

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **ROCHESTER GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**

Rochester

LEA area: Medway

Unique reference number: 118917

Headteacher: D Shepherd

Lead inspector: William Goodall

Dates of inspection: 17<sup>th</sup>- 20<sup>th</sup> November 2003

Inspection number: 259327

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school: Grammar (selective)  
School category: Foundation  
Age range of pupils: 11-18  
Gender of pupils: Female  
Number on roll: 982

School address: Maidstone Road  
Rochester  
Postcode: ME1 3BY  
Telephone number: (01634) 843 049  
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Appropriate authority: The governing body  
Name of chair of governors: Mr P Martin

Date of previous inspection: 20<sup>th</sup> October 1997

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

Rochester Grammar School for Girls is a selective school of 982 pupils aged 11 to 18. There are 245 students in the sixth form. The school serves the Medway area and takes its pupils from a large number of primary schools, selected by examination and interview from the top 25 per cent. The school has been identified as a Beacon School. The socio-economic circumstances of the pupils are around the national average. The percentage of pupils eligible for free school meals is low and very few are identified as having special educational needs. The percentage from ethnic minority backgrounds is average, but very few do not have English as their main family language.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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24453	G Jackson	Team inspector	Science, Physics
19983	H Webb	Team inspector	Information and communication technology, Chemistry
20324	V Morris	Team inspector	Geography, Business studies
30216	A Elliott	Team inspector	History
8159	K Wright	Team inspector	Art and design
30072	J Skivington	Team inspector	Music, sociology
15163	E Deeson	Team inspector	Design and technology, Biology
27226	R Cribb	Team inspector	Physical education
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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a **highly effective school with many outstanding features**. It has made significant improvements in many areas since the previous inspection. The new headteacher provides excellent leadership, supported by very good leadership and management from governors and other staff. She has introduced steady, but significant, changes to a traditional grammar school, maintaining and enhancing the outstanding ethos for learning. Standards have improved, results in both GCSE and AS/A-level examinations were amongst the top five per cent in the country in 2002. This represents considerable achievement for pupils selected from the top 25 per cent in the area. Teaching is very good and often excellent and the pupils' enthusiasm and application support their learning greatly. The sixth form is an outstanding example of the way that older students can support the younger pupils through their example and presence around the school. With average income and outstanding results the school provides **excellent value for money**.

#### The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- excellent leadership by the new headteacher;
- excellent standards are achieved by the pupils who progress rapidly during their time in the school;
- exemplary attitudes and behaviour which support the pupils' learning;
- excellent links with other schools and the local education authority;
- very good teaching overall with some outstanding practice; and
- a well devised and broad curriculum with extensive opportunities for enrichment.

Since the last inspection in 1997 the school has made very significant improvement. All the issues raised have been clearly addressed. Since then the school's effectiveness has improved from good to very good with many outstanding features. The already high standards of achievement have improved further. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour are now excellent, rather than very good and the standards of teaching have improved greatly. In nearly two thirds of the lessons seen the teaching was very good and excellent.

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A*	A*	A*	A
Year 13	A/AS-level and VCE examinations	N/A	A	A	

Key: A\* - very high; A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average.

For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.

Standards by the end of Year 9 have consistently been **extremely high** in national terms and in 2002 were an improvement on those expected from the pupils' previous attainment. They maintained these levels in 2003. English scores in the national tests at the age of 14 were particularly high compared to similar schools. Given their attainment on entry to the school, which is high, but not exceptional, this represents **very good** achievement. Similarly, the GCSE results have been consistently in the top five per cent in the country and the points scores, calculated from the best eight grades, were **well above** those seen in similar schools in 2002. The standards that were seen in lessons and in folders were not quite that high, but it is early in the year and the pupils clearly revise very well and prepare thoroughly for the examinations that are to come later. The pupils have maintained their improvement through from the age of 14, so by the age of 16 their achievement is judged to be **excellent**. In the sixth form the standards remain **well above** the national averages. In those subjects inspected, standards and achievement continue to be very high.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are both **excellent**. Pupils' attendance is **very good**. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**. Pupils develop very mature attitudes, a strong desire to learn and a love of knowledge. There is exemplary behaviour in all aspects of school life and excellent involvement in the life of the school and the wider community right through to the sixth form. Relationships are exceptionally good and the pupils give excellent support to one another.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is **very good**. Teaching is **very good, with many excellent examples**. It is characterised by very high expectations and the pupils respond very positively. There is an excellent ethos for learning. There are extensive opportunities in the curriculum for the 11 to 14 year-olds, with some for accelerated learning. There is then a very wide choice of GCSE and AS/A-level courses and extra subjects for those who can cope. Extra curricular provision is excellent. Care, guidance and support of the pupils are very good; they feel secure and able to ask for support if they need it. The school's links with others as a Beacon School and through collaborative sixth form arrangements are extremely positive.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **very good**. The headteacher provides **excellent** leadership and is well supported by a strong senior and middle management team. They are maintaining the high standards and introducing gradual improvements through, for example, the lead learning groups and the learning skills seminar. The governing body is **very effective**; it is closely involved in strategic planning and in monitoring. The administrative and support services make a very strong contribution to the smooth running of the school and its ethos.

## PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents have **very positive** views of the school. These were reflected in the questionnaire that a very large number returned and in their comments at the parents' meeting. There were no real areas of concern. Pupils' views were similarly **positive**, although several believed that their views could be listened to more, which the school is starting to do. On one question about behaviour, a lot of pupils made comments about a few incidents, all of which had been resolved satisfactorily in the past.

## IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The school continues to seek ways to improve and is not resting on its laurels. A few relatively weaker areas were discussed with the school, such as provision for SEN pupils and the seeking of parents' views, but provision for all of these was at least satisfactory and often good. There are no major issues raised in the inspection that need to be addressed.

THE SIXTH FORM AT ROCHESTER GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS
The sixth form of 245 students is relatively large. All follow GCE AS and A-level courses. There is a recent collaborative arrangement with local sixth forms.

## OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is **excellent** and it provides **very good value for money**. Standards in the sixth form are very good. They were well above the national averages for other AS and A-level students in 2002. Achievement in the sixth form is overall very good and the improvement in average points scores since the previous inspection has been good. Teaching and learning are very good. As a Beacon School the sixth form work is shared extensively with other schools and has developed its collaborative arrangements, such as the Learning Skills Seminars very well. The work is innovative and being used as a model in the authority and beyond. The school's introduction of a

directed independent self-study programme is an excellent example. The sixth formers provide excellent role models for the rest of the school.

**The main strengths and weaknesses are:**

- excellent attitudes and involvement of the students in the life of the school;
- an innovative, directed self-study programme;
- very high standards and achievement;
- very good teaching and learning which are often excellent; and
- very good leadership and management.

**QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM**

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. They 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	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English is <b>excellent</b> . Standards, achievement, teaching and learning are all excellent. Leadership and management are very good. Provision in French is <b>excellent</b> . It is a very successful subject with increasing standards and numbers of students opting for it. Provision in Latin is <b>very good</b> . Standards are well above the national average in both AS and A-level examinations. Teaching and learning are very good.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is <b>excellent</b> . Results are consistently very high and teaching consistently very good.
Science	Provision in biology is <b>very good</b> . Standards are regularly very good and students make good progress. Teaching is very good. Provision for physics is <b>good</b> . Standards are good and the teaching is always at least satisfactory and often better. Provision in chemistry is <b>very good</b> . Standards are very good, as is teaching. Students achieve very well and make rapid progress.
Information and communication technology	ICT was not inspected as a subject, but the provision for it across the sixth form curriculum is <b>excellent</b> .
Humanities	Provision in history is <b>very good</b> . Standards are well above average and the students achieve very well. Provision in sociology is <b>good</b> . It is a new course and standards are satisfactory and teaching good. Provision in religious education is <b>excellent</b> . Students achieve very well.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision for art is <b>excellent</b> . Standards are very high and students have a very mature approach to the subject.
Business studies	Provision in business studies is <b>very good</b> . Standards are very high and there is a dynamic and rigorous learning environment that challenges the students.

*The curriculum areas are broadly common across all post-16 education and training. They do not necessarily correspond with subjects and courses taught by the school. Inspectors make judgements 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'.*

**ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

Despite recent problems with the post of the head of the sixth form, which has changed three times recently, the advice, support and guidance for the students are **very effective**. They have a comprehensive induction programme into the sixth form and a New Girl Officer is identified to give special attention to students from other schools. Tutors see the students daily and there is a very useful weekly pastoral period with a well-planned programme. The students' views are sought and discussed. The pilot scheme for the Medway Plus Certificate is an excellent example of how students can support themselves, the school and the wider community. Each subject has clear



procedures for formative assessment and the students set their own targets on a Learning Goal Sheet. They get very good support for their studies from experts. The careers advice focuses mainly on university entry. This year the head of careers is giving special attention to others, starting early in the year.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM**

Leadership and management in the sixth form are **very good**. The sixth form leadership has very clear vision for its development and this is strongly supported by the headteacher. Systematic planning has enabled the school to manage the development of sixth form programmes effectively, particularly new ventures like distance learning and independent study. The sixth form is currently providing very good value for money. The management of subjects taught in the sixth form is very good and this contributes to the high standards achieved.

Sixth formers are regularly consulted over matters that closely affect them. They are also strongly encouraged to play a full role in the life of the school. The school is rightfully proud of its Officer system, through which the senior students are involved in the running of many extra-curricular clubs. They work alongside teachers in a significant number of classes for younger pupils. This contributes to the respect that younger pupils show towards the sixth formers.

## **STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM**

The students who responded to the questionnaire and who were interviewed expressed **very strong support** for the school and their teachers. The school actively seeks the views of the students and it came as a surprise that some of the responses to the questionnaires raised concerns and these are being investigated and addressed. A quite large proportion expressed dissatisfaction with their advice on courses and careers and whether there was an adult in the school that knew them well. Part of this was to do with the phrasing of the questions and there were no significant problems raised by the students.

## PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

### Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards achieved in national tests and examinations at the age of 14 and 16 are **excellent**. Their achievement, judged by their progress from their attainment on entry to the school is also **excellent** overall. Standards in the sixth form are **very good**, as is achievement.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at 14 and 16 indicated by national tests and examinations are excellent.
- Achievement is also excellent overall.
- Standards and achievement in the sixth form are very good.
- This is supported by the excellent attitudes to learning by all pupils and the very good teaching.

### Commentary

1. Standards achieved in national tests and examinations at the age of 14 and 16 are excellent. They were in the top 5 per cent in the country at both ages in 2002, the latest year where national comparisons are available. These results were maintained in 2003. Attainment on entry to the school is high, but not exceptional. The average National Curriculum level for pupils arriving at the school in English, mathematics and science has been around 4.7 for the past five years, less than one level above that expected nationally. New value added indicators which calculate how well pupils are progressing from the age of 11 in English, mathematics and science suggest that they were doing significantly better than would be predicted from their primary school results or against any other measures by the age of 14. This is very good achievement, although in terms of prior attainment in 2002 the school data indicated attainment was in line with pupils in similar schools, with English coming out very well by comparison. Standards seen in many classes were not quite as high as test and examination results might indicate; this is due to the inspection taking place early in the year. The pupils are prepared very thoroughly for external tests and make rapid progress as they approach. Revision is very conscientiously carried out. Homework timetables are suspended and pupils use the time to revise. Parents and teachers say that sometimes they have to set limits on the time the pupils spend working at home. A key feature in the pupils' achievement is the ethos for learning in the school. Pupils bring enthusiasm and application to their lessons and take away a thirst for knowledge. They return having researched and completed work, ready for the next challenge. There is a subtle competitiveness, with pupils wanting to do well, but also supporting their friends and others so that they can also succeed.

#### **Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2002**

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	44 (43.6)	33.3 (33)
mathematics	45 (45)	34.7 (34.4)
science	41.9 (41.9)	33.3 (33.1)

*There were 138 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

2. By the age of 16, when GCSE examinations are taken, this progress was maintained in 2002, and the new value added measure was still positive. Overall standards are excellent compared to the national average and are now well above those of similar schools. Standards in 2002 were particularly high in languages, mathematics and geography. The achievement of pupils was excellent and the trends of improvement were better than the national ones. In 2003 these standards were maintained and the school's demanding targets were exceeded. Some pupils take GCSEs before Year 11 and their grades do not count in the overall statistics. This

eagerness to study and learn has continued and pupils are willing to take on other duties and responsibilities, preparing themselves well for their work in the sixth form. Almost all continue on to the sixth form.

- The pupils' overall language and literacy skills, their fluency in working with numbers, and grasp of the appropriate use of computers and communications are all excellent, and help them to progress quickly. The levels of achievement of those identified as particularly gifted and talented are also excellent, while the achievement of those with additional educational needs is similar to that of their peers.

#### **Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2002**

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	100(100)	49.9 (48.4)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	90.9 (90.9)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	55.3	39.8 (39)

*There were 136 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

Standards of attainment and levels of achievement have improved since the previous inspection in 1997. The trends in results are above the national average. Particularly noteworthy are:

- much higher levels of achievement overall;
- excellent GCSE results, particularly of the most talented pupils in design and technology at the end of Year 9; and
- the very high proportion of GCSE entries reaching the top grades.

