different historical interpretations of events, such as American military operations in Vietnam. Taking into account pupils' lack of historical skills on entry, the majority makes good progress by the age of 14: the achievement of pupils studying history to the age of 16 is good.

158. Pupils with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language make satisfactory progress due to the support they are given. The girls' better literacy skills result in them attaining higher National Curriculum levels than boys in Years 7-9.

159. Most pupils work hard, maintain concentration and behave well. They show interest, reflected in their willingness to answer questions and join in discussion, and work co-operatively in groups. Occasionally, when the groups are large, some pupils do not contribute. Homework is completed regularly; some pupils voluntarily repeat work in response to teachers' comments.

160. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and structured, with clear aims that are transmitted to pupils. They work individually and in groups at a range of challenging tasks suitably matched to their needs. A good example was the Year 7 lesson in which pupils explored the problems of communication between different native North American tribes by attempting to exchange messages without writing or speaking. The timing of activities is well managed and lessons proceed at a very good pace with no time for loss of momentum. Individual pupils are well supported. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are particularly skilled at careful and repeated questioning. This draws out and extends pupils' knowledge, such as when Year 9 pupils were led to link their previous knowledge of the Treaty of Versailles to the new topic of the Nazi's 25 point plan. Specialist vocabulary is emphasised and aids to literacy, such as structures for writing, are well used. Relationships between pupils and teachers are good. Teaching is less effective where tasks are undemanding and extension materials are lacking. Throughout the school, opportunities for independent enquiry are too limited. Pupils are not encouraged to use textbooks enough for their own research. Some marking lacks specific comment on improvement as related to history.

161. Leadership and management are satisfactory. The department functions through informal contact and good working relationships. However, its work is not monitored rigorously enough to ensure that the best practices are shared. Progress since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Areas requiring further development include raising the popularity of history at GCSE, procedures for monitoring the curriculum and better provision for the use of ICT. Assessment procedures could be improved in Years 7-9 to incorporate closer links with National Curriculum levels. More opportunities could be provided to enrich the curriculum through local study, fieldwork, site visits and extra-curricular activities.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Strategic planning to improve provision is good.
- Pupils have good attitudes that support their learning.
- Improvement since the previous inspection is very good.

Areas for improvement

- Standards of work are not as high as in other subjects.
- ICT is not used sufficiently in other subjects of the curriculum.
- The current timetabling arrangements for ICT limit progression in Years 7-9.
- Pupils have insufficient access to computers outside of lessons.

162. GCSE results in combined information technology in 2002 were average. The course was a combination of business studies and ICT. The proportion of pupils achieving A* grades was twice the national average. Very few girls were entered. Many pupils did better in ICT than they did in most of their other subjects. In previous years pupils were entered for GNVQ examinations.

163. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 indicated that attainment was above average. These assessments are over optimistic. Evidence from the inspection, including observation of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work, indicates that, currently, standards in Year 9 are below average. Since starting in Year 7, pupils have not had sufficient teaching time to cover all aspects of the National Curriculum. Even this year, the amount of teaching time, whilst adequate, is concentrated in two six-week blocks. Consequently, discontinuity of learning, particularly for lower attaining pupils is adversely affecting their attainment. Skills in word processing, desktop publishing and communicating information, are average, but pupils cannot select for themselves the most suitable software to use for a given task. They have a reasonable understanding of spreadsheet and database construction but only the higher attaining pupils can confidently use formulae or generate charts and graphs. Pupils have a very limited understanding of the use of ICT to control equipment by giving a series of instructions in order to achieve a precise outcome. Pupils' independent learning skills are underdeveloped. However, considering their attainment in ICT skills on entry, overall achievement in Years 7-9 is satisfactory.

164. Standards of work in Year 11 are below average. Pupils taking examination courses are fluent in basic operations, understand the structures of relational databases and spreadsheets and have average design skills. Approximately half of Year 11 pupils do not take an examination course and their design skills are well below average. Both groups of pupils lack awareness of the social, economical, ethical and moral issues surrounding the use of new technologies. Given their attainment at the end of Year 9, pupils' overall achievement in Year 11 is satisfactory.

165. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make satisfactory progress. Where special worksheets are provided to help them read and understand the tasks set for them they make good progress. However, this does not happen in all lessons. Gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress. The tasks they are set allow them to work at their own pace and they are not held back waiting for others to catch up. However, their independent learning skills are not sufficiently fostered; for example, although there are good self-help resources in most ICT rooms, pupils are not encouraged to use them.

166. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Good subject knowledge enables teachers to explain concepts and demonstrate software in ways that pupils can understand. Relationships with pupils are encouraging and supportive and motivate pupils to learn. Where teaching is good, pupils are managed effectively, lessons are planned carefully and expectations of what pupils can achieve are high. In the

small amount of unsatisfactory teaching observed, planning was unsatisfactory or the management of pupils was weak. For example, in one Year 9 lesson, because of poor planning, a significant minority of pupils repeated work that they had already covered in the previous lesson. In a Year 10 lesson, some pupils spent more time on pop web sites than on the tasks set by the teacher. Units of work usually take several weeks to complete and learning objectives are not sufficiently focused for each individual lesson.

167. Pupils' attitudes are good overall and support their learning. When required, pupils can work effectively in pairs and help each other learn. In Years 10 and 11 pupils can work with sustained concentration. Where teachers have weak classroom management skills a minority of pupils take advantage and waste too much time chatting or going on the Internet.

168. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. The development of ICT is now an integral part of the school's strategic planning, resources have improved and curriculum development has been good. A very good Intranet site has been developed that is a valuable source of information for parents and pupils. The National Strategy for ICT in Years 7-9 is being trialled with some classes. Classroom displays help to provide an inspiring environment in which to work. All pupils in Year 10 follow a GCSE course of one hour per week. This disadvantages higher attaining pupils who, with this amount of teaching time and given the current inadequate use of ICT in their other subjects, may find it difficult to attain the higher GCSE grades. There is no formal monitoring of teaching and learning in the department, nor is pupils' progress monitored on a regular basis. There is no co-ordination of what ICT is being used to support learning in other subjects. These are areas for further development. Pupils have insufficient access to computers outside of lesson times.

Key skills across the curriculum - Information and communication technology

169. Opportunities for pupils to use ICT to support their learning in other subjects are unsatisfactory. In science, mathematics, history, design technology, art and music computers are rarely used. Where other subjects include elements of computer work in their teaching, it is mainly in presenting information using word processing and desktop publishing skills, and using the Internet for research. Only in modern foreign languages is ICT well integrated into the curriculum. The department has its own computer room and all classes have opportunities to enhance their language skills through the use of computers. Pupils with special educational needs have good access to computers and use an integrated learning package to improve both their literacy and numeracy skills.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Leadership and management are excellent
- Teaching and learning are good. Several native speakers of the languages taught make a very good contribution.
- ICT is well used to support and motivate pupils' learning.

Areas for improvement

- There is still some inconsistency in the quality of provision.

French, German and Spanish

170. As their first foreign language, French is taught to six classes out of ten in each year group, the remaining four taking German one year or Spanish the next. All pupils begin Spanish or German as a second foreign language in Year 9. They continue with at least one language in Year 10; at present most Year 10 students are beginning a GCSE course, as is conventional, but a minority is taking part in a pilot

project to complete GCSE by the end of Year 10. In the current Year 11 there are GCSE classes in all three languages, French and Spanish as first languages, German as second. Present policy is that in future all should take GCSE in their first language in Year 10, and Year 9 pupils are already working on their GCSE course. In addition, all should take their second language in Year 11. This is an innovative curriculum development in which Oulder Hill as a Language College is setting new standards, against the national trend.

171. GCSE results in French in 2002 were above average in the ranges A*-C and A*-G; the school was outstandingly successful in enabling borderline C/D candidates to get the higher grade. Above average standards were reported at the previous inspection and in the years prior to that. German results were slightly below average in 2002 at grades A*-C; but it has to be noted here that a fully mixed ability entry is being compared with a semi-selective national picture. All candidates in German attained at least a grade G. There were no entries for Spanish in Year 11 in 2002. Teacher assessments for Year 9 in 2002 and related targets indicated above average standards in languages. Currently, standards in Year 9 are average compared to pupils of the same age in other schools. Strengths are in listening and speaking skills and the good extended writing of higher attaining pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and learners of English as an additional language make the same progress as others in the mixed ability classes because teachers take pains to match tasks to the pupils' level of attainment. Older pupils retain and extend their listening and speaking skills in Years 10 and 11; extended writing is also a good feature of many pupils' work. Over the full five years this represents good achievement. Pupils enter the school with below average skills in language. They are average by the end of Year 9 and above average by the end of Year 11. In Year 11, achievement is very good in German because above average standards are being reached in only three years of studying the language. The same is true of the equivalent Spanish group in Year 10.

172. Most pupils respond well to the language college environment and show positive attitudes to their learning in all languages. In most classes they are well taught and enjoy their learning. They are clear about where they are at and what they need to do to improve. Pupils are encouraged to take a degree of responsibility for their own learning, for example through the use of personalised workbooks used in Year 7. Some good work on computers was seen in a Year 9 group, where pupils with special educational, boys in particular, were strongly motivated. Relationships with teachers and with other pupils are good, and in group work situations pupils work well together. Exceptionally, a few Year 10 boys displayed negative attitudes because of disappointment with the particular combination of languages available to their class.