#### **The sixth form**

- Standards in the sixth form are very good. They were well above the national averages for AS and A-level students in other schools in 2002. Average points scores are now based on the new university system and so historical comparisons are difficult. However there has been a steady improvement in results. Most GCSE pupils stay on to take the wide range of AS and A-level examinations offered. Although there are no vocational alternatives at the school, there are now collaborative arrangements with other schools.
- All sixth form students pass their examinations and a very high proportion gain the higher grades. In fact all A-level candidates reached top grades in 2002 in further mathematics, Latin and music (though numbers in all cases were small). In one or two subjects, such as theatre studies, results are not as high as in other subjects, but the present standards have picked up and are now very good. Achievement in the sixth form is overall very good and the improvement in average points scores since the previous inspection has been good. As in the main school, these outstanding outcomes result in part from the students' excellent skills in working with language, number and computers and also their very mature attitudes and hard work.

#### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are both **excellent**. Pupils' attendance is **very good**. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils develop very mature attitudes, a strong desire to learn and a love of knowledge.
  - Exemplary behaviour in all aspects of life in the school.
  - Both attendance and punctuality in all year groups are very good.
  - Excellent involvement of pupils in the life of the school and in the wider community.
  - Relationships are exceptionally good and pupils give excellent support to one another.
6. The last inspection report said that the pupils had very positive attitudes and these are now judged to be excellent. They continue to show extremely mature attitudes and a strong commitment to learning and to the school. They believe in their ability to succeed. They are almost unanimous in saying that they enjoy being a pupil at this school. They are confident to voice their opinions and ask interesting questions, they can maintain concentration for long periods of time and they take on these attributes very quickly when joining the school. For example, in a Year 7 art and design lesson, the pupils were highly responsive to the teacher's directions, were very communicative and keen to contribute relevant ideas. The pupils work extremely well both independently and in groups, this level of their application is often outstanding. They plan and use time effectively and show a clear sense of responsibility and social awareness. Year 8 mentors play a valuable role in helping those new to the school to settle in quickly and sixth form officers help around the school, such as in the extra-curricular clubs. All of this has an excellent effect on their achievements. Girls with special educational needs have very positive attitudes to learning.
7. The pupils' behaviour continues to be exemplary, both in lessons and around the school. Pupils are fully aware of the very high standards of behaviour expected of them. An unexpected fire alarm showed the school at its best. The drill was exemplary, pupils filed out in silence and lined up, unprompted, for registration, standing in forms quietly until told to resume lessons. The pupils and their parents indicated in the questionnaires that incidents such as bullying are very rare and are dealt with effectively when the school knows about them. The school is currently devising its own questionnaire to pupils to obtain more information. Relationships are exceptionally good. The girls show a clear sensitivity to the feelings and views of others and they give very good support to one another. There is excellent racial harmony in the school. There have been no exclusions for three years.
8. Attendance is very good throughout the school and well above the national average. Procedures are very efficient and the school follows up any absence immediately when it does not know the reason. Pupils' attendance and punctuality are monitored diligently. Pupils usually arrive punctually to school and to lessons.

***Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)***

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	3.5	School data	0.1
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

*The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.*

9. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The inclusive ethos of the school and the sense of community provide a very good environment for the development of personal values. Although relevant topics are taught in citizenship and in subjects across the curriculum, there is no whole school plan that identifies these and opportunities could be missed in some subjects.
10. The girls' spiritual development is good. The well planned and stimulating assemblies and the meditative periods each day make a valuable contribution. In religious education pupils are encouraged to reflect on important questions of meaning such as human rights and the concept of 'self' in Buddhism. In some lessons – notably those in art and design and music – pupils experience deeper feelings, for example, the creative impulse or the joy of performing

choral music to a high standard. In English lessons, poetry, plays and novels are effectively used to help pupils consider their own beliefs, values and ideals.

11. The moral and social development of all pupils is excellent. They have an excellent understanding of right and wrong, especially in relation to behaviour and attitudes to others. Many opportunities are provided to explore and develop moral concepts and values. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson using Internet research, pupils investigated and considered controversial issues, such as homosexual bishops, or marriage and divorce, in a mature and balanced manner. In the pastoral periods and citizenship programme, the girls consider a wide range of social issues such as family life, friendship, medical ethics and rights and responsibilities. They are willing to consider different views and are inclusive in their approach to controversial issues such as the age of responsibility. The work of pupils in local, national and international charities is exemplary. There are numerous ways for pupils to take responsibility, exercise leadership and show initiative, which they take up willingly. A high number participate in the wide variety of extra-curricular clubs and activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh awards, debating, and self-defence. In physical education they develop a sense of fair play through respect for rules and an understanding of teamwork. Twenty-three pupils represent their sport at national or county level. All forms have representatives and year captains. A Year 11 pupil chairs the school council and Year 8 pupils help at the induction day for new pupils. Two pupils are members of one of the school's "lead learning groups", together with teachers. Year 12 girls have to apply to be an Officer or assistant in the sixth form and give a presentation to support their application.
12. Pupils' cultural development is good. The school's work in art and design contributes greatly. Opportunities to make gallery visits are offered in most years. The girls' artwork on display in corridors and offices does much to improve the aesthetic appearance of the school and demonstrate their achievements. Pupils are very involved in music and school productions. The school choir makes an annual tour in Europe and takes part in international festivals. It is preparing for a visit to Salzburg. Music and literature from different cultures are studied. Two groups of pupils each year take part in school trips to France and Germany. The modern foreign languages department does a lot of work on Europe and the European Union. The sixth form organised a multicultural evening for the rest of the school, where dance, food and fashions from different countries were shown. Visits have been made to the cathedral in Rochester and a synagogue, and a Muslim visitor has spoken to Year 8.

### **Sixth form**

13. The sixth form students' attitudes and behaviour are also excellent; they have very high expectations of themselves. They take on leadership responsibilities and work together as a team. Officers and assistants are elected and take on a very important role in the school. All students take a very full part in the school community, such as taking extra-curricular clubs and have a strong involvement in fundraising for charities. This is being formalised in the excellent "Medway Plus Certificate", in which the students record their activities, analysing the level of their involvement. This is now recognised by Medway universities for UCAS points and is being recognised as a model for other schools. Some students use it for that purpose, but others see it for its value in recording their efforts for when they come to write applications, and in getting them to reflect on their work outside their examination studies, such as:
  - visits to theatres and concerts;
  - music and drama productions;
  - their own weekly assembly and a meditation period on other days;
  - opportunities to explore issues with visiting speakers;
  - the Senior Citizens Christmas party;
  - Year 6 taster days; and
  - helping Years 10 and 11 pupils with specific subjects for exams.
14. One of the features of the school is the directed independent self-study (DISS). This is a timetabled lesson where students have facilities and work set, but are expected to work as a

group. This has been very effective in making them independent learners and they actively participate in their own learning. They also review the standard of the work set for them and feed back their views to the staff.

15. There are very good student-student and student-teacher relationships, with a socially vibrant community. The students clearly enjoy their time in school. A large number participate in Millennium Volunteers, which is an external organisation where volunteers work in the community at different levels, for example in after-school play clubs, as autistic unit helpers, and some set up their own schemes, which are recorded in their Medway plus certificate. A sixth former is currently a member of the Medway Youth Parliament.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL**

The quality of education provided by the school is **very good**. Teaching is **very good, with many excellent examples**. It is characterised by very high expectations and the pupils respond very positively. There are extensive opportunities in the curriculum for the 11 to 14 year-olds, with some for accelerated learning. There is then a very wide choice of GCSE and AS/A-level courses and extra subjects for those who can cope. Extra curricular provision is **excellent**. Care, guidance and support of the pupils are **very good**, they feel secure and able to ask for support if they need it. There is an **excellent** ethos for learning. The school's links with others as a Beacon School and through collaborative sixth form arrangements are extremely positive.

### **Teaching and learning**

Teaching is **very good overall with many excellent examples**. There is no significant difference between the quality of teaching in the different years or subjects. Learning is **very good and often excellent**. Assessment is used **very well** throughout the school.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' very high expectations of effort and behaviour receive a very positive response from pupils so that they learn very well.
  - A very good command of the subject, well planned and varied methodology and brisk delivery result in very good and often excellent learning.
  - Excellent behaviour and attitudes from the pupils allow the teachers to concentrate on teaching.
  - The teachers' enthusiasm and encouragement catch their pupils' attention and lead to increased independent learning.
  - A more formal approach sometimes does not excite pupils.
  - A strong culture of learning allows the teacher to concentrate on the lesson objectives and involves pupils in their own learning.
  - Assessment is used thoroughly to track and help pupils.
  - Very good formative assessment encourages pupils' reflection on their own work; their progress is very effectively monitored.
  - Pupils have the opportunity to assess how teaching helps them learn by monitoring the delivery of every subject.
  - Some marking is less than satisfactory where it is not securely linked to the pupils' learning needs.
16. Teaching is very good overall with many excellent examples. There is no significant difference between the quality of teaching in Years 7 to 11 and that in the sixth form. The teaching seen in lessons during the inspection was excellent overall in English, information and communication technology, art and modern foreign languages, enabling pupils to achieve very high standards and was rarely less than very good in other subjects.

17. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subjects they teach and this enables them to plan the content of their lessons well and help pupils in their learning. Their enthusiasm for their subject and encouragement catch pupils' attention and make them want to learn more. Lessons are very well structured and pupils usually make a brisk start through a focused opening activity. Many of these involve literacy skills aiming to support the use of a specialist subject vocabulary or other basic skills such as, for example, pulse and rhythm in music through singing the register to a variety of complex patterns.
18. Pupils' behaviour and diligence in lessons are exemplary because they are fully involved in their own learning. There is a very strong learning culture throughout the school, which enables teachers to concentrate on the delivery of the subject and achieve the lesson objectives. Pupils know what is expected of them and they respond by working hard, but also enjoying good relations and touches of humour, with their teachers. Pupils benefit enormously from the high commitment of the lead learning group's research approach to learning and learning styles. This is an approach which is innovative and exciting and making a real impact on the quality of both teaching and learning.
19. The level of challenge, together with the pace of lessons, separates the excellent and very good teaching from the merely good. This was exemplified in many lessons, for example, in science where pupils' thinking skills were developed, or in English with its promotion of discussion and independent thought. Teachers challenged the pupils, made the work exciting and interesting in these lessons and pupils were swept along in a wave of active learning.
20. In wanting pupils to succeed, teachers occasionally spend more time than is necessary explaining things rather than encouraging pupils to work things out for themselves. Then the style of questioning does not challenge individuals sufficiently. This more formal approach to teaching leads to passivity on the part of the pupils. On occasion, time is not used effectively in the lessons, or homework to reinforce and extend knowledge. The very long lessons were sometimes split into separate learning activities by the teachers so as to keep the momentum going.
21. There is very good use of information technology as a teaching and learning tool throughout the school. The special education needs of pupils are well catered for in the material tailored to pupils' needs, the extra support given by teachers who know their pupils well and the challenge to excel presented to those who are gifted and talented.
22. Teachers' marking and assessment are securely linked to learning needs. There is some excellent formative assessment, and encouragement to self-evaluation, for example in English and history. There are exemplary procedures in information and communication technology, but some marking is unsatisfactory in science. In religious education and physical education, assessment needs to be used more clearly to inform pupils how to improve. Generally, assessment is very good because pupils know how well they are doing and it is used thoroughly to track and help those pupils who need it. An excellent feature is the opportunity for pupils to assess not only their own performance but also that of their subject teachers. This is having a significant impact on standards because the importance and quality of learning are at the forefront in the minds of both teachers and pupils.
23. Provision for special educational needs is seen as a whole-school issue with subjects sharing responsibility for intervention and monitoring. It is satisfactory overall and pupils make similar progress to their peers. Good and very good practice was observed in classrooms, but is not consistent. Most teachers take pupils' needs into account when managing lessons, setting deadlines for homework, or commenting on achievement for reviews, but where this is not happening pupils do not feel supported.
24. The Code of Practice is in place for the few pupils with special educational needs. Procedures for identifying their needs are satisfactory, and regular reviews take place. Individual Education Plans are satisfactory but do not identify specific needs well enough to match targets for the

pupils to the specialist assessments. Targets do not specify expected measurable outcomes in enough detail and how these relate to progress over time. A record of agreed teaching strategies is not made by the co-ordinator soon enough after the distribution of Individual Education Plans. Comments from subjects about pupils' achievement are recorded before reviews but do not sharpen the focus of the targets being set. The responsibility for achieving targets is not clear enough to give pupils full confidence in the support provided.

## Sixth form

25. Teaching in the sixth form is very good overall. It is clearly focused on raising and maintaining standards. There is a very good command of the subject evident in all lessons, particularly in English and in art and design. Teachers prompt, guide and encourage their students and regularly check their levels of understanding. They are prepared very thoroughly for their examinations and the students' efforts and enthusiasm extend and deepen their work in the subjects. The use of independent self-study is exemplary. Teachers and students use it very well to provide more time to develop and complete work. The students are very conscientious in their use of this time and complete questionnaires of how well the teachers prepare for it. There has been some use of distance learning; in sociology it is used well, but there are still some problems with the monitoring of progress. Film studies has changed to a taught course for the A-level year and the skills of independent learning necessary for the distance learning on the AS course are now evident and helping the students progress rapidly.