173. Teaching and learning are predominantly good throughout the school in all languages. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed, which is an improvement on the situation in the previous inspection. The school is an attractive place to work, and unlike many other schools has few problems in recruiting and retaining linguists. Two members of staff are Advanced Skills Teachers; they share their expertise well with other schools. There is a foreign languages assistant for each of the three languages. Some members of the permanent staff are native speakers of Spanish or German, which makes a good impact on the climate for learning. Other teachers also have good language skills and use them effectively in the classroom. Using the foreign language as the medium of instruction is a feature of all the good teaching seen. Teachers plan lessons well, so that time is used to best effect. They manage pupils well, so that attitudes and relationships remain good. Because of this they are successful in communicating a sense of high expectations to the pupils and in promoting good achievement. Good provision for ICT motivates many pupils, including those with special educational needs. Tasks are well matched to pupils' learning needs in the mixed ability classes.

174. Outstanding leadership has created a very good climate for learning within the language college environment, in which the school is further ahead than many. A key feature is the success of provision for all pupils, including those with low self-esteem in other subject areas. Some who do not attain five or more A*-C grades nevertheless get a grade C in their foreign language. A particular strength is the teaching provided for pupils with special educational needs, many of whom enjoy languages because their achievement is valued. Assessment is well used to keep pupils on track towards clear targets, which are

further refined in the light of progress. The formal award of the coveted title of Linguist of the Week is one of a number of initiatives to raise the profile of modern languages.

175. Beyond the basic task of preparing pupils for examinations the language college has widened horizons of many who come within its influence, pupils, parents and members of the host community, some members of which benefit from the out-of-hours courses provided in a range of languages. There are courses in Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Urdu (for native speakers and for complete beginners). Good working relationships exist with an Anglo-French firm in the local area, and staff provide taster courses for pupils of their feeder primary schools. Some of the multicultural and extra-curricular events taking place in school, such as the summer International Day and the Winter Festival, are also open to members of the public. At the same time the department has made a strong commitment to the Juconi Foundation in Mexico, which gives pupils the opportunity to raise funds for the education of Mexican street children. The department makes a good contribution to the teaching of citizenship; Third World as well as European issues feature in the programme.

176. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. Teaching has improved, as has pupils' ability to work independently. High standards have been maintained and the language college has been further developed.

Urdu

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average in Year 11 in response to good teaching.
- Pupils are highly motivated and have good attitudes to learning.
- Leadership and management are good.
- There is good provision for pupils to use ICT for research.

Areas for improvement

- The provision of Urdu from Year 9 results in some pupils making less progress than others by the end of that year.

177. In 2002, a very high proportion of pupils gained grades A* to C at GCSE. This is well above the national average and was a further improvement on the good results of the previous year. All the pupils entered for the examination were successful in gaining grades A*-G in both years. The provision of Urdu from Year 9 onwards gives pupils who are new to Urdu less time to prepare for the exam however.

178. Pupils take up Urdu in Year 9. At this stage standards of work are below average because most pupils start the course with very little knowledge of Urdu, particularly in reading and writing. They achieve well and by the end of the year most pupils can give simple details about themselves and construct sentences using different tenses. They can identify the letters of the alphabet and know how to form letters when they are joined with others. Structured guides are provided to assist lower attaining pupils with their writing.

179. Standards of work are well above average in Year 11. Some pupils are already successfully working on the AS course. Overall, pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 11 they give lengthy replies giving details about, for instance, the significance of sacrifice in Eid. They listen attentively to each other and follow authentic Urdu from Pakistan television, understanding most of what is said. Pupils take care with the presentation of work, which is of a high standard. Standards of spelling are good. Pupils develop their numeracy skills through studying numbers, telling the time, shopping and presenting information through charts and tables

180. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. There are some very good features in many lessons. Teachers' subject knowledge and enthusiasm for Urdu are excellent. Large classes with wide

levels of attainment from beginners to fully fluent new arrivals from Pakistan are well managed and catered for through appropriate levels of work. Discipline in lessons is very good. Lessons are well prepared; high quality resource sheets are designed carefully, using ICT, with lower and higher attaining pupils in mind. Some use is made of role-play and group work but much of the oral work is through formal whole class teaching and from short questioning. Teachers make good use of their time to check pupils' progress in lessons. The inspection took place during the week of Eid. Many lessons drew on pupils' cultural and religious heritage to highlight the purpose of sacrifice and pilgrimage in Eid. Good displays in the teaching room and around the school attract the attention of other pupils and promote interest in the different cultures represented in the school. Relationships between pupils and staff are good. Pupils of all abilities, and sometimes at different stages in their learning of Urdu, are well supported through additional 'twilight' sessions. They have extensive opportunities to use ICT in Urdu lessons and to read newspapers on the Internet. Teaching materials are produced to a high standard using Urdu software. Target sheets are used regularly for pupils to review their progress. This helps them to know what they need to do to improve further.

181. Pupils' attitudes are very good. They are responsive to instructions, listen attentively in lessons and maintain high standards of behaviour. They are respectful to staff, highly motivated and anxious to achieve well. They have a clear sense of purpose in lessons and concentrate on tasks without distraction. Pupils listen to each other without interruption, including in lessons where short and full course students at very different levels of attainment study together.

182. Leadership of the subject is good. The department is well organised. Urdu plays a wider role in the life of the school through festivals such as the Winter Celebration and fashion show. Good cross-curricular links have been established through the study of Eid (religious education), the Moghul Empire (history) and Pakistan (geography). Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. The overall provision for Urdu within the curriculum is being reviewed, along with other subjects, as part of a whole-school curriculum review.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Standards in Year 11 are well above average.
- Teaching is good overall.
- Provision for instrumental work, vocal tuition and extra-curricular activities is very good

Areas for improvement

- There are not enough computers to aid pupils' work in composition and performance.
- More provision could be made to help pupils with special educational needs.
- Sound-proofing is not effective enough in the music/drama area.

183. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 is broadly average. Pupils achieve well considering the variable level of musical skills on entry. By Year 9, most pupils use a range of classroom instruments with some competence. Electronic keyboards are introduced to pupils at a later stage than in most schools and so keyboard skills are below average at this stage. Pupils build well on their individual instrumental skills. Pupils satisfactorily develop a musical vocabulary with which to describe and appraise the music they hear. Where teaching stresses technical vocabulary, attainment in aural work improves. There are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls. In 2002, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicated an above average profile. National Curriculum levels were generously applied leading to an inflated estimate of standards.

184. GCSE results in 2002 were well above the national average. All pupils gained A*-C grades, 50 per cent at A/A*. Detailed analysis of the results revealed standards in performing that were very high

indeed; standards in composing and aural appraisal were lower and more variable. The school has maintained a consistently good standard at GCSE in recent years. Standards of work in Year 11 are well above average. Pupils achieve very well. Attainment in performing is very good indeed and, overall, better than in appraising and composing. The department contributes to the development of basic literacy skills, particularly in relation to the appropriate use of technical language and speaking and listening skills. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, pupils were referred to a bank of technical terms, resulting in better use of analytical and descriptive language. Most pupils make very good progress in building on their performing skills. Individual instrumental skills are often very good and well utilised in supporting composition. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls.

185. ICT is not used enough in music lessons. The department has prioritised this as an area for development. There are no working computers in the department; this has a negative effect on learning, particularly in relation to progress in composition in Years 7-9. In addition, pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not have the appropriate opportunities to draft scores and develop computer-composition skills.

186. Progress for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Not enough work is designed with their particular needs in mind. Where it is, and pupils have the appropriate support, progress is good. Individual education plans for special needs pupils set general, rather than musical, targets and those with acute special educational needs seldom have support staff to help them in music lessons. This lack of specialist support was referred to in the previous report. A few simplified worksheets are provided for pupils with low reading ages or for whom English is an additional language. These help to consolidate pupils' knowledge of technical vocabulary, but, overall, the development of literacy skills within music is not sufficiently routine to enable these pupils to express themselves clearly enough in oral work or writing. Some work is specially and effectively designed to extend the horizons of gifted and talented pupils. This enables them to exploit their talents to full potential.

187. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Teaching usually embodies thorough preparation, a range of teaching styles, good pace, and clear organisation. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, pupils enjoyed a wide variety of tasks including rhythmic warm ups and the exploration, through performance, of the differences between picture and graphic scores. At all stages teachers ensure that pupils have opportunities to develop the most necessary musical skills. Marking of pupils' work is helpful, giving appropriate encouragement whilst indicating the areas that require improvement. It has also assisted the department in identifying areas for development, in particular the need to extend the depth of pupils' writing. Teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11. It carefully builds on previous attainment. Teachers' musical skills are used well in the classroom and in the range of extra-curricular activities. Homework is set regularly and helps to consolidate pupils' learning, thus maintaining their interest. Occasionally, lessons are rather abstract in content as in a Year 9 lesson where pupils completed a worksheet on the range of functions on different electronic keyboards without switching the keyboards on. Pupils in Years 7-9 have limited opportunities to explore the music of other cultures as this aspect is mainly introduced in Year 10. Overall, provision in Years 10 and 11 is better than in Years 7-9. Pupils are attentive and show interest in their work. They respond well to most classroom tasks and are co-operative when working in groups. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are particularly enthusiastic and diligent.

188. The teaching of instrumental work is very good. The number of pupils taking lessons in school is above average; over 300 pupils have instrumental lessons each week. The 11 visiting instrumental teachers make a very valuable contribution to the curriculum and their work is well managed and carefully integrated into the work of the department, both in examination contexts and in work for school performances. They teach with good pace and an intense focus on technical elements in the music. Pupils develop a range of intellectual and physical skills that are applied to areas both within musical study and in broader educational contexts. Pupils are encouraged to take instrumental grade examinations and they have a record of success up to, and beyond, Grade 8. In Years 10 and 11 pupils can take singing in addition to instrumental lessons; this vocal work helps them to improve their aural skills. Pupils work well individually and with enthusiasm in instrumental groups.

189. Leadership and management of the department are good. Schemes of work are sound. The long-term monitoring, assessment and recording of pupils' work provides good information which is used in forward planning. Day-to-day assessment is used informally to modify and develop lesson plans. GCSE results are analysed by component, which helps the department to target areas of relative weakness. Computer resources are unsatisfactory and there are insufficient electronic keyboards to fully equip two classes. Some pianos are in a poor state and require attention. Accommodation is suitable for most musical activities but not enough space is available to accommodate the many visiting instrumental teachers. Soundproofing is inadequate in the music and drama area.

190. The music department makes a good contribution to extra-curricular work. Pupils enthusiastically commit time and effort to bands, choirs, instrumental ensembles and other smaller groups. The performing and composing work of pupils is appropriately celebrated in musical events. These have a strong impact on the aesthetic development of pupils; they also contribute to enrichment within the school. There are regular school productions under the auspices of the performing arts faculty, for example the recent production of Grease, and standards of performance are often high. Such opportunities for performance have a strong impact on the cultural and social maturity of pupils; they also contribute to the prevailing ethos of the school and foster links with the community. The department is eager to further promote opportunities for pupil involvement in dance, music and drama.

191. Overall, satisfactory improvement has been made since the previous inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well in physical education and dance.
- Pupils reach particularly high standards in the Junior Sport Leader Award in Years 10 and 11.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- There is a very good programme of extra-curricular activities.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils who are excused from the practical activity in lessons do not always learn as much as they could.
- Limited curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 prevents standards becoming higher for those not taking GCSE.

192. Standards of work in Year 9 physical education are broadly in line with the national average representing good achievement in relation a below average starting point. These standards are due to good quality of teaching and a very good programme of extra-curricular activities. Pupils have very positive attitudes towards the subject and consequently they learn at a good rate in lessons.

193. The standard of work in Year 11 is broadly in line with the national average. This reflects good achievement in relation to prior standards. The most recent GCSE results, although lower than at the time of the previous inspection, are broadly average. Girls performed better than boys, particularly in the theory element of the course. These standards are brought about because of good quality of teaching, pupils' positive attitudes and a strong extra-curricular programme.

194. In Year 9, girls have good evaluation skills in badminton. A small number of higher attaining pupils play singles games well, using a variety of strokes to outwit an opponent. In basketball, boys build an effective attack, passing is secure and they use a variety of shots. Boys' evaluation skills are less evident. Girls taking part in swimming lessons perform at an above average level. However, a high number of

girls, including many from Asian backgrounds, do not take part regularly enough to reach these standards. School teams in Years 7-9 perform at above average standards in girls' netball and boys' basketball.

195. In Year 11, standards of leadership for those pupils taking the Junior Sports Leader Award are very high. Standards in basketball and badminton in National Curriculum lessons are broadly average. Limited curriculum time restricts the raising of standards further for pupils not following a course at GCSE. Standards in GCSE practical activities are above average in football, swimming, basketball and netball. Average and higher attaining pupils produce good training programmes which make good links between their plans and the theory. Lower attaining pupils, often boys, have difficulty explaining why they have chosen a particularly training plan and tend to be more descriptive rather than analytical.

196. Good quality teaching leads to learning at a good rate. Teaching was never less than satisfactory and was good in most lessons, occasionally very good. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good, based on mutual respect, good humour and high expectations. Consequently most pupils have very positive attitudes, behave very well and enjoy working hard. The teaching makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. Teachers plan lessons carefully making the aims of the lessons clear to pupils. They include a good range of progressively challenging activities, good demonstrations and explanations. As a result, pupils work at a good pace, remain interested and improve their skills and performance. In the best lessons pupils are given many opportunities to evaluate their own and others' performances and take responsibility for parts of the lesson. In these lessons evaluation tasks are well structured and there is a good emphasis on using the technical language of the subject, as was seen in a girls' swimming lessons. Regular assessment and feedback to individuals and classes informs pupils of how well they are doing, helping to motivate them and giving a clear idea of what to do to improve. Marking in GCSE theory and coursework is especially helpful. Teachers' good knowledge of pupils helps them to plan suitable tasks for pupils with special educational needs. As a result these pupils make good progress. Pupils with specific talents in physical education have been identified and are well supported through provision of additional challenging experiences both in lessons and out of lesson time. Occasionally teaching is satisfactory and could be improved. For example, evaluation tasks are not well structured and pupils not able to take a physically active part in the lesson are not involved enough in learning.

197. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a clear view of what needs to be done to develop the subject arising from very good self-evaluation that includes regular checks on standards and teaching. Assessment information is well used to identify areas for improvement and raise pupils' aspirations. However, pupils' progress within each aspect of the National Curriculum programme is not recorded and so differences between their performance skills, evaluation skills or knowledge of health and fitness are not necessarily recognised. Indoor accommodation is extensive but in need of refurbishment. Although there is a good hard area, other outdoor facilities, including playing fields and an all-weather area, are in poor condition and cannot be used regularly. Improvement since the last inspection is good because the good achievement and good quality of teaching have been maintained. Assessment procedures have improved but parts of the accommodation remain unsatisfactory.

Dance

198. The most recent GCSE results are broadly average. Standards of work in dance are above average in Years 9 and 11. Overall, these standards reflect very good achievement in relation to pupils' prior standards. They arise because of very good teaching and pupils' positive attitudes towards the subject. In Year 9, pupils quickly learn complex rock and roll routines. Girls master the steps faster than boys and their performance reflects the style of rock and roll more clearly. In Year 8, boys perform with great energy and bring excitement to their dances. In Year 11, most girls have a good understanding of composition and use choreographic principles well to develop motifs and ensure that the movement expresses the ideas they intend. Pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress because the teachers have a very good knowledge of pupils' prior attainment and they plan tasks and activities to match their needs. The use of prompt cards and whiteboards are especially helpful to pupils in learning the technical language of the subject.

199. The very good teaching is characterised by excellent demonstrations that help pupils to pick up on the style and composure of good performance. Composition is broken down into manageable steps and so pupils make very good progress. Relationships are very good, based on very high expectations of behaviour, effort and improvement. The teaching makes a very strong contribution to pupils' personal development. Pupils grow in confidence as their performance improves. Pupils benefit from many opportunities to perform within school, to visit dance performances or to take part in workshops organised by professional dancers.

200. The subject is very well led and managed. High expectations of pupils and staff are well established. There is a clear understanding of how the subject needs to develop arising from very good self-evaluation, which includes regular checks on teaching, planning and analysis of results and assessments. Since the previous inspection more boys are taking part in dance in lessons and performances but only a small number continue into examination programmes.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Pupils achieve well throughout the school.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes and behave well.
- The subject is effectively led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- There are inconsistencies in the use of assessment procedures and marking.
- Insufficient use is made of resources to be found within the local faith communities.

201. Pupils' performance in the 'short' GCSE examination in religious studies over recent years has been inconsistent. Up to 2000, results were above average with girls outperforming boys to a degree broadly similar to that found nationally. Results fell sharply in 2001 when they were well below average. This coincided with a change in entry policy for this examination. Previously, a significant minority of pupils was not entered for the examination, which had, as the previous report found, a marked adverse effect on attitudes to learning and the progress made. In 2001, a much higher proportion of pupils took the examination and this increased further in 2002. Results improved in 2002 although they were still below average. The more recent results also occurred at a time of rapid staff turnover within the religious education department which had an adverse effect on the continuity of learning, particularly because few of the teachers had a specialist qualification in the subject.

202. Pupils in Year 9 are following a full GCSE course in religious studies and will continue their studies throughout Year 10 and Year 11, when they will take the examination. Current standards of work are average compared to what might be expected for their age. Consequently, taking into account pupils' below average starting point on entry to the school, they achieve well. Higher attaining pupils have a good understanding of basic beliefs in Christianity and Islam and are beginning to see how these may influence attitudes, for example towards the nature of the 'Welfare State'. Average and lower attaining pupils' knowledge and understanding are satisfactory. They can express opinions on moral issues, but in their writing, do not make sufficient reference to the teaching of the faiths studied. Too many pupils do not have a coherent view of what it means to belong to a faith community and the way that it influences the daily lives of believers. Knowledge and understanding varies between groups, indicative of the lack of consistency in the teaching prior to the current academic year.