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 138 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
26 (19 %)	63 (46 %)	33 (24 %)	16 (12 %)	0 (%)	0 (%)	0 (0%)

*The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.*

## The curriculum

Curricular provision is **excellent**. It meets National Curriculum requirements and a range of extra subjects to cater for interests and aptitudes. There are also extensive choices in GCSE and AS/A-levels, providing many opportunities for the pupils to take appropriate subjects. Opportunities for enrichment are also **excellent**. The accommodation and resources meet the needs of this curriculum **very well**.

## Main strengths and weaknesses

- A very full curriculum is provided in Years 7 to 9 with opportunities for accelerated learning in some subject areas.
- There is an excellent range of options for GCSE. Top sets have opportunities for further subjects, such as statistics in mathematics and three separate science subjects.
- Sixth formers are able to choose from a very wide range of A and AS level courses.
- There are no vocational courses offered.
- Extra-curricular provision is excellent – there are many opportunities in sport and the arts as well as a full range of choices.
- Citizenship, personal, health and social education and the pastoral curriculum are well established.
- Accommodation and resources are generally very good and are excellent in ICT.

## Commentary

26. The school offers a very broad and balanced curriculum for 11 to 14 year olds. All subjects are offered and fully meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. The constraints of the four



period day mean that some subjects, for example non-examination physical education (PE) and religious education (RE) for the 14 to 16 year olds, are squeezed into tighter timescales than are recommended. However, such is the quality of provision that achievement is very good and pupil attainment is not directly compromised. Similarly, the reduced ICT subject time in Year 8 is offset by the very strong ICT provision integrated into the broader curriculum. This includes areas that are often not covered in schools which have a larger time allocation, such as data logging in science and spreadsheet work in geography.

27. Provision for 14 to 16 year olds is excellent. The basic curriculum of English, mathematics, sciences, two modern foreign languages and design and technology is combined with options from humanities, expressive arts, Latin, PE and RE. The school has done much to circumvent any problems thrown up by the option system through the provision of additional subjects within the extra-curricular provision. For example GCSE music and GCSE dance may both be taken as extra subjects, although this is in the pupils' own time.
28. The school fully provides for pupils of varying aptitude. For example, three separate sciences are offered to top sets in the subject, balanced science to the middle and double award to the lower sets. The school offers opportunities for pupils to take some GCSE subjects early, such as design and technology, which is taken in Year 9.
29. The school offers an excellent range of enrichment courses at lunchtimes, after school and sometimes at other times. The very large range of extra-curricular music and sports activities can lead to examinations if required. In addition to these, there are, for example, foreign language study, young scientist, the writers' club, art clubs, dance, drama, history, gymnastics, chess, ICT, scrabble and the Duke of Edinburgh Award. The very high uptake among pupils demonstrates their appreciation of this excellent provision. The school is already bidding for an Artsmark silver award.
30. Pupils receive very good guidance on careers and on further and higher education and the link with Connexions is being extended. Citizenship, PSHE and RE are provided across the school on rotation within a designated pastoral period each week. The requirement for a daily act of worship is met by a combination of whole school and year group assemblies and tutor group meditation sessions.
31. Staffing levels are generally very good across all subjects. There are no areas where staffing issues negatively affect pupil attainment. Accommodation and resources are generally very good across most subject areas and excellent in some such as ICT.
32. Pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum. There is a computer in the library to support pupils with specific learning needs. The lack of headphones limits the effectiveness of its multi-sensory support and the impact on progress is not recorded. There are no electronic spell-checkers available for the use of pupils with specific learning difficulties. The school has ramps for disabled access on the ground floor, but no disabled access for pupils with physical needs to upper floors, creating difficulties for pupils who, for example, are on crutches as a result of injury. The school is aware of this and has a plan to improve accessibility.

### **The sixth form**

33. The sixth form provision is excellent. The range of curriculum choice for academic subjects is very wide. The 29 subjects currently offered are nearly all available at both AS and A2 level. Some subjects, for example philosophy and dance, are offered as additional extra-curricular courses. Most students take a critical thinking AS level examination in Year 12. There is very good linkage between subjects as part of the provision, for example, the wide range of modules in mathematics is linked to pupils' needs in relation to other courses. Physicists may study mechanics and non-physicists may study statistics. Other courses such as sociology are offered in an innovative way through distance learning programmes involving video

conferencing. This sixth form provision has been further supplemented by the school's growing involvement in a consortium where further subject courses are offered. Some sixth formers attend a neighbouring school for specific courses and a few from other schools come to study at the grammar school. This provision is set to expand as the collaborative arrangements become more established. The students also have opportunities to widen their studies through the excellent initiative of the Medway plus certificate, recognised for university entry, where they record their work within and outside the school and assess the level of their contribution.

### Care, guidance and support

The school is **very effective** in ensuring the care and welfare of pupils and their health and safety. The provision of support, advice and guidance is **very good**. The involvement of pupils through seeking, valuing and acting on their views is **good** overall, but it is **very good** in the sixth form.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Health and safety and child protection procedures are very secure.
  - Very good induction arrangements help pupils to settle in well.
  - There is a caring environment with a very strong and committed pastoral team.
  - Pupils improve their learning through a clear picture of how well they are doing and very good involvement in setting individual targets.
  - Effective systems to identify pupils who are slipping behind are established and there are good strategies to support them.
34. The school takes very good care to ensure the pupils' welfare, health and safety. The governing body and school staff carry out their duties diligently and monitor health and safety issues carefully. Risk assessments are carried out for activities in the school and trips outside. A very well executed fire practice was carried out during the inspection following a genuine alarm. The health education programme is delivered through the pastoral lessons. It provides good advice to help the pupils to be knowledgeable about themselves and about healthy and safe living. Child protection procedures are securely in place. All staff are trained at the beginning of each year. Parents who have children with serious health conditions say that the school provides very good care and monitoring.
35. Transfer from primary school is very well organised. Pupils settle quickly into Year 7. The response of Year 7 parents to the questionnaire about induction arrangements for their child was extremely positive. A particularly good feature is the involvement of Year 8 pupils. Some are present at the Induction Day to answer questions and also act as mentors when the new pupils start in the school. The school has developed curriculum links with the six main feeder schools.
36. There is a very strong and committed pastoral team. Staff have a very good relationship with the pupils. Every half term, teachers assess all aspects of pupils' work, behaviour and personal development, so they have a full picture of their strengths and weaknesses. These are fully discussed by the form tutor with pupils. Everyone has individual targets specific to each subject. When pupils are slipping behind through either organisational problems or unsatisfactory behaviour, they are put on the Pastoral Mentoring Scheme. Strategies are devised with the pupil to enable her to resolve the issue. These are closely monitored for success. In addition, a professional mentor works with a group in Year 11. They are responding very well and good progress is evident. The pastoral team is very alert to signs of stress. These are dealt with individually and help is provided, for example, a sixth form student will help with subject problems. Some pupils who responded to the questionnaire thought they did not have an adult to talk to if they had a problem. Discussions with pupils reveal that their replies referred to personal problems. The school has recently organised for the school nurse

to be available to give confidential advice in a drop-in surgery, which should meet this need. There are no pupil mentors for the whole school, but Year 10 pupils are currently being trained.

37. Careers advice in Years 7 to 11 is very well structured and delivered. However, the school recognises that in the sixth form there are weaknesses in the provision for those not going on to further education. This year the head of careers is working more closely with Connexions and is giving specific attention to this group.
38. Nearly one third of pupils who responded to the questionnaire replied that the school is not interested in their views, which was a surprise to the school and was not backed up in subsequent interviews. The school has some good procedures to find out pupils' views and pupils contributed to the Code of Conduct. A questionnaire on homework was given to Year 9 and the school council is used well to sound out pupils' views. However, they are all not yet fully involved in the decision making process in every aspect of school life. Questionnaires and surveys about aspects of school life are established but not yet routine. However, the school is currently devising a questionnaire to obtain a precise picture of the frequency and type of bullying, if any, in the school. The school council structure allows all pupils to contribute ideas, but there is a staff presence at meetings and the agenda is decided by consultation with staff. Two pupils are on the behaviour "Lead-Learning Group" to give their personal views which is a very positive move.
39. Pupils identified as having special educational needs show a mature and responsible attitude to their needs and are able to talk about both the strengths and weaknesses of their achievements and the support provided. Being small in numbers, they are particularly sensitive to whether their needs are dealt with effectively, discretely and in confidence. The school does not yet identify individual staff or pupil mentors for each of them to monitor the appropriateness of support on a regular informal basis between reviews. Pupils with special educational needs lack opportunities to meet socially with others on the register to enhance their self-esteem and prevent isolation.

### **Sixth form**

40. Despite recent problems with the post of the head of the sixth form, which has changed three times recently, the advice, support and guidance for the students are **very effective**. They have a comprehensive induction programme into the sixth form and a New Girl Officer is identified to give special attention to students from other schools. Tutors see the students daily, and there is a very useful weekly pastoral period with a well planned programme. The students' views are sought and discussed. The pilot scheme for the Medway Plus Certificate is an excellent example of how students can support themselves, the school and the wider community.
41. Each subject has clear procedures for formative assessment and the students set their own targets on a Learning Goal Sheet. They get very good support for their studies from experts. The careers advice focuses mainly on university entry. This year the head of careers is giving special attention to others, starting early in the year.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

The school's links with parents and carers are **good** and the links with the community are **very good**. The school's links with other schools and colleges are **excellent**. The sixth form links are generally **excellent** and are integral to those in the main school.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents have very positive views of the school.
- Information for parents is good and the Year 11 annual reports to parents are very good.

- There are extensive and very productive links with other schools and the wider community, which help particular groups and organisations.
  - There are extensive links with other schools developing in the sixth form.
42. The large number of parents who returned the questionnaire shows that almost all parents agree that the school expects their child to work hard, that the teaching is good and that their child makes good progress. Almost all think that the school is led and managed well and they are comfortable about approaching the school. Inspection findings strongly agree with these views. Less think they are well informed about progress and that the school seeks their views. However, opportunities and arrangements for parents to meet with teachers are similar to those found in other schools and the interim and annual reports are good overall. The inspection team agrees that the school seeks parents' views on important issues in a limited way, but that overall it is satisfactory.
43. The quality of documentation that the school provides for parents is good. Pupils' annual reports include appropriately detailed information about their progress. The reports for pupils in Year 11 give specific areas for improvement in all subjects, but this is not consistent for all subjects in other years. There is a very helpful booklet for new parents and they say there are very good arrangements for settling in. The newsletter prepared by the pupils celebrates their many achievements and is very well produced. However, there is limited space for items relating to parents and their involvement in the work and life of the school.
44. The contribution of links with parents to pupils' learning at home and at school is good. There is very high attendance by parents at parents' evenings and events. The school follows up those parents who are unable to attend the parents' evening. The student planner is used well as a link between home and school. Parents know the specific targets that their child has in each subject as they are in the front of their subject books. Parents know what their child is studying each term in each subject so that they can be involved in their learning, for example, in planning related visits. The school has held an educational evening for parents on the use of e-mail and has sent out a questionnaire to seek parents' views on communications between home and school by e-mail. The school now has a website which is being developed further.
45. The school has very good links with the wider community. There are links with a wide range of individuals, organisations, services and employers, which help the pupils to gain an understanding of society and the world of work. Sixth form students are helping younger pupils to get involved in the Medway Plus Certificate scheme, which recognises active citizenship in the wider community and work related learning. A governor who works in industry helps with interview techniques and mentors some pupils. There is a good range of visitors to the school such as the police, members of parliament and charity representatives. The girls raise considerable amounts of money for local, national and international charities. The school is a pilot school for a computer club for 11 to 14 year old girls called "cc4g", which is very successful. All of these and more enrich the pupils' learning. The staff are currently working to improve links with the local business community.
46. The quality of the schools' links with other schools and colleges is excellent. The school has excellent links with two primary schools and one secondary school through its Beacon School status. It is currently applying to extend this to the "leading edge" initiative. There are ICT projects with the two primary schools. They confirm that this has had a very large impact on the skills of both staff and pupils at their schools. Some pupils give demonstrations of playing musical instruments in primary schools. The joint training of middle managers of the other secondary school and Rochester Grammar School has had a good impact on the lessons in both schools. The school participates in a consortium of five secondary schools. Many links have been developed: for example, they shared a training day for gifted and talented pupils, take part in other joint INSET sessions and share teaching expertise by visiting lessons in each others' schools. The consortium offers choice to pupils, so they can do courses in other schools. The school is the leader for the Medway Plus Certificate, which has now been adopted by the other secondary schools. The Learning Skills Seminars are organised and

delivered by the school for the LEA as part of the Medway Progression Compact, aimed at improving participation and performance post-16. Students from other secondary schools attend, with pupils from the Grammar School, and most are delivered by the school staff. Arrangements to help the pupils choose and transfer to post-16 and post-18 institutions and employment are very thorough.

47. Links with feeder schools and use of outside agencies are well organised. Parents are kept well informed of the results of reviews and target setting, but the involvement of parents does not demonstrate sufficient recognition by the school of the importance of the role of the parent in being present at reviews and in the setting of targets.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **very good**. The headteacher provides **excellent** leadership and is well supported by a strong senior and middle management team. They are maintaining the high standards and introducing gradual improvements through, for example, the lead learning groups and the learning skills seminar. The governing body is **very effective**; it is closely involved in strategic planning and in monitoring. The administrative and support services make a very strong contribution to the smooth running of the school and its ethos.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good overall.
  - The headteacher provides excellent leadership and is strongly supported by the leadership team.
  - The school has very effective teams for managing academic and pastoral work.
  - The governing body has played a strong part in shaping the vision and direction of the school.
  - Staff recruitment, professional development and the initial training of teachers are very well managed.
  - The administrative and support services make a very strong contribution to the smooth running of the school and its ethos.
  - The leadership of the sixth form is excellent and a very clear vision for the sixth form is the basis of the clear development plan.
  - The involvement of sixth form Officers and their assistants in the work of the school is very good and innovative.
48. The headteacher and other key staff have very high aspirations, a sense of purpose and clarity of vision for the development of the school. The vision statement “support, encouragement, achievement” very clearly underpins this. The good standards identified at the last inspection have been improved in several areas. The quality of leadership is very good overall. The headteacher is an excellent leader, who has clearly identified and begun to tackle areas where a very successful school can be improved further. The senior management group and governors are “not resting on their laurels”. The headteacher has given staff at all levels opportunities to be involved fully in decision-making and in setting priorities, through self-review. She has encouraged staff to take responsibility and provided them with very effective support within the framework of the “lead learning groups”, where research and debate can contribute to the development of new initiatives. Staff have high regard for this approach, which they say makes them feel empowered and morale in the school is high as a result. The high commitment to action research is a key factor in the move towards “Leading Edge” status.
49. The senior leadership group is very strong. It contains a good balance of staff with long service within the school and others who have been appointed from outside. The team members complement each other very well. The new challenges of the headteacher’s collegiate approach have given a sharper focus to their work. The headteacher and the members of the senior management group have a very strong commitment to providing high quality learning experiences for pupils that will address the needs of all individuals. The “Lead Learning Groups” are an excellent example of how classroom practice has become the focus for

developmental work. The considerable efforts to address the needs of all pupils both in the main school and the sixth form are very apparent. The high commitment to action research has led to very innovative work linked to the work of the local schools' consortium and the Beacon School status.

50. The strategic planning in the school is very good. The senior management group meets on a regular basis both formally and informally. It has drawn up a strategic development plan with very clear priorities. The headteacher and her senior managers are evaluating initiatives and seek advice and comments from a wide spectrum of informed opinion before taking decisions. This was particularly strong in the case of the Specialist School bids, where faculties were invited to present their proposals to the governors. It was they who selected the most appropriate route for this development. Teachers, support staff and pupils are fully consulted when it is appropriate. Heads of department and heads of year have also produced development plans which link very well into the overall school development plan. All plans are well costed, have target dates by which objectives are to be met and precise criteria to measure success.
51. The governing body plays a central role in shaping the vision and direction of the school and fully shares the headteacher's vision for the school. Governors work very closely with the school and have a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. The governing body challenges and supports the headteacher and the senior management group very effectively. Governors are fully involved at a strategic level in the formation of policy and are actively involved in identifying and prioritising the key issues for the raising of achievement. They work very efficiently through committees and have clearly defined responsibilities. They are now linked to faculties and are briefed by staff on the achievements of departments or the progress of initiatives. They visit the school to talk to staff, track pupils in lessons and spend time with faculties. Teachers value the involvement of the governors as critical friends. The governing body has ensured that the school meets statutory requirements.
52. The school has effective teams managing the curriculum and pastoral work. The management structures are clear and procedures for monitoring progress are generally very good. The Lead Learning Group is a new development that has been very successful. The senior managers, heads of year, key stage co-ordinators and heads of faculty work together very effectively. All have a very clear focus on promoting high achievement.
53. The school is very well run. Financial management supports the school's educational priorities very well and the administrative and support teams make a very strong contribution to the success of the school by providing very good support.
54. The systems for the induction of new staff and the opportunities for continuing professional development are very good. Performance management has successfully been introduced and clear targets have been identified as a result of this. The training days organised by the school meet teachers' needs and are of high quality. The school makes a very good contribution to initial teacher training. It has very good links with establishments of higher education and is currently offering initial training places. The recruitment and retention of staff are very well managed. They are appropriately and highly qualified. There is a very good match of qualifications and experience to the demands of the curriculum.
55. The leadership and management of special educational needs are good and there has been good progress since the last inspection. The co-ordination of support, monitoring of subject provision, and carrying out of regular reviews is good. Special educational needs provision is reported on annually to parents, but meetings between the governor with responsibility for this area and the school coordinator are not yet regular and formalised. The number of pupils with special educational needs in the school is very small. Twelve pupils, including one in the sixth form, have been reviewed for interventions through School Action and Action Plus, as required by the Code of Practice. No girl has a statement of special educational need. The needs of pupils are physical, medical, emotional and behavioural and include dyslexia.

## Leadership and management in the sixth form

56. Leadership and management in the sixth form are very good, despite recent problems with three heads of sixth form in a very short time. The sixth form leadership has very clear vision for its development and this is strongly supported by the headteacher. Systematic planning has enabled the school to manage the development of sixth form programmes effectively, particularly new ventures like distance learning and film studies. The sixth form is very cost-effective. The management of subjects taught in the sixth form is very good and this contributes to the high standards achieved.
57. Sixth formers are regularly consulted over matters that closely affect them. They are also strongly encouraged to play a full role in the life of the school. The school is rightfully proud of its Officer system, through which the senior students are involved in the school and the running of many extra-curricular clubs. They work alongside teachers in a significant number of classes for younger pupils. This contributes to the respect that younger pupils show towards the sixth form.

### **Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003**

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3,280,910	Balance from previous year	183,541
Total expenditure	3,356,218	Balance carried forward to the next	367,305
Expenditure per pupil	3,070		

The positive attitudes of pupils and the support of their parents and carers, valuing education and learning, make a significant contribution to raising standards and achievement.

#### **Example of outstanding practice**

**On her appointment, the head teacher made excellent use of a questionnaire based on a publication by the Local Education Authority that had identified the 7 key factors that underpin “an excellent school”.**

Her analysis of students’ responses identified those areas where further investigation was needed. A high quality and extremely thorough School Development Plan resulted and each faculty contributed fully. To ensure that this is a working document, the head teacher has been highly innovative in her leadership style. Aware that change needed to be brought in gradually, she shared her findings with all her staff and set in motion an extremely thorough process of whole school self-review. Lead Learning Groups led by senior and junior staff have developed in-class research to ensure that the impact of change focuses on students’ needs and learning. This work is exemplified by the high quality business studies sixth form work, based around the musical learning style. The head teacher also showed her excellent leadership in respect of the Specialist School status bid. Encouraging her colleagues to work collaboratively and present ideas as to how this status should be focused to the Governing Body, she has brought about cross-faculty co-operation and a vibrant atmosphere in the staffroom, which staff describe as “a learning and researching community”.

Her excellent innovative approach makes staff feel empowered to play a significant role in the development of their school. She has enabled them to share in her high aspirations and clear vision of ensuring the “excellent learning environment” for all her students.

# **PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES**

## **SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4**

### **ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

#### **English**

Overall provision in English is **excellent**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Standards and achievements are excellent.
- Excellent teaching with exemplary planning to promote speaking and listening in small and large groups.
- Lucid, well-structured writing following lessons which establish a well-judged balance between instructing pupils and encouraging them to draw on their own ideas.
- First class use of computers which enable pupils to compose, order and communicate their own ideas clearly.
- Inconsistent spelling of younger pupils because teaching has not highlighted routinely the need for accuracy.

#### **Commentary**

58. Results in national tests at the age of 14 in 2002 far exceeded the national standards. In comparison with similar schools they were also extremely high. The school has sustained this level over several years. GCSE results in English were also excellent in 2002, both compared to the national figures and similar schools and these have been maintained. In English literature they followed a similar pattern.
59. Standards by the age of 14 are excellent and this represents excellent achievement. In discussions, pupils share hypotheses, ideas and experiences together and express their conclusions clearly. They read and write about fiction and non-fiction analytically, building depth of understanding sustained by well-planned materials that help them clarify their own ideas. Pupils write successfully in a broad range of forms, including book reviews, diaries, analyses of advertising material and accounts of personal experience. They know how to sum up arguments surrounding controversial issues because teachers arrange lessons and assignments so that there is a balance between instruction and opportunity for pupils to develop their own ideas. Their written work is greatly enhanced by the use of computers, where they benefit from well-structured teaching to locate information, develop ideas independently and communicate them coherently. The work of a minority of younger pupils suffers from spelling errors because teachers have not yet highlighted the importance of accuracy in notes and written exercises.
60. In Years 10 and 11, standards are again excellent, building on high quality materials and resources which extend thinking fully. Pupils write about controversial issues and sum up conflicting arguments astutely. They benefit from thorough teaching of a challenging range of plays, poems and novels, which manifests itself in their mature and ambitious written assignments. They identify film techniques confidently, discriminating and explaining their use accurately as they view well-chosen film extracts and respond to incisive teacher questioning. Standards and achievement are excellent because teaching is planned to ensure that pupils build lesson by lesson and year by year upon skills acquired earlier, putting them to use in increasingly demanding tasks. Gifted and talented students are supported well in lessons, but in additional sessions provided for them, teaching is not challenging enough to capitalise fully on their capabilities and prior learning.



61. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. Teachers make very good use of national initiatives in Key Stage 3 to extend the pupils' understanding and to demand a high work rate from them. They mark written work helpfully, at the same time as giving pupils valuable specific advice on what they need to do in order to improve and engaging them in reflection on their own progress. This results in excellent achievement because pupils share teachers' high expectations of themselves.
62. The quality of leadership and management is very good. It has enabled staff to improve their work based on mutual observation, analysis of pupils' strengths and weaknesses and very good planning to share ideas and resources. In all these areas there has been significant improvement since the last inspection.
63. Drama is taught as a separate subject for GCSE and is extended into theatre studies and film studies in the sixth form. It is a separate department and the links with English and creative arts have just been reviewed. There have been recent problems in the subject which have now been overcome by a new appointment. Results in external examinations have been high in national terms, but lower than those in other subjects. The pupils and students are progressing rapidly so that their overall standards and achievement in all three areas are now very good. Much of the teaching is excellent and uses the very good facilities extensively to promote very effective learning. The pupils' enthusiasm and positive attitudes to the subject result in excellent learning. There are extensive opportunities to take part in productions and clubs, often run by older students. Leadership and management are excellent, making significant improvements in a very short time.

#### **English as an additional language**

64. A very small number of pupils using English as an additional language achieve in line with their peers. This is a consequence of very good support and thoughtful adjustment of teaching to suit their needs. Visiting specialist staff provide additional well-focused support, supplemented by good systems across the subjects to check and ensure their quality of learning.

#### **Literacy across the curriculum**

65. Standards of literacy across the curriculum are excellent. Pupils discuss ideas, examine issues and answer questions well in class. Their responses are fluent, thoughtful and enthusiastic because most teachers plan well to stimulate the pupils' ability to express themselves aloud. They are well taught to read methodically in order to extract information from non-fiction books and the Internet. At the same time they explore and read a wide range of fiction for pleasure and enjoyment. Their writing is well structured, particularly in subjects such as English, history, science, art and design, religious education and information and communication technology, because teachers provide well-focused guidance and assistance to sustain and extend pupils' capabilities and potential. About half of all pupils suffer from occasional inconsistencies of spelling of less commonly used words. This is because teaching of spelling skills is not yet specifically focused on the need. The library operates as a well-managed resource to extend reading for pleasure and information. A working group of staff has been well led to analyse teaching and the needs of pupils. It has gone on to make good use of national initiatives to improve the teaching of literacy across the subjects.

### Example of outstanding practice

#### Excellent use of information and communication technology resources as a vehicle to promote analysis and communication with Year 9 English classes.

Pupils use the Internet incisively to research background information on controversial social and moral issues. They make notes, draft and redraft text to clarify and order their thoughts, before refining them further using desktop publishing programs to develop the best ways of communicating them to a wider audience. Elsewhere, they analyse advertisements, using an interactive whiteboard to identify techniques of persuasion inherent in text and graphics. In both examples, the technological tasks set by the teacher provide a strong focus for high quality whole-class discussion and for independent development of ideas in small group discussions.

### Modern Foreign Languages

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

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in French and German, where GCSE results are consistently very high when compared to similar schools and where many pupils achieve better than in their other subjects.
- The quality of teaching; all lessons seen were at least satisfactory and over half were either very good or excellent.
- A well-led team of dedicated, specialist teachers.
- The use of high quality accommodation and resources which also provide a positive tone for learning.
- The use of ICT to promote learning.
- Improvement since the last inspection where all issues were successfully addressed and where standards are even higher.

#### Commentary

66. All pupils begin to study both French and German in Year 7 and by the end of Year 9 their attainment has been consistently high when compared to similar schools and has been maintained at these levels. There has been a general trend of improvement over the last three years. All pupils study a foreign language to the age of 16 and have the option of studying both French and German. In both languages attainment has been consistently very high when compared to similar schools and many pupils achieve significantly better than in their other subjects. In both languages, usually all pupils gain the higher grades of A\* - C and many gain the very highest grades of A\* and A, especially in German. There has been a general trend of improvement over the last three years in both languages.
67. By the end of Year 9 pupils are achieving above expectations and by the end of Year 11 their achievement is well above expectations in both French and German. All pupils are constantly challenged to extend their knowledge and skills and the most able respond eagerly to the extension material which is available for them. In this way, all pupils are encouraged to achieve their maximum.
68. Standards of work seen reflect a similar pattern. In a Year 7 lesson, pupils were already able to use French spontaneously to ask for things and had a very good range of classroom and general vocabulary. They were also confident in the use of gender and plurals and were beginning to use possessive adjectives. By Year 9, a German group was able to talk confidently and accurately about European stereotypes using specialised vocabulary and displaying a sophisticated knowledge of word order and verb identification. In a Year 10 French lesson, pupils were able to distinguish accurately between the perfect and imperfect tenses, using information technology to extend and reinforce their knowledge. By Year 11 a German group was able to use the perfect tense with both "haben" and "sein" and make the necessary word-order adjustments. Again, they used information technology to reinforce their learning.