203. Standards of work in Years 10 and 11, for pupils following the 'short' GCSE course, are just above average. Pupils achieve well. The wide difference in the performance of boys and girls in the most

recent examination results is not as evident in the work of pupils currently in Year 11. A particular strength in their coursework is the way in which higher attaining pupils use well-selected quotations from religious writings, the teaching of Islam and various Christian denominations to support their conclusions. Average ability pupils use their knowledge and understanding well in their explanations although they sometimes lack precision, for example in describing the activities of aid agencies without identifying the way in which their religious convictions inspire their work. Many lower attaining pupils use their knowledge and understanding accurately but tend to over emphasise their own convictions at the expense of the even-handed approach, which the syllabus requires. Throughout the school, in the majority of lessons, pupils who have special educational needs and those at an early stage of learning English achieve well. Gifted and talented pupils make similar progress. These pupils achieve well because their needs are well understood by the teachers and the learning is adapted so that they are appropriately challenged.

204. The religious education department is emerging from a period of instability in its teaching force, which has effected the continuity of pupils' learning. The overall quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection was good, reflecting the now largely specialist teaching within the department. Non-specialists, who are committed to the subject and receive good support from the department, teach a relatively small proportion of lessons. The major strengths in the good and very good teaching were rooted in the quality of lesson planning, the management of pupils, classroom organisation and the quality of resources. Most lessons began with a recall of previous learning and ended with evaluation of what had been newly learnt in the lesson. The learning activities in the main part of the lessons were interesting and well matched to the range of attainment represented in the mixed ability classes. Very good learning took place in a Year 7 lesson on the Gospel story of the Prodigal Son. This happened because the teacher carefully arranged the composition of the pupils' groups to ensure all could be fully involved in the learning. The worksheet which they used to analyse a well selected extract from the film 'Jesus of Nazareth' was well adapted to match the pupils' capabilities. The discussion of the story that followed enabled pupils to reflect on the meaning it had for their own lives. In some otherwise satisfactory lessons, progress was not as good as it could have been because a minority of pupils were easily distracted from their work and the teacher was only partially successful in restoring their concentration. The analysis of pupils' written work indicated some inconsistencies between teachers in the extent to which they kept pupils informed about the standards they were achieving and what they needed to do to improve.

205. Pupils generally have positive attitudes to learning in religious education lessons. However, they tended to be less good in those classes of older pupils that had not been taught consistently by subject specialists. Pupils in Year 7 and 8 classes displayed excellent attitudes in response to interesting and demanding learning experiences.

206. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. The majority of issues then raised have been successfully dealt with. Good progress has been made in devising procedures for assessing the attainment and progress of pupils in Years 7 to 9. A very good feature of these is the way in which pupils are involved in the process. However, teachers vary in the way in which they make use of the procedures and the information obtained is not yet analysed and used in curriculum planning. Religious education makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development. However, the subject still fails to make sufficient use of the resources represented in local faith communities. The new leadership has quickly identified the subject's strengths and weaknesses and has created an agenda for improvement that is already having a positive effect on standards. Relationships are very good and there is a very good capacity for further improvement.

Vocational courses

Business studies

207. Pupils' results in GCSE business studies were above average in 2001 and 2002. Standards of work in Year 11 are above average, representing very good achievement from pupils' below average attainment at the start of the course in Year 10. Strengths lie in their good understanding and application of business knowledge to real organisations, which they have researched well, and their good and

developing ICT skills. Higher attaining pupils have produced some very substantial, detailed, relevant and well-analysed work on business planning and human resources management. They tackle more complex tasks and extension work to accelerate their learning. Relative weaknesses are in the collection and interpretation of facts and figures, for example, in market research; and pupils' inattention to spelling and punctuation. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, following individual or group education plans and using task sheets and other materials which have been matched to their ability and needs.

208. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Pupils listen closely, show interest and enthusiasm and make good, workable notes; their detailed, often lengthy answers show good retention of previous knowledge. Teachers plan their lessons very skilfully, set a brisk pace, and use time well to achieve their aims, which are made clear to pupils at the outset. High expectations of pupils activate independent learning. Teachers employ a good range of strategies such as quick-fire, intensive questioning, case studies, group activities, research exercises and mini-presentations. Their very good subject knowledge and business experience underpin pupils' learning. Pupils work and communicate very well in groups, using good problem-solving skills to arrive at accurate solutions, for example, by correcting a faulty website file for a business advertising its goods on the Internet. Concentration usually spans the entire lesson. Pupils have a good insight into the progress they are making towards their target grades. Their numerical skills are good and they use calculators appropriately. Homework tasks broaden and deepen pupils' knowledge and help them to practise skills, for example, through customer surveying and interviewing key personnel in business organisations. Pupils have very good opportunities to practise the full range of communication, number, and ICT skills in their study of business communication, finance and marketing. The quality of teachers' assessment is very high. Pupils receive very detailed, oral, and written comments about their work, though fewer about punctuation, spelling and occasional grammatical errors.

209. Relationships are very good. They encourage productive discussion in lessons. Teachers know the pupils very well and use this good knowledge of them and of their prior attainment to set achievable targets. Pupils' attitudes are very positive. Work experience in Years 10 and 11 consolidates pupils' business knowledge by providing an authentic vocational setting.

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

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	21	76		43		2.71	
Statistics	12	58		17		1.42	
Chemistry	26	89		31		2	
Biology	40	63		18		1.78	
Physics	15	80		20		1.40	
Design technology	12	92		17		2.33	
Computing	22	31		9		0.91	
Sport and physical education	28	43		11		1.04	
Media studies	27	100		48		3.44	
Music	6	83		83		3.50	
Dance	1	100		0		2.00	
Drama/theatre studies	5	100		60		3.40	
Geography	11	82		18		2.09	
History	4	100		25		2.75	
Law	38	87		24		2.21	
Psychology	54	70		7		1.54	
Sociology	60	89		27		2.52	
English language	15	100		27		2.53	
English literature	5	100		0		2.00	
English language and literature	31	94		29		1.81	
French	5	40		0		0.80	
German	1	100		0		1.00	
Urdu	11	100		100		4.73	

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	14	93		57		6.86	
Chemistry	25	100		28		5.68	
Biology	43	93		21		4.84	
Physics	5	100		20		4.40	
Design technology	7	100		0		3.71	
Business education	15	93		13		3.73	
Information and communication technology	9	78		11		3.33	
Computer studies	5	100		0		3.20	
Sport and physical education	11	100		64		6.73	
Health and social care	17	88		0		3.06	
Art	5	100		60		7.20	
Music	13	100		23		4.77	
Dance	6	100		17		5.33	
Drama/theatre studies	11	100		64		7.64	
Media studies	28	100		39		6.57	
Geography	6	100		0		4.67	
History	2	50		0		2.00	
Law	28	86		14		4.29	
Psychology	30	93		23		5.27	
Sociology	40	95		30		4.95	
English language	15	100		33		5.07	
English literature	5	100		20		4.80	
English language and literature	19	100		26		5.37	
French	2	50		50		4.00	
German	1	100		0		6.00	
Urdu	1	100		100		8.00	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

210. The main focus was on mathematics, biology and chemistry but further mathematics, statistics and physics were also sampled. In further mathematics, very good teaching and students' enthusiasm result in above average standards of attainment. In statistics, standards are average. Students make good progress in physics because teaching is good and experimental work is well planned. A2-level examination results in physics in 2001 were average; all students were successful in gaining A-E grades in 2002.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Teachers have a thorough command of subject knowledge.
- Relationships between teachers and students are good.
- Standards are rising.

Areas for improvement

- Students could be more involved in discussion during the class focus part of some lessons.
- ICT could be used to a greater extent to enrich and support learning.
- Learning could be promoted further by adopting a more rigorous approach to the structuring and presentation of notes and solutions.

211. In 2001, A2-level results were below the national average although students achieved well and gained results that were higher than predicted by their prior performance in GCSE examinations. AS results were low because a high proportion of students did not obtain a grade. This resulted in about one-third of students terminating their study of mathematics at the end of Year 12. There was a significant improvement in AS and A2-level results in 2002. The good improvement is reflected in the significant increase in students' average point score that was the equivalent of a grade higher in both examinations. At A2-level, more than half of the students achieved grades A or B. The examination results of male and female students have been broadly similar over the last four years. Retention rates are satisfactory and improving.

212. Standards of work are average in Year 13. Although the full range of attainment was observed, work is mainly at the grade B/C levels. This is partly because the introduction of an alternative AS and A-level course in statistics has resulted in an increase in the overall ability profile of students in the mathematics groups. Work is sufficiently rigorous to challenge students with the potential to attain the highest grades and similar standards are achieved in each of the modules. In general, prior learning has provided a sound basis for work at this level. The most able students learn with good understanding and confidently apply their prior learning to the development of new knowledge and skills. However, except for the higher attainers, students in Year 12 lack confidence in applying their pure mathematics to work in the mechanics module. For example, when working on vectors they do not readily use surds and rationalisation to simplify the evaluation of trigonometrical ratios. Overall, students demonstrate that they have adequate manipulative skills in algebra to meet the requirements of the course. The quality of students' written exercises shows that most are achieving well. However, written work often lacks structure and rigour and, particularly for weaker students, does not help in establishing the necessary routines for presenting solutions. The quality of students' notes, though sometimes good, varies. Few students annotate their notes to suit their individual learning needs.