69. The pupils' folders and exercise books reflect the same high standards as their work in class. They are organised, neatly presented and show that pupils take a pride in their work. Written work becomes increasingly sophisticated as pupils progress through the year groups and the progress they make in terms of correcting errors and using complex grammatical constructions is easily measurable.
70. In lessons seen, the teaching was always at least satisfactory and in over half the lessons it was either very good or excellent. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subjects (they are all dual linguists) and lessons are based on detailed schemes of work. In the best lessons, the pace was brisk and the pupils were constantly encouraged to rise to the challenges presented. A variety of activities, including pair work, games and the use of information technology, not only maintained interest and concentration, but also developed and consolidated learning. Lessons were well-planned to incorporate different techniques such as the use of tape-recorders, overhead projector transparencies and work packs, all of which enabled pupils to build up their knowledge from the more basic to the very sophisticated with a high level of confidence. Where pupils were actively involved in their work and given the means to extend their knowledge themselves, they were most successful and the most able had the opportunity to move beyond the scope of the lesson. Where lessons were only satisfactory, there was less collaborative work, less variety and the pace was not so brisk. Relationships between teachers and pupils were always positive and encouraging and created an atmosphere of trust where pupils felt confident to ask questions and tackle more complex grammatical constructions knowing that they would be supported. Teachers are skilled at knowing when to use the foreign language and when to use English; consequently, the use of the foreign language is never a barrier to communication and yet is seen as the main language in the classroom. Pupils' work is marked regularly and teachers indicate what the pupils should do to improve further. Pupils are involved in setting their targets and assessments of their work are used to help future planning. Visits to both France and Germany also enhance learning.
71. The high quality of the teaching and the impressive achievements of the pupils stem from the excellent leadership and management of the faculty. All aspects of the work of the faculty are well-documented and each teacher has her own specific responsibility. Ideas are shared and valued and consequently the talents of each individual are used to benefit the pupils. The French and German foreign language assistants also provide valuable help in preparing pupils for their GCSE examinations.
72. The suite of rooms for modern languages has a positive impact on learning, setting a quality tone for every lesson. The well-equipped suite includes interactive whiteboard, ICT facilities and perimeter audio facilities, all of which are used routinely to enhance learning. All rooms have a plentiful supply of dictionaries, reading materials and extension materials which are used routinely by the pupils. The use of display both in the classrooms and adjacent corridors is excellent.
73. Improvement since the last inspection has been excellent. All issues have been addressed successfully and the standards which were already high, have improved further.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The consistently excellent results in Key Stage 3 national tests and in GCSE examinations as pupils start from slightly above average levels in Year 7.
- Supportive leadership and management of a very high quality.

- Very well planned lessons, based on a well-detailed scheme of work with the effect that teaching is consistently very good.
- The very good subject knowledge of all teachers.
- The extremely positive attitude of all girls towards mathematics.
- Lessons are very effective but there could be even more involvement of pupils so that they become more active learners.

## Commentary

74. When pupils reach the age of 14, results in national tests are very high when compared to all schools nationally. Standards on entry are slightly above average, so this is very good achievement. Comparisons with similar schools in 2002 show that the value added for mathematics is also very high, although slightly fewer reached the higher Level 7 than would be expected. The GCSE results for 2002 are also very high with all girls gaining grades A\*-C. These results are significantly better than the other core subjects. These results indicate that achievement is very good. National comparisons for 2003 are not available but the results are broadly similar. Work seen during the inspection confirms these very high standards. The excellence of provision in mathematics is the result of consistently very high quality teaching coupled with the very positive attitude of all girls towards mathematics that has led to excellent results over recent years.
75. Several factors contribute to these high results. Teaching is of a consistently high quality. This means that learning is also very good. There is a detailed scheme of work in place that enables teachers to use their very good subject knowledge to plan very good lessons. These lessons are brisk and contain material that is both relevant and challenging. Lesson objectives are clear and there is constant academic challenge stimulating the girls to achieve very well through all lessons. The National Numeracy Strategy provides the basis for the three-part lesson, with a starting activity that very quickly focuses the girls' minds on mathematics and leads into the main part of the lesson. At the start of lessons, teachers use a range of activities that reviews previous work and still provides a springboard for the current lesson. The open question and answer sessions in lessons encourage a questioning mind that develops reasoning. Introducing new technology with the use of the interactive whiteboard improves presentation of lessons by adding greater interest and clarity. In many lessons, girls are encouraged to discuss their work with their partner and this develops good mutual support. Investigations are integral to the work of each year; they develop deeper reasoning and an enquiring mind. One example was a Year 8 investigation into the voting system where the girls compared the different types of voting system. Clear results and convincing arguments on this form part of an attractive display.
76. The second factor is the very positive attitude of all girls towards mathematics. Girls arrive at lessons promptly, behave well, settle quickly and work very hard. They are polite, respond to questioning and give reasons for their answers when appropriate. They question their teachers, sometimes enthusiastically to ensure that they understand the topics being studied. These questions always receive positive support from their teachers and on many occasions girls answer questions for their friends before the teacher can assist. Girls' work is regularly marked, much of this is self-marked and this was always after completion of an exercise. Teachers mark work regularly and give positive comments on how to improve in the future. In lessons, girls mark their own work; teachers trust girls to mark honestly and the girls respect this trust. There are regular formal assessments to monitor progress; this enables action on any area of concern.
77. A highly effective head of department, who regularly monitors teaching and learning, oversees these two major factors, providing support where necessary. She has a quiet determination to ensure that all girls achieve the very best results possible. This, combined with good vision for the future, is a commitment to further improvement. Broadening the curriculum is part of the departmental development plan so that overall standards improve even more. This started with participation in the national mathematics challenges and there is now a specific

programme to extend the gifted and talented pupils. A hard working mutually supportive team of teachers has successfully improved standards since the last inspection by raising the quality of teaching and learning to bring about the subsequent rise in standards. Stimulating displays of pupils' work enhance classrooms; this adds to the positive atmosphere for teaching mathematics. Standards at the last inspection were high but improvements to teaching mean that these standards have risen.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

78. The application of mathematical skills across the curriculum is very good and all girls can access the whole curriculum. There is a whole-school policy and the National Numeracy Strategy is in place. Many departments do not plan specifically for mathematical skills in their individual schemes of work but it is implicit in their teaching. Although the development of the cross curriculum aspect is still under development, some good applications occur in science where the use of graphs charts and diagrams is very effective. In ICT, girls use spreadsheets to model different and changing situations and translate numeric data into graphical form. Data analysis of word and sentence length in different newspapers occurs in English.

## **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Year 9 test and Year 11 GCSE results are well above the national standard.
- The motivation of the girls and their desire for learning is very high.
- The high quality and presentation of notes made, which serve as a valuable and effective source of revision material.
- The very good use of ICT, both in the teaching and for pupil research.
- The inclusion of interesting and novel approaches to both lessons and homework, which enhances the learning.
- The use of questioning strategies and guidance given to pupils needs to be further developed in some lessons.

### **Commentary**

79. Results in Year 9 national tests in 2002 continue to be well above the national standard and are comparable to students in schools with similar prior attainment. Although there has been a slight fall in the average point score over the past three years, the 2003 results indicate a marked improvement. In 2002, pupils attained less well in science than in both English and mathematics, but in 2003 science attainment is now better than mathematics. The results indicate that levels of achievement are generally good. At GCSE, in 2002 almost all pupils obtained grades A\* - C for double balanced science, with 40 per cent gaining grades at A\* - A. The results for the separate sciences were equally impressive with the vast majority of students entered gaining either of the top two grades. In 2003, the results remain impressive, despite a slight fall in the A\* - C passes for double balanced science. Levels of achievement remain high.
80. During the inspection, most of the lessons seen were based on very good teaching, including two rated as excellent. In all lessons, pupils were superbly behaved and their high levels of interest and motivation helped create a very good learning environment. As a result, teachers were able to concentrate on teaching the learning objectives, indicated in the thoroughly produced lesson plans. The better lessons are characterised by the presence of enthusiastic and knowledgeable teachers who set a brisk pace. They stimulate the pupils by varied, novel and interesting activities with a significant use of ICT, including PowerPoint style presentations, as a teaching aid. An example of the good use of ICT was in a Year 8 lesson, where the girls

were showing good skill in the use of data loggers. They were able to interact with both computer and interactive whiteboard displays in order to obtain appropriate results. In the best lessons, the teachers are constantly challenging and extending the pupils' learning through the use of skilled questioning strategies; as a result the pupils continue to achieve very well. A particular feature of the teaching is the opportunities given to the girls for independent learning using the Internet, which encourages them to develop an interest in science.

81. Notebooks are particularly well presented and notes made are of a particularly high standard so forming a valuable revision resource. In many books seen, the work is well marked with praise given for good effort and suggestions given on how pupils can improve. However, there were inconsistencies across the department in terms of the frequency and detail of marking, with spelling errors going uncorrected. The standard of wall display, based mostly on samples of pupils' work, including many high quality posters produced using ICT, provides a rich learning environment.
82. Since the previous report, most areas requiring attention have been addressed. The new course for pupils in Years 7 – 9 provides more opportunities for practical work and there is far less passive textbook work in lessons. The provision of separate sciences for the more able pupils in Years 9 – 11, in addition to double balanced science, enables all pupils to achieve well. Lessons are pitched to match the pupils' abilities and the girls are encouraged to ask relevant and often searching questions. The department continues to provide valuable enrichment activities through a lunchtime science club and visits. The additional preparation room has provided additional storage space, but the main area is still rather short of working bench surfaces. The head of department provides very good leadership and management of the department, coupled with a clear vision for its future development. Of particular note is the department's desire to further develop the modern technological based approach to the teaching and learning process. The department handbook and schemes of work are well developed and provide very good guidance. The department is particularly fortunate to have a team of well-qualified and experienced teachers with a wide range of talents and experience who are very well supported by three hard working technicians.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

The provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- A high quality of teaching throughout the school.
- Exemplary tracking and monitoring of the pupils' progress.
- Excellent achievement by the pupils throughout the school.
- High expectations and academic rigour are all prevalent.
- All the pupils show insight, tenacity and the ability to work to very high standards.
- Insufficient curriculum time to enable pupils to reach exceptional performance easily.

### **Commentary**

83. In tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002 standards were well above the national average. In GCSE examinations, for the short course in ICT, attainment was again well above average with 100 per cent of pupils gaining a pass grade of A\* - C. These continuing standards are confirmed from the lessons observed and the analysis of pupils' work. Many pupils start in Year 7 with sound skills, knowledge and understanding of ICT. By the time they have reached the end of Year 9 their outstanding achievement is reflected in their high level of skills, knowledge and understanding. This progress is maintained as pupils work towards GCSE qualifications at the end of Year 11. Gifted and talented pupils achieve equally as well as there are many opportunities for them to extend their studies. The small number of pupils with special educational needs also achieve well because the lessons are planned to meet their needs. All the pupils are totally engaged in the learning process.

84. The quality of teaching is high throughout the school. A Year 9 class was taught to an excellent standard when they were studying the applications of control technology. The teacher's enthusiasm and encouragement caught the pupils' attention and they worked to the best of their abilities. A wide range of teaching resources was used very effectively to support learning. High expectations coupled to attention to the needs of pupils as individuals are all pervasive. The pupils always work to the very best of their ability. They are highly self-motivated and confident pupils who clearly enjoy their studies. These qualities and the very good teaching give rise to outstanding learning throughout the school.
85. A dedicated specialist leads the subject to an excellent standard and all the teachers work well as a team to ensure consistency in standards. The facilities are very good and organised so there is open access to the computers out of formal lesson times. A network manager provides high calibre support in maintaining the network and the laptop computers. There are exemplary procedures for assessing the pupils' standards to National Curriculum levels of attainment and every pupil's progress is very effectively monitored. They are always informed of their achievements and they are given very helpful written advice on the ways through which they can improve.
86. The scheme of work is presented in the form of pupils' booklets. These are of exceptional quality. They draw the pupils' attention to a very wide range of resources including the Internet. This scheme of work offers a very broad and inspiring course. These elements make a major contribution to the very successful teaching and learning seen in this subject. Further enrichment comes through the school's involvement in the computer club for girls scheme. Many girls work on these projects which provide challenging tasks orientated around the teenage interests. For example, they use a problem solving application to manage the tour of a pop group.
87. Since the last inspection there has been a highly commendable improvement in every element of the subject. The quality of teaching and learning has improved further along with the standards reached throughout the school. There is now a very good scheme of work and there has been an exemplary improvement in the assessment and tracking of pupils' work.

### **ICT across the curriculum**

88. Throughout the school there are examples of outstanding practice. ICT is used extensively and the pupils' skills are developed to very high standards as they use computers in the majority of their subjects to research and record information, to log and process numerical data and to solve problems. For example, in geography Year 7 pupils set up a spreadsheet with formulae to model the ideal site for an Anglo-Saxon settlement, considering information such as the availability of arable land and the distance from water and a wood supply. The distance to a trade route is also considered. In science there are many examples where a computer has been used to directly monitor and rapidly record readings from sensors. For example, the pupils are able to plot the very rapid fluctuations and directions of the voltage changes across a coil as a magnet is dropped through it.

### **HUMANITIES**

Provision in history is **very good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching promotes high quality discussion and writing that is varied and often extended.
- The excellent use of ICT generates a strong culture of learning based on a commitment to research and self-directed study from an early stage.

- Very good relationships between staff and pupils create a positive view of the subject and encourage pupils to question and express opinions with total confidence.
- The department is very well led and managed by a head of department who has high expectations of pupils and staff and provides effective support to both.
- Homework is used purposefully to reinforce learning. Challenging tasks are set which are often both imaginative and enjoyable.
- In a few classes tasks are set which are insufficiently demanding, particularly for the most able girls.

## Commentary

89. Standards at the age of 14 were well above national averages in 2003 and these have been maintained. Pupils in Year 7 understand why historians differ in their interpretation of events in the past and are able to evaluate skilfully the reliability of different sources of evidence. In Year 9, where all pupils are working at an appropriate level, they are able to write extensively with well-substantiated conclusions and clear explanations of historical change.
90. Standards observed during the inspection in GCSE classes were also well above average. In 2002, however, about 12 per cent of girls failed to achieve a Grade C in GCSE and this increased to 30 per cent in 2003. The school believes this was partly due to lack of continuity of staffing during the previous two years. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of work during the inspection would suggest that almost all the present Year 11 are working at an appropriate level.
91. Achievement in all years is very good. Girls make impressive progress from entering the school with an average National Curriculum Level 4 or 5 to the end of Year 9 where most reach Level 7 or above. Significant progress was observed in literacy and verbal skills in the subject. By Year 11 they have developed an impressive range of skills in historical research, seeking out evidence for themselves using ICT and libraries.
92. Teaching and learning are almost all good or very good, with some outstanding features. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good. The best teaching is characterised by high expectations and skilful, focused questioning underpinned by humour. There is a real sense of the enjoyment of history exemplified by an excellent lesson using the Bayeux Tapestry as a source of information. Pupils are challenged by the unexpected, such as a question to Year 9, "What was good about nineteenth century urban life?"
93. In most lessons there is a well-timed range of activities which ensure a lively pace: these include thoughtful discussion, rapid question and answer sessions, written work, from extended pieces to brief answers and pupil presentations. The well-integrated use of ICT in lessons is an effective feature of teaching; pupils word-process their work accurately, download relevant material quickly from the Internet and use PowerPoint for presentations. ICT supports the excellent research skills the pupils develop from an early stage, exemplified in a very good Year 8 lesson where the pupils, well briefed by the teacher, embarked on a project on Elizabethan England. Homework reinforces learning, as in a Year 9 class where pupils were asked to work in pairs on contrasting views of workhouses.
94. Occasionally, teaching and learning are less effective where there is insufficient challenge; for example, when a few pupils simply copied extracts from a text book into a PowerPoint presentation or others answered some undemanding questions about eighteenth century crime and punishment.
95. Assessment is very good with a clear focus on learning objectives. Pupils understand both their numerical and learning targets, assisted by constructive comments on written work.
96. Relationships between staff and pupils and amongst pupils are excellent, characterised by mutual respect, self-confidence and a concern for others which enable pupils to ask for help



when they need it and express opinions knowing they will be listened to by all. Pupils value and like the subject.

97. The department is very well led and managed by a head of department who has forged a strong team spirit and focuses strongly on raising achievement and expectations. Documentation is effective and the department well resourced. The department has made very good improvement since the last inspection with significant improvements in teaching and assessment and the use of ICT.

#### **Example of outstanding practice**

##### **A lively starter activity- an interactive whiteboard version of Blockbusters on the Norman conquest.**

The Year 7 class divided into two teams, which set the tone for a cracking pace throughout. The atmosphere in the classroom buzzed as the pupils devoured a range of varied, interesting and demanding tasks. The class teacher made excellent use of the Bayeux Tapestry as a resource to introduce and reinforce key historical skills of testing evidence and recognising bias. Her love of history, authority and humour were infectious as the pupils responded eagerly to demanding questioning and productive written tasks.

The question "How did Harold die?" became the focus for lively group discussions as the pupils rose to the challenge of historical detection, arguing their different viewpoints and searching for reliable evidence whilst the class teacher constantly probed, encouraged and challenged.

An impressive feature was the use throughout of techniques such as show boards, and "thinking time", with pupils coming to the front to answer; and the gradual release of information to the pupils ensured they were alert throughout and all participated fully.

#### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **very good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils attain very high standards because of the very good teaching.
- The quality of teacher subject knowledge is excellent and as a result pupils achieve highly.
- The quality of leadership and management is excellent and provides a clear vision for the subject.
- Low attaining pupils' needs are not always sufficiently addressed.

#### **Commentary**

98. The standards achieved by pupils are very good at the end of Year 9; the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 are very good and often excellent; examination results were well above the national average for all schools. Results in the 2002 GCSE examinations for some were very high indeed and well above the national average; 95 per cent of students attained the highest A\* to B grades and all students a C grade or above. The unvalidated results for 2003 indicate that the school successfully has maintained these very high standards in the most recent GCSE examinations.
99. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with widely differing levels of skills in geography. By the end of the year, as a result of very good teaching which carefully develops their skills and understanding in the subject, they are attaining good standards. This represents very good achievement. Pupils produce some very good fieldwork reports on Rochester using a range of investigative and map work skills learnt during the year and providing a secure basis on which they can build up their skills and broaden the knowledge of world geography through Year 9. In Year 9, pupils demonstrate very high standards of attainment in a very stimulating lesson based on a range of geographic resources including rock types, maps, photographic material, the Internet and graphic data, using well-developed geographic skills to interpret, explain and

describe how physical features have influenced human activity. Their written and map work are very strong.

100. By Year 11 pupils reach very high standards and achieve very well as a result of excellent teaching. In an intellectually demanding lesson, rich in content, pupils had total concentration and commitment. They demonstrated their capacity to think through the impact of geographic features, physical, economic, world trade, social and cultural on the changing pattern of the Japanese economy over time. They effectively interpreted a range of evidence and data to construct time lines of development, use systems analysis to examine inputs, process and output and relate shifts in industrial structure to wider MEDC such as the Pacific belt. Pupils are extremely well organised, have excellent concentration and a strong capacity for independent analytic thinking.
101. The quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 is always at least good and has several excellent features. As a result, pupils learn very well and make good progress. Lessons are very well planned with a range of learning opportunities and activities that capture the interest and imagination of all pupils at every level of attainment.
102. In Years 10 and 11 pupils benefit from very good teaching, many aspects of which are excellent, including excellent subject knowledge, and very effective questioning which is intellectually demanding. The range of teaching strategies is stimulating and challenging through fieldwork, practical application, discussion, debate, use of graphs, ICT, statistics, maps, photographs and satellite images. In this positive learning environment pupils learn very well indeed. Teacher expectations are realistically high, time and resources are used very effectively and as a result a high standard of learning is consistently maintained throughout the two years leading to the GCSE examinations. Pupils consolidate their knowledge and understanding of physical, human and economic geography and develop skills of interpretation, reasoning, analysis and evaluation which they can apply to unfamiliar topics and situations.
103. Homework is used very effectively to both reinforce and extend what is learnt in school. Marking is thorough and helpful. Assessment is good. Geography makes a very effective contribution to the development of cross-curricular skills in ICT, literacy and numeracy.
104. The leadership and management are excellent. The head of department provides very clear vision and direction. Schemes of work are extremely well developed comparatively covering almost all aspects of the curriculum; departmental policies covering all aspects of the subject are in plan. A clearly defined action plan has key priorities identified for the strategic development of the subject. Resources are very good. Professional development is well supported. Improvement in the subject since the last inspection is good.

## Religious Education

Provision in religious education is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- 2002 GCSE examination results were well above average, adding very good value.
- Current standards in GCSE classes are well above average.
- All pupils achieve well and GCSE pupils achieve very well.
- The capacity of pupils to work independently and collaboratively is excellent.
- All pupils' engagement in their study is excellent, showing positive attitudes, the result of excellent encouragement.
- Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent, promoting confidence and enthusiasm for the subject.
- Resources are used very well and reinforcement activities produce a rich learning environment.
- The quality of leadership is very good and the subject is managed well.

- There is less than the recommended time for the subject in Years 10 and 11.

## Commentary

105. By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is satisfactory for pupils studying the locally agreed syllabus for religious education (RE). Their knowledge of religions today is broad with satisfactory understanding of their backgrounds, beliefs and ideas, moral codes, main practices, principle authorities and religious communities. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and those from ethnic minority backgrounds, achieve well. They can distinguish religions but their skill of comparing and contrasting within religions is not developed enough. This limits their capacity to evaluate the behaviour of individuals and societies by reference to the diversity of practices, teaching, beliefs and interpretation available to individual adherents and characteristics of religious organisations in the wider community and media. They are not secure in talking about how religions explicitly influence and are influenced by changing moral codes and cultures, nor in drawing on examples of the diverse views within religious communities.
106. Results in 2002 GCSE examinations were very high, adding very good value and were above average for similar schools, which is an improvement on the last inspection from average. The average point score for the subject was above the national average and the average point score for each pupil taking the subject was significantly higher than the average of all schools. Similar results in 2003 maintain the trend over the last three years of very high results, with twice as many pupils gaining the highest grade of A\*. This represents high achievement. In 2002 and 2003, nearly one in two pupils chose to take a full GCSE in religious education compared with less than one in five nationally, even when school options mean pupils can choose only one humanities subject.
107. Overall standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average. By the end of Year 11, the pupils following the full GCSE course have developed the required skills and specialist subject knowledge at well above average standards. They achieve very well in applying a range of Christian perspectives and exploring the breadth of Judaism. Other pupils in Years 10 and 11 follow a reduced religious education timetable, as at the last inspection and this has an effect on attainment for the majority of girls. This is average for pupils studying the agreed syllabus. All pupils, including pupils with special educational needs and pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, demonstrate good achievement in comparing their own responses on moral and social issues to others. They demonstrate mature attitudes and insight when considering and discussing human behaviour and values and when exploring questions of meaning. They are not confident in the skill of presenting a balanced picture of religious beliefs and values, or of analysing the importance of historical and cultural contexts in order to resolve obvious conflicts in religions between beliefs and actions. In all years, pupils' spiritual, social, moral and cultural development is very good.
108. In Years 7 to 9 teaching and learning are mainly good and excellent, promoting confidence and enthusiasm for the subject. All pupils' engagement in their study is excellent, showing positive attitudes, the result of excellent encouragement. Their literacy levels are high, they take good notes and this helps reading for information and written explanations and descriptions. Their competence in ICT supports good learning and they reinforce their learning through producing examples of expressive work on early Christian writings and Islamic duties for display. Video, picture and text resources are used very well and reinforcement activities produce a rich learning environment. Assessment practices are very good. Visits to and visitors from local religious communities, Christian, Muslim and Jewish, contribute to pupils' understanding of living religions today. Satisfactory teaching and learning, particularly in Year 7, had low expectations, did not build on pupils' average prior attainment and contributions early enough, nor ensure there was challenge in every lesson. Questions are not open enough to push pupils to build on and extend their understanding about the required key concepts of religions. Excellent teaching in Year 8 exploring a religion in depth, highlighted its different aspects in the tasks that were set, matching high expectations of learning as well as organisation. The

capacity of pupils to work independently and collaboratively is excellent. In Year 9, girls develop good empathy, but when they learn to argue for and against a practice or belief, it is from a personal or human viewpoint. They learn to explain how selected features of religions such as common beliefs about God, suffering, non-violence and anti-racism make a difference to the lives of individuals, but do not analyse events for their impact on understanding how particular religions have changed in response to history and changes in society.