213. Teaching and learning are good, overall. Two particular strengths characterise all lessons, the subject command of the teachers and the very good relationships that have been established between

teachers and students. In the best lessons, the teacher's subject expertise is reflected in the skilful choice of questions that illuminate understanding and isolate misconceptions. For example, in a good lesson introducing students to integration by partial fractions, the teacher's careful selection of a range of analogous structures from arithmetic and algebra was effective and ensured students' understanding. The result was a good balance between the consolidation of prior knowledge and acquisition of new knowledge and skills. In less successful, but nevertheless satisfactory, lessons there is too much talk by teachers and insufficient involvement of the students during explanations. Teachers compensate by giving effective tuition on an individual basis but opportunities are lost to share and discuss ideas. There is little variety in teaching methods and the potential for using ICT to enrich and support learning is not fully utilised. Nevertheless, students are very well focused. They explain their work with good levels of articulation when involved in discussion.

214. Students' work is regularly marked and assessed. In most instances, there is detailed analysis and correction of inaccuracies, with supporting comments and guidance on what action is required to bring about improvements. Although there is a lack of consistency in the grading of work students feel they are well informed about their progress and how they stand in relation to their target grades. Students invariably display positive, studious and mature attitudes to their work. Very good relationships between students and teachers are characterised by mutual respect. Students find teachers approachable and are particularly appreciative of their availability to give extra help when required. A significant strength of this feature is that students feel they can approach any mathematics teacher for academic help, not just those responsible for their lessons.

CHEMISTRY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is consistently good.
- AS and A2-level examination results are improving.
- Working relationships between staff and students are very good.
- Procedures for assessing students' work are good.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough provision for the use of ICT in lessons.
- The monitoring of teaching and learning could be more effective.

215. Results at AS level in 2001 were below the national average but improved considerably in 2002. At A2-level, results were average in 2001. They too improved in 2002. Retention rates in both AS and A2 courses are good; most students complete their courses. Currently, standards of work are average in both Years 12 and 13. These are achieved as a result of consistently good teaching coupled with students' very positive attitudes. Taking into account the examination results and current standards of work, achievement in chemistry is good overall.

216. Students make a good start to the study of the subject in Year 12. They tackle new complex concepts and theories well. For example, in physical chemistry, they have a good understanding of Hess's Law. They use their understanding of it well to calculate the theoretical energy evolved by reactions that do not occur directly in nature. By Year 13, students are making good progress in their knowledge and understanding of inorganic, physical and organic chemistry. For instance, they write accurately the half-equations that describe various redox systems and hence determine which ions are being reduced or oxidised. Their practical and investigative skills are improving, such as was demonstrated by the accuracy of results when students worked on titrations.

217. Teaching and learning are good. Scrutiny of students' work confirms this judgement. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject and their clear explanations of concepts

help students to learn better. Working relationships between teachers and students are good, which result in students' improving standards. For example, whilst students were working independently on energy calculations the teacher was able to give useful advice and hints to lower attaining students in the group. This enhanced their understanding of the topic and enabled them to make better progress. The main weakness in teaching is that it seldom, if ever, uses ICT to support and extend students' learning in chemistry. As a result, independent learning is more restricted than it might be.

218. Students display a mature attitude towards their work. They have very positive views of chemistry and value the extra help they receive outside the laboratory situation when they find parts of the course difficult. Teamwork within the department is good. It supports the sharing of successful practices. However, there is no formal monitoring of teaching and learning within the subject that would serve to further raise standards. Assessment of students' work is good and contributes well to the standards achieved. Improvement since the previous inspection is good; in particular, examination results are on an upward trend. The department should strive to ensure that students experience ICT in their chemistry lessons.

BIOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and facilitates learning.
- Small group sizes enable students to share ideas and help each other.
- Students are well motivated.
- Working relationships between staff and students are good.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT needs to be developed.
- Independent learning skills are not sufficiently well developed.
- Some larger resources need to be replaced.
- There is not enough technical support to enable students to experience as much practical work as they should to support theoretical work.

219. The A2-level results in 2001 were above average. More females than males achieved higher grades. The proportion of higher grades was lower in 2002 but the overall pass rate was comparable. The AS results in 2002 were not as good as those for 2001. Results were affected by staffing problems, which have now been resolved. Retention rates in biology are good.

220. Evidence from the inspection indicates that standards of work are above average in Year 13. These are achieved through good teaching and because the students are highly motivated. There is no significant difference between the achievement of male and female students. Students in Year 13 make good progress in lessons and are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results. They are good at data handling and can explain why statistical analysis of data is necessary. Although no practical work was seen during the inspection, evidence from written work indicates competence in this area, particularly in ecology. Students have a clear understanding of the topics of photosynthesis and respiration and can satisfactorily describe the various stages of each. Work in the folders of students in Year 12 shows that they are successfully building on prior learning at GCSE.

221. Teaching in biology is good, which enables students to learn well. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They give clear explanations of facts and extend students' confidence. The aims of lessons are clearly stated so students know exactly what they are expected to learn. Reviews at the end of each lesson help to consolidate learning. Students are encouraged to share ideas and help each other, which is helped by the relatively small group sizes, particularly in Year 13. Teachers' expectations are high; they

question students frequently during lessons to establish and reinforce knowledge and understanding. Pleasant working relationships between teachers and students during lessons encourage students to ask questions if they need to. Students' written work is marked thoroughly and appropriately annotated, giving clear guidance on areas for improvement, with good use of praise and encouragement. Assessment takes place through regular testing during and at the end of each module of work. Targets are regularly reviewed so that students are always aware of their progress. Homework is set and marked on a regular basis and is used to reinforce work covered in lessons, often comprising past examination questions. Additional homework is now set to make up for the recent reduction in curriculum time. Regular fieldwork takes place and is well used for coursework assessment. The use of ICT in lessons is underdeveloped due to limited resources. Consequently, students' independent learning skills are insufficiently developed.

222. Students learn well. For many, biology is a necessary element of their career aspirations, which further motivates them. They respond well in lessons and rise to challenges as shown during question and answer sessions. They are keen to contribute to class discussions. They work co-operatively together in lessons and share ideas in a mature and sensible way.

223. The department is well led and managed and high standards have been maintained for several years. There is a good team spirit within the department. Staff support each other and share information and expertise, meeting regularly to discuss departmental issues. There is a clear focus on direction and a commitment to the continued achievement of good examination results. General resources are good, but some of the larger equipment needs to be replaced. The department receives good technical support although it is insufficient in time allocation, and therefore students do not experience as much practical work as they should in order to reinforce their theoretical work. Overall improvement since the previous inspection is good.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

224. No focus subjects were observed in this area but design and technology was sampled. A2-level results in 2001 were average but declined in 2002. In contrast, AS results improved in comparison with 2001 when they were below average. Two lessons were observed during the inspection. Standards seen were generally higher than those indicated by the most recent examination results. Teaching is consistently good and motivates students well. The quality of students' practical assignments and work in their project files is good although final designs sometimes lack high level technical detail.

BUSINESS

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- The course provides a good work-related education.
- Students achieve well and develop very good research skills.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- Assessment procedures are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Some students' analytical skills need to be further developed so that more of them achieve the higher grades.
- ICT could be used to a greater extent.

225. In 2001, results for the advanced business vocational qualification were well below average. A combination of completely open access to Year 12 and severe staffing problems is judged to have been the cause. The results for 2002 were a considerable improvement on those for 2001. Standards of work in the current Years 12 and 13 are average, representing good achievement in view of students' below average attainment at the start of the course. Strengths lie in students' good business knowledge and understanding, their very good research skills and good use of ICT in coursework. Good work was seen in the management of human resources; for example, higher attaining students showed an analytical and critical approach to the way in which large retail organisations recruit, hire and train employees and interpret information about the labour market. The work of lower attaining students tends to be more descriptive; their use of English is not as good.

226. Learning is good overall. Students work hard and have good powers of concentration. They are clear about the progress they are making towards their target grades and are committed to improving their own performance. Students make their own notes, often without having to be told, carry out very good research into businesses and read around the subject. They listen closely in class and give articulate and well thought out answers. They retain knowledge well and show the ability to link work in one area to that in others. Theory is translated into practice; for example, students relate the management models learned in class to those encountered in retail and service organisations chosen for their own work experience or part-time jobs. Students' numerical skills are good and well used. A considerable number of students have English as an additional language. Their work is equal to that of other students of similar ability.

227. Teaching is good overall. Teachers plan their lessons well, set a brisk pace, constantly praise and encourage the students, and provide very good accompanying materials and assignments which are designed to make them accessible to students at all levels of attainment. One very good lesson centred on market research for the design of a new caravan to halt declining sales. The teacher engaged the students in a variety of activities: question and answer, video, discussion, groupwork, note-making and a conclusion with mini-presentations. The lesson presented exactly the right degree of challenge for a Year 12 group just beginning to study marketing and was clearly enjoyed by the students, who learned a great deal about market research tools such as questionnaires and surveys, and about samples and target audiences. Teachers have high expectations of students. They know them well and use their very good knowledge to set achievable targets. Students are provided with clear, detailed oral and written guidance for improving grades and raising standards. However, though teachers make useful reference to study skills, they need to give the development of students' literacy skills a higher profile in lesson planning. ICT should also be incorporated more into teaching and learning, as it is in business studies in the main school GCSE courses.