109. In Years 10 and 11 teaching and learning were good, and very good in GCSE exam groups. Very good teaching in exam groups gives pupils good study routines and topics can be seen to follow on from one another. Subject requirements are stated clearly and tasks identify the stages of learning in order to look at religious significance, and to relate traditions to original teachings and both strict and liberal attitudes today. Work is marked regularly, is well organised and comments for improvement are based on target grades. Pupils support each other in group work. GCSE pupils visit Chatham synagogue. In non-exam classes girls are encouraged and do give full expression to their views, explaining them fully. Topics effectively enable pupils to fully engage and to identify with the adult and personal dimension of moral and social dilemmas. Pupils contribute from their own experiences well, but do not confidently relate these to explicitly religious teachings exemplified in current debates and standpoints to inform their learning. Good teaching provides resources reflecting a multicultural and multi-faith society. In non-exam groups, reduced time for formal religious education impacts on standards, and assessment is informal and does not lead to accreditation.
110. The head of department provides very good leadership, demonstrating high aspirations for pupils and staff, resulting in positive attitudes, very good relationships, high option numbers and exam successes. The department supports school policies well, but lacks consistent practice on using inclusive language and promoting balanced views of religions. The department plans well ahead to promote high standards, including future support for gifted and talented girls who have been identified using subject specific criteria. The department has done well to have implemented national and local guidelines on levels of assessment but these are not yet applied consistently to provide an effective strategy to ensure that skills are developed early enough on entry and girls continue to gain new skills in Year 9. Overall improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

#### **Example of outstanding practice**

##### **Excellent teaching and learning in Religious Education in a Year 8 lesson of 75 minutes.**

The lesson had been moved into the library in order to make use of a range of books and ICT facilities for researching the Mosque in Islam: how it developed, its main features, its uses reflecting national or cultural lifestyles, the role of the imam, services and prayers. All the topics were given to everybody but each topic was given to one group to research. Each pupil was also given written guidance on good practice in research and a recommended book and website list. Tables were well prepared with relevant materials. Groups shared tasks among themselves. Some moved to the computers and used search engines independently or the website list. Others scanned the available books on Islam for relevant pictures, key words and information. Pupils photocopied, cut and highlighted in colours from books, or printed out or saved from computers. Pupils' ability to work independently and collaboratively was excellent. Some pupils informally arranged to meet out of class to complete tasks of comparing churches and mosques. By the end of the lesson, each group fed back on the advantage of books or computers, seeing the value of both. They summarised their findings and identified what they still had to find out. Teacher monitoring raised the level and effectiveness of learning. The breadth of pupil understanding of the Mosque was clear, achieved by high level extraction, sorting and synthesising of information for a purpose.

Provision in design and technology (DT) is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Excellent standards overall, particularly among the accelerated learning group.
- Very good leadership and management lie behind the high quality outcomes of this subject.
- Some highly innovative curricular initiatives are leading to the early achievement of high grades by significant numbers of girls.
- Below average contact time adds to strain in staff and girls, though all cope well.
- While there is some very good use of ICT by teachers and by individual girls, access for whole classes is too low.

### **Commentary**

111. Standards overall are excellent. The standards of pupils joining in Year 7 are around the national average – but they work very hard, they progress very well and their achievement is very high. The national target by the end of Year 9 is Level 5 and every pupil has achieved this, with the very large majority reaching at least Level 6. The pupils' standards by the age of 14 are very good. Assessment of the pupils' work in Years 7 to 9 during the inspection confirms this – their skills in working with graphics, textiles, resistant materials and micro-electronic components and circuits have developed very well. This is underpinned by very good scientific knowledge. However, they do not see their work in design and technology (DT) as solving problems; and do not generally realise how what they do and how they do it, reflect practice in the world of work. Therefore they do not understand the value of at least some of the techniques used (for example market research, product specification, evaluation). This is partly because it is not emphasised in the teaching and partly because the timetable for the subject is giving insufficient time to step back and gain a whole view.
112. During Years 7 to 9 the department identifies pupils with particularly strong talents in the subject. They invite these to follow an accelerated course (at home by distance learning and later in lunchtime classes). The levels of achievement of this group are excellent – though many say they could do even better! – and at the end of Year 9 last year nearly all reached GCSE A\* or A grades: an outstanding result for them, for the department, and for the school.
113. In Years 10 and 11, every pupil continues to study an area of DT, which in itself is good practice. Those in the accelerated learning groups are now working towards AS level qualifications; they have excellent achievement and reach excellent standards. Those not in these groups study for GCSE; all or almost all each year reach the national target of Grade C and the proportion achieving the top grades of A\* and A has steadily improved from 57 per cent in 2000 (very good) to 99 per cent in 2003 (excellent). The work of the current pupils in the classes seen is overall very good. The main area of concern is the superficial understanding of the problem-solving cycle and its application to what the girls do in the various areas of the subject.
114. The quality of DT teaching as a whole is very good, as is the quality of the teachers' assessment of how well the pupils are doing. In fact, assessment in Years 7 to 9 is excellent, being particularly thorough, responsive to individual needs and developmental – in formal and informal tests, homework and coursework. The department keeps very good records too, though these do not follow the girls quickly enough when they change teachers. Other areas of excellence in the teaching are:
  - the staff's command of their particular areas (particularly so in the GCSE work) and often of more than one area;
  - their encouragement of and challenge to, the pupils (particularly in the early years); and
  - their effective use of a wide range of resources (again particularly in the early years).

On the other hand, the teachers do not always keep that problem solving approach at the front of all aspects of their work – so the pupils do not develop it well and thus do not learn so easily or so deeply. Also not all use specific learning objectives for topics, lessons and resources; then their ongoing assessment of the girls' grasp can be incomplete, so what they present does not always sufficiently match individual students' needs.

115. Very good leadership and management, which are realistic and effective, lie behind the high standards achieved in DT – including in the quality of many of the wide range of learning resources developed by the team. Partly because the rooms are in two separate blocks, the staff are still working towards a consistent problem-solving approach and a common style, for instance in the overall ethos and the displays, posters, handouts, booklets, assessment materials and ICT-based resources. While there is some very good use of computers, such as with computer-aided design and making, it is hard to book a room for whole-class ICT-based work. Accommodation and resources are otherwise good. There is less technical support for DT than is common for a department of this size.
116. In most regards, DT has improved greatly since the previous inspection, in 1997; standards are much better, as is the programme in Years 10 and 11 and accommodation and resources. However, some problems remain: the low time allocation is a challenge, continuity is lost because of sharing time with ICT and teachers still have to spend too much effort on tasks done by technical support staff in many schools.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

Provision for art and design is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning are excellent. Teachers have very good command of their subject.
- Lessons are structured carefully to challenge pupils both intellectually and aesthetically.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes and rise to the challenge of the teachers' high expectations.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good.

### **Commentary**

117. Standards by the age of 14 are very high and in 2002 they were well above national expectations. Artwork of a very high standard is produced across a wide range of media including painting, drawing, collage, print and 3-D construction. GCSE results were also well above national averages in 2002. These standards were maintained in 2003. All pupils regularly achieve A\*-C grades. Standards seen were very high overall.
118. In Years 7 to 9 the drawing, painting and three-dimensional work show very high standards of research and execution. Pupils' painting and drawing work is very good across a range of wet and dry media. Three-dimensional work using constructional materials is well developed. GCSE work is of very good quality. Drawing media are handled well. Pupils work skilfully in a wide range of two-dimensional media. Three-dimensional constructions and relief studies are designed effectively. Sketchbook journals show pupils undertake extensive research and preliminary study to inform their work. The highest attaining pupils invest their sketchbooks and reflective work with deep personal interest. Pupils who are not achieving the very highest grades nonetheless create work to a high standard, incorporating well-understood processes of exploration and development.
119. Achievement in lessons is very high across both key stages. Pupils arrive in Year 7 with diverse experiences of the subject and there is little uniformity in their levels of knowledge, skills and understanding. However, the teaching programme develops pupils' working methods and applied knowledge so that within a relatively short period pupils' artwork shows

the assimilation of a very good foundation of art processes, techniques and skills. GCSE pupils successfully build upon their foundation of knowledge, skills and understanding to develop a more individual approach to their work. They pursue individual research into art and design from both European and non-European cultures, including contemporary works and demonstrate a responsiveness to different kinds of art and design.

120. Teaching and learning are excellent. Teachers have very good command of their subject that is reflected in their lesson planning. Their lessons are structured carefully to challenge pupils both intellectually and aesthetically. Pupils' critical skills and language are cultivated through high quality focused teaching. Inventive strategies are used to improve pupils' understanding and capture their imagination. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils' involvement with the tasks they set and pupils strive hard to meet those expectations. There is excellent ongoing monitoring and assessment of pupils' work. Teachers know the work of each pupil and identify with insight where additional or divergent teaching will be required for individuals.
121. Excellent attitudes to learning mean that pupils make rapid gains in the subject. Homework completion is of very high standard. The generally excellent behaviour of the pupils is a major factor in the success of the teaching and learning.
122. Very good leadership has provided a focus for the continuing development of the subject. The small team has a coherent approach to managing aspects such as planning and assessment. The school has successfully addressed the issues highlighted in the previous inspection report.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **excellent**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching, with excellent features, results in very good learning.
- Teachers' high expectations inspire excellent creative efforts.
- Excellent planning and tailored work meets the learning needs of all pupils.
- Outstanding extra-curricular enrichment opportunities involve a significant number of pupils.
- Use of technology to support learning is exemplary in Years 10 and 11 and is developing in Years 7 to 9.

## **Commentary**

123. Standards in Year 9 and Year 11 in teacher assessments and examinations were well above the national average in 2002; these standards were maintained in 2003 and are similar now. Examination results at GCSE level are excellent, with 100 per cent of pupils achieving grades A\*-C. Pupils have above average performance skills because of the very good specialist teaching they receive and the practical nature of lessons, which encourage inventive composition both individually and collectively. Given the average prior level of attainment on entry to the school, this represents very good achievement.
124. In Year 11, pupils' compositional skills are well developed and they produce imaginative pieces in a variety of styles. They have good access to computer software and can use multi-tracking electronic keyboards to enhance their complex pieces. Their knowledge of theory and musical structure is sound and they are generally good performers on their chosen instruments. Standards continue to be well above average and suggest equally excellent results in the coming examinations with more pupils achieving the highest grades. Achievement at this level is outstanding.

125. Pupils learn well because the teaching is very good and on occasion excellent. Lessons are planned well and the pace of lessons is brisk and lively. Pupils respond to enthusiastic teaching and the challenge of high expectations by working really hard to a very high standard. Where a lesson is excellent, they enjoy creating music because the teacher ensures they have a terrific range of activities that captures the pupils' interest. The pupils themselves contribute significantly to their own learning by making very good intellectual and creative effort working either by themselves or in groups. Teachers carefully modify work so that all pupils achieve very well. Year 11 pupils are very good independent learners. They have excellent attitudes and work really hard in lessons without over-reliance on the teacher to keep them focused.
126. Marking and assessment procedures are very good because the pupils then know how well they are doing and what they must do to improve. Pupils who receive lessons from visiting teachers achieve a very good level of technical accuracy but attention to dynamic and shape is not always evident and performance then lacks feeling and interpretation.
127. The head of department manages the department and the faculty of creative arts very well, with excellent leadership, vision and commitment to the highest standards. There is an excellent programme of extra-curricular music, which involves a high proportion of pupils in choirs, ensemble groups, musical productions and many examples of outreach to the local community, including primary schools. The visiting music tutors are managed very well and make an excellent contribution to the school's provision for music.
128. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, particularly the standard of teaching and assessment and the greater challenge to pupils in Years 7 to 9.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

Provision for physical education is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils achieve well because the very good teaching engages and interests them.
- Learning is very good, because teachers use their very good subject knowledge to set challenging targets that pupils strive hard to meet.
- The pupils' knowledge and understanding of performance are very well developed by strong teaching of sports vocabulary.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good and uptake by pupils is very high.
- The time available for the subject is limited.
- Pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not have a clear idea of their standards or how to improve them.

### **Commentary**

129. Standards in 2002, of Year 9 pupils, as assessed by the teachers, were above national averages and they are similar in 2003. On entry, pupils' experiences of physical education (PE) vary considerably. Whilst their practical skills are average, their knowledge and understanding are below what could be expected. Standards seen during the inspection in the present Years 8 and 9 are generally good for their age. Their achievement is therefore good. Standards in the GCSE examinations have been consistently above the national averages and the pupils' achievement is also good. Standards in Years 10 and 11 non-examination PE activities are above average. Standards in Year 10 GCSE theory work are well above expectation. Achievement in the present GCSE classes is therefore good.
130. Teaching and learning are very good. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 learn well when clear targets are set at the start. In Year 11 lessons the very good demonstration of skills, the pace and challenge of the lesson creates a vibrant learning experience that encourages pupils to use



tactically sound approaches in netball and hockey. Analytical skills are well developed by this. Sports vocabulary teaching enables pupils to describe performance very effectively. Well-motivated pupils achieve much more in gymnastic and dance lessons because they behave in an exemplary way, striving to do their best throughout. In theory lessons in GCSE, a small number of pupils are making very good progress and their achievement is very good, because they are very well organised and very well taught. Assessment is good. Good self-assessment and target setting in Year 10 GCSE work are very effective. However, pupils are not always aware of how to do better. The limited amount of time available for PE affects their progress in the subject.

131. Leadership and management are good. A strong emphasis upon teamwork underpins the success of the department. Clear targets for development have been established. By providing a well-planned and wide range of activities for all pupils, nearly every pupil has the opportunity to develop their skills in an area that they can enjoy. Extra-curricular sports activities are very strong. There is considerable commitment by staff to these activities. The talented sports players achieve highly with the support of the school. In addition to two internationals, representation at county level is high, teams have considerable success and many pupils identified as having particular talents help their fellow pupils to develop their skills.
132. The introduction of the GCSE in Year 10 is a very positive development, and 20 pupils have opted for it. The improvement since the time of the previous inspection is good.
133. The Community Sports Leader Award (CSLA) is well taught. Students learn well and are given good opportunities to work independently. They enjoy the challenge of this course and achieve satisfactorily in their theory work. Those who did small presentations on local and regional sporting provision showed very good research skills and a lot of confidence in talking to their peers about their interests. There is no provision for core physical education in the sixth form.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

### **Citizenship**

Provision for citizenship is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good achievement by pupils by the ages of 14 and 16.
- An extremely well organised and delivered curriculum across all subjects and in pastoral time.
- Excellent leadership and management by the co-ordinator who introduced the subject well and continues to monitor and develop it.