228. Leadership and management are very good overall and give clear educational direction. The department acts promptly to remedy issues that arise from the regular subject performance reviews. Monitoring of teaching and learning, assessment and homework is very effective. Resources are good. The department's links with retail have secured valuable work placements that give the business programmes an attractive and credible vocational context. The very good, positive student attitudes and the high level of caring and commitment shown by the teachers have created a very pleasant climate for learning. Students' attendance and retention are very good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

229. No focus subject was observed in this area. One Year 12 lesson in AVCE ICT was sampled. A significant minority of students did not take ICT as a GCSE examination course. Standards are below average. Students' attitudes are good and the teaching is satisfactory. In the most recent A2-level examination in computer studies, all students were successful in gaining grades A - E although none obtained the higher A-B grades. Results improved in comparison with 2001, when they were low and half the candidates failed to obtain a grade.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education was the focus subject for inspection. No other subjects are taught in this curriculum area.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Recent examination results are above average.
- Students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment.
- The quality of teaching is good.
- Students show a high level of commitment to their studies. They appreciate the individual support and guidance they receive.

Areas for improvement

- ICT is not used as extensively as it should be; its use is restricted due to lack of technical support.
- Lower attaining students do not read widely enough.
- Links between theory and practical work are not made explicit enough in the teaching of all parts of the course.

230. A2-level results were above the national average in 2001 and have been for a number of years. In 2002, results improved further with a high proportion of students gaining A or B grades. There was no significant difference in the results of males and females. Taking into account students' prior standards, they gained better results than expected and so achieved well. The 2001 AS results were above average but in 2002 they dipped significantly. This is because the students taking the course in 2002 were not well suited to it and they were accepted onto the course with very modest prior standards at GCSE. Almost all students completed the AS course but a significant number did not continue with the A2-level course. Students generally complete the courses on which they embark and retention rates are good.

231. Standards of work in the current Year 13 are average overall. They represent good achievement in relation to students' prior standards. Year 13 students offer well considered views on the historical, political and economic influences on sport in the United States of America. They readily draw on contemporary examples to explain their opinions. They are less confident in drawing on the work of academics to explain historical developments. In their written work, students write well-constructed essays and higher attaining students draw on a good range of source material in their work on the sociology of sport. In exercise physiology, students show a sound understanding of oxygen deficit and debt and they use numeracy skills appropriately to interpret graphs and make calculations.

232. Standards of work in Year 12 are above average. Students are achieving well. Average and higher attaining students link the theory to the practical work very well because much of the teaching gives the opportunity to do so. In students' personal exercise programmes, they draw on psychological theory to explain differences in motivation and performance. Lower attaining students describe differences in performance and explain why they might occur without reference to any background theory. Average and higher attaining students show that they have read widely to draw on the theory but this background reading is less evident among lower attaining students.

233. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers are very secure in their knowledge of the subject which helps them to explain difficult concepts clearly and produce useful supportive written material. A good range of teaching approaches is used in most, but not all, parts of the course. For example, students investigate the effects of different types of feedback on their own practical performance. This helps them to apply and understand the theory. Students' written work is marked carefully and useful guidance ensures that students know exactly how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve, especially in their coursework. Students appreciate this individual attention and support. They apply themselves very well to the course. They readily enter class discussions and most prepare coursework and assignments conscientiously. ICT is used effectively in parts of the course to present classwork clearly and to support the analysis of performance. However, the lack of a technical

support in one lesson meant that the teacher had to spend too much time getting equipment to function rather than on supporting students' learning. Opportunities are missed to use ICT to support learning in all parts of the course.

234. The course is well led and managed. There are regular checks on the standards students achieve and the quality of the teaching. These form the basis of self-evaluation and help to give a clear guide to the development of the subject. There are few opportunities for colleagues to share best practice in teaching and learning at this level. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good, which facilitates learning.
- Staff are widely experienced.
- Small group sizes enable students to work together and share ideas.
- Assessment, target setting and monitoring are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The department could focus more on improving performance in the examined units of work.
- Larger resources need to be replaced.

235. The results for advanced health and social care were above average in 2001. All students achieved a pass, 78 percent gained a merit. There were, however, no distinctions. In 2002, under the dual award system, 17 of the 19 students achieved passes ranging from C to E grades. Retention rates are very good.

236. Evidence from the inspection indicates that standards of work are above average in both Years 12 and 13. Students are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results. Year 13 students have a good understanding of the theories of early years' educators such as Montessori and Froebel. They applied these well to the design of a book corner for a nursery. Other students designed a questionnaire for use with a diabetic patient showing appropriate sensitivity when needing to ask questions of a personal nature. Students in Year 12 approached a discussion on the topic of equal opportunities in a mature and sensible manner. They discriminated between legal and civil rights, giving good examples of both. The written work of both years is well presented and shows competence in the use of ICT skills.

237. Teaching in health and social care is good, so the students learn well. The staff have a wide and varied experience between them and advise students well on their coursework assignments. They display an enthusiasm that is passed on to the students and helps to motivate them. The aims of lessons are clearly stated at the start so that students know exactly what they are to learn. Reviews at the end help to consolidate learning. Good working relationships between staff and students give students the confidence to ask for help when they need it. Teachers encourage class discussions and ensure that all students become involved. Students are encouraged to undertake personal research and make use of local facilities, such as hospitals and nurseries, to promote their independent learning skills. The department has very good links with external agencies; a group of students recently visited a local hospital and took part in a simulated operation. Outside speakers are a regular feature of lessons. All students do blocks of work-experience as well as a weekly half-day placement. These build up students' confidence in the practical aspects of the course. Marking of students' work is thorough and feedback sheets provided for coursework assignments give advice on how to improve grades. Each student has a personal tutor with whom he or she meets regularly to discuss progress and set targets. Booklets are provided to help students to monitor their own progress. They are asked to complete a questionnaire at the end of the course to provide feedback for the staff.

238. Students make good progress in lessons and learn well because of the good teaching and the range of opportunities available to them, and because they are highly motivated. They are responsive in lessons and interested in the various topics covered. They take a pride in their work as shown by their coursework assignments, which indicate that they explore a wide variety of avenues when undertaking their personal research work. Many of them wish to pursue a career in a caring profession and appreciate the relevance of the work. They work well together and help each other in a mature and sensible way, which is assisted by the small group sizes. Students are less successful in the examined units than they are in their coursework assessed units. This is affecting the overall final grades so some improvement needs to take place in this area.

239. Leadership and management of the department are very good and there is a commitment to raising standards further. High standards have been maintained for several years. There is a good team spirit amongst the staff. Monitoring takes place on a regular basis to ensure consistency of marking. The dedicated teaching room is well equipped with computers and the attractive displays are informative and support teaching and learning. However, some lessons are taught in another room some distance away. This has implications for learning as students do not have access to the computers that are necessary for this type of course. General resources are good but some of the larger equipment is becoming outdated and needs to be replaced.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

240. The focus was on music and art. Drama, dance and media studies were also sampled.

241. A2-level results in drama in 2001 were average. Results in 2002 were very significantly better. All candidates gained A-C grades. In the AS examination in 2001 all candidates obtained at least grade C. These results too improved in 2002; all students were successful and 60 per cent obtained A/B grades. During the inspection Year 13 and Year 12 drama lessons were observed. Standards in the lessons observed during the inspection were well above average. In Year 13 students responded well to dynamic teaching as they developed a piece on schizophrenia, appropriately using the improvise-rehearse-perform process. Teaching stressed key concepts in performance and this helped students to critically appraise and develop their work. Students clearly enjoy their work

242. AS results in dance in 2001 were above average. The entry in 2002 was too small to make comparisons. All candidates gained pass grades at A2-level in 2002. Students benefit from enthusiastic teaching, expert guidance and individual support. They are highly committed to the course and spend much time in out-of-lesson rehearsals. They have opportunities to visit dance performances and experience dance workshops. Currently there is no A2-level course but it is hoped that many current Year 12 students will continue to A Level.

243. In 2002, all students entered for AS and A2-level examinations in media studies were successful. Two lessons were sampled. Standards are average and students achieve well.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Visiting instrumental teachers make a strong contribution to the work of the department.
- The subject is well led and managed.
- Teaching is good.

Areas for improvement

- Not enough use is made of ICT.
- Attainment in some aspects of students' work could be improved, for example analysis.

244. AS results in music in 2001 were a little above the national average. Similar standards were attained in 2002. At A2-level in 2001, standards were average. They were not quite as good in 2002. They represented a decline from the students' attainment at AS level. Detailed analysis of the 2002 A2-level results revealed performing to be by far the strongest component. This is similar to the trend in results in GCSE where excellent results in performance are often found alongside nearer average attainment in the other components. This has a cumulative effect over time on A2 -level results. The department has identified historical analysis as a weak area and performance as a strength. Composition is variable. Strategies are required to combat this imbalance, starting at a much earlier stage.

245. Overall standards in Year 13 are average. Students achieve well from their starting point in Year 12. Standards in composition vary but are broadly near average. Compositions display some variety and reveal a developmental approach using a satisfactory harmonic vocabulary. Instrumental skills are used well in supporting composition. Standards in performance are often very high with students performing suitable music with fluency. Standards are more variable in aspects of writing. In comparison with performing, standards in aural analysis and appraisal are much more variable. In a Year 13 lesson on historical studies, students identified significant details of character portrayal in a recitative with some fluency in relation to texture and style. They found it harder to produce a written paragraph of analysis. It is in these aspects of extended analysis and aural appraisal that attainment is least good.

246. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Work is matched to students' abilities. Teaching embodies good preparation, apt pace and thorough organisation. Students are helped to consolidate their technical vocabulary; teaching re-enforces musical terms and language. This helps to improve students' ability to apply appropriate language to the analysis of music. Students have opportunities to develop the most necessary musical skills. However, computer work is not used and this means that some student potential, particularly in the area of computer-generated composition, is left untapped. Teaching stresses the need to widen analytical thinking, though students sometimes tend to focus on the factual elements. Marking of students' work is mostly thorough and comments helpful; students have a realistic view of their standards and are pleased with what the courses offer.

247. Visiting instrumental teachers make a valued contribution to the curriculum. Their work is carefully managed and integrated into the work of the department. Instrumental teaching is very good and has considerable impact on standards of performance. As a result, many sixth form students perform music of considerable technical difficulty with high levels of competence. Students have the opportunity to take instrumental grade examinations on a variety of instruments and have good records of success. Students also take advantage of the wide range of extra-curricular activities open to them in music. In Years 12 and 13 they can take singing lessons in addition to instrumental lessons to help improve their aural skills.

248. The students currently on the courses are enthusiastic and diligent. They work with focus and respond well to challenging work. They enjoy good relationships with their teachers and are appreciative of the help and advice that is given. Their response to all elements of the course is positive and they show high levels of commitment. They have a mature approach to learning and are hard working. Overall the subject has good retention rates.

249. There is good awareness of students' potential. The long-term monitoring, assessment and recording of students' work are satisfactory and students are usually aware of what areas they need to develop in order to attain the grades to which they aspire. The department has good instrumental stocks

but no appropriate computer resources. There are opportunities for students to take part in public concerts and solo performances are promoted. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

ART

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Only a small number of students take up art. This restricts opportunities for students to discuss and develop ideas with their peers.
- The retention rate is too low. Too many students do not complete their courses.

250. In 2001, numbers taking the A2-level examination were too small to reliably compare results with those gained nationally. All students taking the examination obtained pass grades, although none achieved the higher grades A and B. In 2002, results showed a significant improvement. In the AS examination, results were above average in 2001. The entry in 2002 was small; all candidates were successful. Numbers taking the subject are very small. Too many students who start their courses do not finish them so retention is unsatisfactory.

251. Standards of work of current students are below average. Their achievement is satisfactory taking into account their prior attainment. They make steady gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject. Their work in ceramics is well made, and shows a sound knowledge of coil building techniques. It is decorated imaginatively, with ideas based on natural forms, such as flower petals or snakes. Collage work is bright, and shows a growing willingness to explore pattern and colour. Above average students produce large-scale paintings, which use high tonal contrast to achieve striking results. They also draw competently, clearly expressing the tension seen in the human body in motion. Students' research, however, lacks depth, and their sketchbooks are rather unadventurous. In addition, the drawing of lower attaining students lacks confidence and fluency, particularly when pencil is used.

252. Teaching and learning in lessons are good. Strengths include the very good teacher-student relationships, and the clear demonstrations, which are often used at the start of lessons. For example, in a lesson exploring the use of chalk pastels, the teacher showed students how to blend the colours, and create patterns and textures by cross-hatching or stippling. Students listened and watched intently, and tried hard to follow the teachers' lead. As a result, they made good gains in their media handling skills, and learning was good. However, there is not always enough variety in materials and scales used to raise interest and engagement above a level that is good.

253. Students' attitudes are very good, and they respond well to the good teaching they receive in their lessons. However, in Year 13 they receive less taught time than is usually found for advanced level study. In Year 12, they are taught on only one day a week, and this restricts the ability of teachers to provide enough feedback or monitor individual progress closely enough. The very small numbers also restrict the opportunities for students to discuss their work among themselves, and learn from each other. These factors, taken together, are the major reasons why students' achievement is no better than satisfactory, in spite of the good teaching that they receive.

254. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Teaching and learning are now consistently good. Steps have recently been taken to raise the profile of the subject in the school, although more time is needed for the effect to be seen on standards and numbers of students taking the subject.

HUMANITIES

255. Geography, sociology and psychology were the focus subjects. History and law were also sampled. Numbers of students choosing to follow the A2-level history courses have been small. In 2001 and 2002 results were mixed. In the same years, all the candidates taking AS examinations were successful, although few obtained the higher grades A and B. Only two students are currently following the A2-level course. The AS course is taught by staff from a local college of further education. Two law lessons were observed. A2-level examination results in 2001 were above average. Results were similar overall in 2002 although there was a smaller proportion of higher level grades. Good teaching was observed, providing students with comprehensive and up-to-date coverage of the English legal system. Learning was good because students responded to the clear and accessible style of each lesson.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Field studies contribute effectively to students' learning.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and experience.
- The subject contributes well to the development of numerical skills.

Areas for improvement

- Some lessons rely too heavily on duplicated notes.
- Weaknesses in students' written work are not sufficiently challenged by teachers' marking.

256. Results in AS and A2-level examinations in 2001 were below average. There was an improvement in 2002 when all students obtained a pass grade at advanced level. Most students complete their courses. Retention rates are satisfactory. Only two lessons were sampled during the inspection because of staff absence, but in both lessons standards were judged to be average and better than those reflected in the previous examination results. In relation to their GCSE grades, students' achievement is satisfactory.

257. Students on the AS course demonstrate satisfactory knowledge and understanding of physical processes. For example, they apply their knowledge of factors that cause glaciers to advance or retreat to explain changes to a valley glacier in the Alps and to identify the impact on settlements in the valley. Students in Year 13 demonstrate sound levels of understanding of river processes based on well-planned field studies. Higher attaining students offer explanations for anomalies in their data, making perceptive links between theory and practical work. They make effective use of statistical techniques to analyse data they have collected, for example to correlate the size and roundness of the bed load with distance downstream. The subject, in its preparation of students for the practical paper, makes a good contribution to the development of numeracy skills. The quality of students' written work is less secure. Written answers often lack detailed analysis and exemplification. Lower attaining students do not make close reference to data provided so that their answers are too general.

258. Teaching and learning are satisfactory with good features. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject so that explanations are clear and students are well guided in their preparation for examinations. Relationships in the classroom are good; teachers are approachable and generous with the time and support offered to individuals. In a well-planned lesson on the effects of glaciation, students worked well in pairs to discuss the information provided and to share ideas, which helped them to develop more fully their responses to the task. Students are encouraged to research and read around topics covered in lessons, so that they develop a degree of independence in their learning. They make effective

use of the Internet to find up-to-date information and their learning is enriched by well-planned field studies and visits. Some lessons rely too heavily on the use of duplicated notes, so that students' study skills are less well developed. There are inconsistencies in the regularity and quality of the marking of students' work. Some comments by teachers are perceptive and helpful in showing students how to improve. However, weaknesses in students' written work, such as the lack of detail, the use of examples and annotated diagrams, are not adequately challenged in some marking.

259. The well-devised faculty initiatives to improve the monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department are too recent to have an impact on standards. Instability of staffing has contributed to a lack of consistency in the current provision and has made it difficult to raise standards in geography. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

SOCIOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Homework promotes distance and independent learning.
- Teachers provide good guidance and support that enhances students' learning.

Areas for improvement

- Some students could participate more in discussion.
- The quality of some students' writing could be improved with respect to the application of grammatical skills.

260. Standards of work are above average in Year 13. They are the result of good teaching and students' positive attitudes. Students' achievement in relation to standards on entry to Year 12 is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and provide explanations that are clear, accurate and at the right level for most learners. However, work is not always suitably adapted for lower attaining students. For example, teachers could provide more explanations of the technical language to aid understanding. All students are encouraged to be actively engaged in their learning through practical research, problem solving, investigations and through the application of knowledge in case studies. Retention rates are very good.

261. A2-level results in 2002 were an improvement on those of 2001 when results were below average. AS results were above average in 2001 and similar in 2002. A large number of students took the AS examination in 2002. Students gain some of their highest grades in sociology examinations.

262. Students write critical, rigorous and analytical studies of sociological ideas. The higher attainers produce more accurate work than lower attainers and their work contains fewer grammatical errors. All learners are developing a set of transferable intellectual skills such as comprehension, interpretation analysis and argument. Students are being introduced to relevant concepts, theories and methods in sociology. They satisfactorily learn how to contribute to logical and coherent argument. These skills are being used to demonstrate understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in society. Most students understand that there is a variety of theoretical approaches to measuring sociological facts. The higher attaining students can account for the divergence and the commonality between theories that emphasise structure and action.

263. Teaching and learning are good. The teachers of sociology project high expectations of writing and research. High standards of effort, accuracy, presentation and thinking are encouraged. These are the key skills taught by teachers as being most relevant to sociological studies. The use of electronic media is good. Its use provokes deeper understanding amongst most students. The higher attainers produce some determined and unexpected but original contributions, both in writing and in argument, from

their Internet research. All students, at all levels of ability, are challenged and inspired to make imaginative contributions and to take on further research via the Internet to add to their knowledge. The work provided in the lessons observed was challenging and rewarding. Teachers asked penetrating questions. These probed for understanding and encouraged students to show how they arrived at their answers. Students quickly learn that the study of society is a complex matter. A few students rely too much on their teachers' notes to get by. Students are encouraged to be actively engaged in their learning through research work and applying knowledge to sociological problems.

264. Leadership and management are very good. A variety of strategies is used to monitor the quality of students' learning in the classroom. Planning is good and teachers' high expectations are communicated to students. These arrangements are effective in promoting good standards. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

PSYCHOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- Good use of research techniques develops students' independent learning.
- Students' work is well marked, providing them with good information about their progress.

Areas for improvement

- Assignments of work could be matched more closely to students' individual abilities.

265. A2-level examination results in 2001 were above average. Results were similar in 2002 although there were fewer of the higher grades A and B. Females significantly outperformed males. Some of the highest grades were achieved by students who, on the basis of GCSE grades, were predicted to achieve lower grades. A majority of students in 2001 gained their highest 'A' level grade in psychology. Fewer did so in 2002.

266. Standards of work in Year 13 are above average. Students achieve well in relation to their attainment at the beginning of the course. Students' ultimate knowledge of psychology causes the quality of their learning to be good. For example, students know that the advantage of using field studies is that findings can be generalised to other real-life settings. Retention rates are good. Standards are average in Year 12 because students have a wide range of literacy and numeracy skills. The majority of students, but particularly females, make effective use of relevant terminology, concepts and computing methods to select up-to-date information in their research. The highest attaining students are fully aware of the significance of dependent and independent variables. Students are gaining a good understanding of the moral, social and ethical issues that influence and sometimes govern modern research activities. Students have a good awareness of psychology theory and practice in their everyday life. The significance of family is part of that awareness; the influence that security has on their well-being is one example of that acute perception. Students recognise, for example, that abnormal behaviour is statistically infrequent and that some people believe that abnormal behaviour threatens social norms. Students satisfactorily undertake inferential testing. Higher attaining students quickly see the value of a case study approach to psychology as it develops their ability to seek and verify evidence. Most students value the use of electronic data sources to gather information. They use case studies, stimulus materials, textbooks and well-prepared notes from the teacher to enhance their writing and ensure factually accurate statements. Self-motivation and discipline are good. Clear, constructive guidance from the teacher is a contributory factor to the good standards achieved.

267. The quality of teaching and learning is good. There is a good awareness of the necessity for students to develop as independent learners. However, the work provided does not always match

students' varied abilities. Teachers provide ideas for investigation but leave students scope to work them through for themselves. The use of ICT is effectively promoted. Students with exceptional ability demonstrate their talents by using initiative in their research work. Much of their writing has depth. Teachers give extra support to lower attaining students where appropriate. Staff meets on a regular basis to discuss teaching strategies and students' progress with other social science teachers. Changes are made to methods as and when necessary.

268. Leadership and management are good. There is a good awareness of developments taking place in psychology. Planning is effective. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Students are now more actively encouraged to study outside class time and to utilise a wide range of psychology resources including the Internet. A great deal of time is spent helping students prepare for examinations. This subject makes a good contribution to students' social and moral education.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

269. The focus was on English language and French. English literature, English language and literature, German and Urdu were also sampled. Standards of attainment in both English literature and the combined language and literature AS-level courses are broadly average. The quality of teaching in all courses is good, and students achieve well. German and Spanish are normally offered in alternate years. Almost all candidates were successful in obtaining a grade in A2-level examinations in 2001 and 2002. One Year 12 was observed in German. Teaching and learning are very good, though only four of the original seven students are still studying the subject. The quality of provision in Urdu is good. Standards are well above average as a result of good teaching. In 2002, all students were successful in gaining grades A-C at AS and A2-level.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving.
- Students are well motivated towards their learning.
- Teaching is good.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not support their learning with sufficient wider reading.
- The assessment system is not fully effective in supporting students' progress.

270. GCE AS and A2 courses are offered in English language, English literature, and in English language and literature combined. Retention rates in all courses are satisfactory. Observation during the inspection focused on English language.

271. Results in AS and A2-level examinations in 2001 across all courses in English were below average although almost all students were awarded a pass grade. Approximately twice as many female students as male students take the courses. In 2002, all students gained a grade in the A2-level English language examination and significantly more obtained A grades than in the previous year.

272. In Year 13, students' achievement in the English language course is good in comparison with their prior attainment. Almost all obtained pass grades in the AS examination, although few gained higher grade passes. Standards of attainment in work observed during the inspection were close to average. Students currently taking the course are better informed than previously about its requirements, and are

more realistic about the appropriateness of their choices. Students in Year 13 have secure analytical skills; they understand the evolutionary nature of language and can compare archaic usage with contemporary expressions. They recognise implications of social status and regional variations, and understand the nature of language acquisition in children. Most students show very good understanding of the developmental process whereby children adapt language to different social situations. However, much of their writing is highly dependent on recommended sources, with little evidence of wider research, and conclusions tend to be predictable. Work by students of higher ability has a sharp critical edge. Less able students occasionally misunderstand passages of text and fail to observe nuances which indicate social status or gender differences. Students in Year 12, in original diary writing, convincingly portrayed the background, gender and ethnic origins of their chosen personality, by using appropriate language and turns of phrase. When given the opportunity to comment on different uses of language, students are prepared to justify and defend their opinions.

273. With the exception of the most able, students' work is marred by inconsistencies in literary style; there are frequent instances of misrelated constructions, the variety of connective devices is limited, and colloquialisms and speech idioms intrude into formal writing. In order to develop a more succinct style students need to use dictionaries and thesauruses more frequently.

274. Students who speak English as their second language achieve equally well. Almost all are at an advanced stage of language acquisition and express themselves fluently, both orally and in writing.

275. The quality of teaching and learning in English is good, and has a number of very good and occasionally excellent features. Teachers are knowledgeable and well prepared, providing very good examples of commitment and scholarship. In a lesson with a Year 12 class, students were shown well how to punctuate their work more precisely, in order to communicate their ideas more effectively. Relationships are very good, students' strengths and weaknesses are well known and expectations are high. Teachers are authoritative and enthusiastic, and encourage students to share observations, and express and discuss opinions. Probing questioning ensures that students scrutinise text closely and extract evidence to support their observations. Where teaching is good or better, pace is lively, tasks are varied and students are encouraged to pursue an independent line of thinking. Occasionally too much time is allocated to a single activity, and pace is lost.

276. Students feel well supported by members of staff, and appreciate their accessibility and willingness to discuss their work. They consider that they are well informed about their progress and know how they can improve further. Although some had found the AS course in English language difficult to relate to, almost all had found the A2-level course satisfying both in personal and academic terms. Few, however, read widely to increase their understanding of the subject.

277. Students' work is thoroughly marked. Extended pieces are annotated with constructive comments and followed by a critique providing helpful guidelines for the further refinement of personal style. Targets are set for all students and there are regular opportunities to discuss progress on an individual basis; however, teachers do not have enough information about students' prior attainment to be sure that their achievement is satisfactory.

278. Staff meet regularly to share ideas in an informal manner, and formal observations of teaching take place in line with the practices of performance management. New staff are well supported. The range and relevance of courses are reviewed regularly to ensure they continue to meet students' needs.

279. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Standards of attainment are improving and the already good quality of teaching has improved further. The department should continue with its efforts to increase the numbers of students attaining higher grade passes.

FRENCH

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

Strengths

- Good teaching leads to good gains in subject knowledge and understanding
- Students work well independently, using the Internet and satellite TV where appropriate.
- Students benefit from the international dimension of the Language College.

Areas for improvement

- The school needs to attract more students to its sixth form language courses.

280. The results in the A2-level in 2001 were from a much larger group than had taken the examination in the recent past. A third of the students obtained grade C, the highest grade gained, but others were less successful. Overall the results were well below average. Female students did better than male students. In 2002, the number of students was too small to make comparison of results realistic. AS results in 2001 and 2002 were mixed, ranging from grade A to unclassified.

281. The number of students on the A2-level course in Year 13 is small. Standards of work are average overall and achievement is satisfactory. Much is demanded of students and they work at a brisk pace. Scrutiny of work shows sophisticated use of the Internet to access French sources relevant to topics set for A-level. Good use is made in school of satellite TV, for example to watch TV news from France.

282. Students in the current Year 12 include several who are specialists in other disciplines. Some are of British Asian background. Overall, their attainment is broadly average and almost all are achieving as would be expected according to their GCSE scores. They respond well to the good French of the teachers ; reading aloud in a group situation is a good developmental experience for them. Students showed themselves capable of receiving complex statistical information in audio form, which required them to spot the errors. A very good feature of the course is the existence of Internet links to the publisher's website, which allows able students to move further ahead. It is reported that male students do so more readily than female students, and that Asian students do so more readily than students of a European background.

283. Teaching and learning are good overall and sometimes very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and experience. Good planning and an awareness of what needs to be achieved lead to a brisk pace of learning, and students are made well aware of their need to work independently. Contact with a French *assistante* is a worthwhile extension of teaching. However, students also need the stimulus of the presence of other learners; in Year 13 small numbers sometimes adversely affect the quality of learning.

284. The atmosphere of the language college is a bonus for sixth form students, all the more so for those who lack the confidence to take up opportunities of work experience abroad. They do have the opportunity to take part in major events within school such as the International Festival held in summer or the Winter Festival, a genuinely multicultural event. Students say they are attracted to the sixth form by the language college status of the school. All this has come about because of outstanding leadership and management, which is now formulating a vision for the next four years.

285. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory. Students now work more independently especially in their use of the Internet. Strategies are being developed which it is hoped could increase student numbers. They have risen in Year 12 but fallen back in Year 13, against a national background of declining uptake.