### **Commentary**

134. The evidence from the observation of lessons, reviews of portfolios, work in progress and discussions indicates that the pupils attain excellent standards in this subject. There are no national measures to compare the standards with, but they are clearly well above what would be expected in most schools by the ages of 14 and 16. Their achievement, compared to what they might be expected to have done, given their standards in other subjects, is very good.
135. Most of the work seen was completed in subjects across the curriculum. Each subject has developed modules of their curriculum that address the three strands of the citizenship curriculum within its own schemes of work. The teaching of these is very good, with clear targets, well-organised activities and a commitment to addressing issues that are relevant to the pupils. Their learning is also very good, the pupils are able to talk about their studies, discuss issues and their experiences beyond the immediate locality and their understanding of complex issues is extensive.

136. There is a very well organised programme of events to support citizenship, including an activities week, where the pupils select experiences that contribute to their overall understanding and experience of the subject. Speakers such as members of parliament are invited and the pupils devise, develop and ask questions of them. The programme reinforces the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through targeted events and lessons.
137. Citizenship is also addressed through the pastoral lessons. These are excellent opportunities for pupils to address relevant issues, schemes of work are provided and staff develop these and devise their own. The pupils also complete portfolios to record and assess their work. Each pupil makes an assessment of their own efforts and writes an evaluation, the teacher makes a comment and these form the final report on the subject for parents. The comments made are perceptive, going beyond describing what they did to judging how well they have done and what they need to do to improve. This is a valuable process for them to consider their progress. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very good, feeling that it is relevant to the subject they are studying, and this helps their learning.
138. All the pupils are progressing very well. The subject teachers are aware of the different groups of pupils in each class and try to make appropriate provision with different activities where needed. The subject is led and managed extremely well. Preparations were made to introduce the subject well in advance of the legal requirements to do so. Appropriate courses and resources were identified and a co-ordinator appointed. As a result, the school was well placed to develop citizenship and embed it in the work of subjects across the curriculum and in the newly extended pastoral lessons. Each of them has a clearly defined programme within their own schemes of work and these are mapped out across the school to ensure consistency.
139. The work in the main school is complemented in the sixth form by the Medway Plus Certificate, a newly developed initiative which is being developed and piloted in the school. This is a portfolio accredited by the Medway Universities for UCAS points, which students build up over their two years in the sixth form, listing and evaluating their contributions to the school and the community. This is valued by those who are completing the pilot and is increasingly being taken up by the Year 12 students as they see the way that it can be used to identify their efforts and act as a record and reminder of their wider involvement in initiatives for applications and interviews.

## **SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM**

In the inspection, 11 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.

**Level 3 GCE AS level courses 2002 (the national percentages are for girls)**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	2	100	92.5	50	47.2	40	41
Biology	8	100	83.5	37.5	36.1	41.3	34.6
Business studies	8	100	89.7	0	33.3	26.3	36
Chemistry	4	100	87.5	50	39.9	40	36.9
Classical civilisation	1	100	96.7	100	55.3	60	44.2
Critical thinking	97	96	N/A	78.1	N/A	39.1	N/A
Economics	3	100	86.8	0	45	33.3	38.2
English literature	7	100	94.9	14.3	38.7	32.9	39.4
French	2	100	85.5	50	35.1	40	35
Geography	8	100	89.6	37.5	41.3	40	38.2
German	5	100	88.6	60	35.6	48	36.2
Government and politics	4	100	N/A	25	N/A	32.5	N/A
ICT	8	100	78.6	62.4	20.1	45	28.5
Latin	1	100	N/A	100	N/A	50	N/A
Mathematics	11	100	78	9.1	37.3	31.8	33.3
Music	2	100	94.7	0	41.7	30	40
Physics	5	100	87.7	58.3	42.8	30	38.1
Psychology	3	100	N/A	0	N/A	30	N/A
RE	1	100	91.4	100	40.5	40	38.5
Theatre studies	2	100	95.6	50	41.1	45	40.4
General studies	24	100	80.1	62.5	27.4	47.5	31

**Level 3 GCE A- level and VCE courses 2002 (The national figures are for girls)**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	10	100	96.7	40	52.3	90	87.8
Biology	24	100	92.6	33.3	38.7	82.5	76.3
Business studies	21	100	96.8	47.6	35.9	88.6	78.4
Chemistry	28	100	95.1	42.9	49.2	81.4	83.8
Classical civilisation	10	100	99.3	80	56.3	100	90.9
Economics	7	100	96.6	71.4	48.2	97.1	84.7
English literature	40	100	98.7	60	44.1	92	84.7
Language	16	100	98.5	75	37.4	101.3	80.8
French	8	100	96.4	50	46.1	95	83.2
Further mathematics	3	100	N/A	100	N/A	120	N/A
Geography	10	100	97.9	50	47.3	90	85.3
German	5	100	96.7	80	44.5	104	82.6
Government and politics	33	100	N/A	78.8	N/A	92.7	N/A
History	14	100	97.4	57.1	43.3	97.1	82.6
Latin	2	100	N/A	100	N/A	120	N/A
Mathematics	19	100	95	78.9	56.4	105.3	88.3

Music	3	100	97.8	100	42.5	120	82.7
Physics	12	100	95.4	58.3	50	93.3	84.6
Psychology	10	100	N/A	70	N/A	92	N/A
RE	17	100	96.7	70.6	50	92	84.6
Theatre studies	10	100	98.6	10	44.1	76	84.6

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

Overall, provision in English literature and language is **excellent**.

#### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent standards in literature and language.
- Excellent teacher command of subject knowledge, used very well to prompt, check and extend learning.
- Very good mixture of methods in lessons which draw in student interest and encourage independent intellectual development.
- Very good advice given to students on what they need to do in order to improve.
- Very good leadership and management which has enabled staff to work as a team to improve the quality of teaching.

#### Commentary

140. English literature was inspected in depth and English language sampled. Results are excellent in both courses, where a very good mixture of teaching methods engage student interest, imagination and independent thinking.
141. 2002 results in English literature were well above average both overall and for those reaching higher grades (A and B). In English language too, they were very high and the standards were maintained in 2003.
142. Standards in work seen reflect examination results in both subjects. They are very good at AS level where teachers help students to build well on their previous skills of analysis and discussion so that their level of critical repose to literature develops autonomously and that arguments are methodically developed and substantiated. At advanced level standards are far above those expected, because teachers allow students time to establish a firm foundation of analytical skills before exploiting it fully in their second year of advanced study. Students demonstrate a secure grasp of the techniques to contrast characters and convey a sense of place in a novel such as Thomas Hardy's 'The Return of the Native' and they apply this well to their own choice of books.
143. The quality of teaching and learning of English literature is excellent. Teachers use an authoritative command of their subject matter to prompt, guide and encourage students, and check their levels of understanding. They deploy an extensive mixture of stimulating methods which draw out student interest, commitment and high levels of independent intellectual development. For example, students working on the poems of Carol Ann Duffy develop independent critical perspectives based on a thorough interrogation of the texts, independent research, discussion in small groups and making presentations in class. Students are strongly self-motivated because teachers take their contributions seriously and help them to articulate and refine their own ideas well. Their written assignments are marked conscientiously and they benefit from the chance to reflect regularly on advice given to them about what they need to do in order to improve. In English language, expert teaching stimulates rapid learning and establishes a secure atmosphere of critical inquiry where students make thoughtful suggestions and frame questions with insight and imagination.

144. Achievement is excellent in both subjects. Students grasp ideas quickly and build rapidly in knowledge acquired in previous lessons and in homework.
145. Leadership and management of the subject are very good, based on a clear vision for its continuing improvement. Specialist staff are enabled to work together well as a team, analysing strengths and practice in the classroom and identifying priorities for improvement, leading to improved teaching since the last inspection.

## French

Overall the quality of provision in French is **excellent**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are above average for similar schools and have shown a general trend of improvement over the last three years.
- The quality of teaching in all lessons observed was good.
- There is a well-led team of dedicated, specialist teachers.
- High quality accommodation and resources provide a positive tone for learning.
- The use of ICT to promote learning is very good.

### Commentary

146. Large numbers of students choose to study French in the sixth form which is indicative of their interest and success in the subject in the main school. This year there are 20 students in Year 12 and 15 in Year 13. Their attainment was above average for similar schools in 2002 with a significant number of pupils gaining the very highest grades of A and B. There has been a general trend of improvement over the last three years. Students generally achieve above expectation.
147. Standards of work seen reflect a similar pattern. In a Year 12 lesson, students were able to discuss the differences between the English and French education systems in French and the differences in approach between GCSE and A-level studies. Individual students were confident to give presentations to their peers and respond to the complex questions which were asked of them. The language used was sophisticated for this early stage of an AS course but the challenges were sufficiently realistic for the students to remain confident. By Year 13, students had more than sufficient vocabulary to discuss the French political system in depth and have a good understanding of the European Union.
148. The students' folders reflected the same high standards as their work in class. Their work was organised to reflect the topics they were studying and contained a significant amount of authentic material. Their use of language was becoming increasingly sophisticated as the course progressed, demonstrating a good understanding of complex tenses and grammatical constructions. They corrected their written work in such a way that errors were rarely repeated.
149. In lessons seen, the teaching was always good. Pace was always brisk and students were constantly prompted to correct themselves and control their own learning. Challenges were always realistic but still enabled students to extend their knowledge. A variety of activities, including the use of information technology, taped material and pair work, consolidated students' knowledge and provided them with reference material for future use. Teachers used French throughout the lessons thus ensuring that it became the natural means of communication for the students. Students were always able to measure what they had achieved during a lesson and then be able to continue extending the theme for homework. The French foreign language assistant works with individual students and supports and enhances

their classwork and homework. The opportunity to visit France for work experience provides another valuable means by which students can extend their knowledge.

150. Students' work is marked constructively and they know exactly what they have to do to improve further. In this way they become involved in setting their own targets and in their own learning.
151. The sixth form French students benefit from the same high quality leadership, management, accommodation and resources as the main school with well-qualified staff, comprehensive schemes of work and excellent facilities for learning.

## Latin

Overall, provision in Latin is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good examination results in AS and A2 Latin.
- In depth subject knowledge and expertise of Head of Classics.
- Wide range of enrichment activities for A-level Classicists.
- Students have very positive attitudes to the study of Latin.
- The combined Latin language lesson for Years 12 and 13 does not enable students to make maximum progress.
- Students' work does not always contain comments which inform them how to improve.

### Commentary

152. Standards in both AS and A2 Latin were well above the national average in 2002 and in 2003 all pupils at AS and A2 level achieved grades A and B. This is very good achievement. Students in Years 12 and 13 have a very good understanding of Latin grammar and, as a result, their translation skills are strong. Students in both Years 12 and 13 make very good progress and they have very positive attitudes to study. However, the combined language lesson does not allow students to make sufficient progress despite the very good planning and support offered by the teacher. In both year groups, students respond well to the study of Latin literature and they are able to discuss both the content and the style of two different genres of Latin poetry with knowledge and maturity.
153. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. The very good teaching is characterised by a wide variety of appropriate tasks, the high quality reference and support materials provided for the students and high expectations. For example, during a language lesson, Year 12 students gave accurate, literal translations for a series of ablative absolutes; the teacher then set a further challenge for them to put these into more natural English. The students worked very well in pairs to provide some very fluent suggestions. During the language lesson observed, the teacher gave constructive verbal feedback and support to individual students and students were not afraid to ask for help both during and after their lessons.
154. Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural is very good. There are very good relationships between students and their teachers and students work well in pairs and listen to the views of others. They have very positive attitudes to Latin with two students in Year 13 planning to study Classics in university and AS and A2 students supporting pupils in Years 8 and 9 in lunchtime Latin Club. In addition, most students continue to A2 level and one Year 13 student is studying A-level Greek during lunchtimes and after school with the head of classics. In addition, there is a varied programme of extra curricular activities such as an annual, oversubscribed visit to Italy or Greece, Latin summer schools and visits to the London Festival of Drama.

155. Latin forms part of the humanities faculty with a head of classics responsible for Latin from Year 8 to Year 13 and classical civilisation in the sixth form. The head of classics has great commitment and vision for the development of Latin both within the school and the wider community. For example, there are plans to re-establish links in classics with the local boys' school and to offer the Minimus' scheme to local primaries to raise the profile of Latin. Schemes of work in Latin are good and the department has great expertise and up-to-date knowledge in the teaching of Latin. Students' work is assessed regularly and language work is corrected in great detail. However, comments on students' work do not always give strategies to students on how to improve further. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The consistent, very high results in A Level examinations over recent years.
- The consistent, very good teaching that enables students to gain these results.
- The very positive attitudes of all students who work very hard to achieve these results.
- Highly effective leadership and management that encourage success but still have a vision for improvement.
- The range of subject modules, carefully chosen to develop the full potential of all students.

### **Commentary**

156. A number of very good features combine so that the overall provision is excellent. The 2002 A-level results were very high with the percentage of students gaining the highest grades A and B putting the school in the highest band of performance when compared with the national figure for all students. Results for 2003 are in line with these figures although national comparisons are not available. Standards seen during the inspection are in line with these and results of modules taken so far are very high. Because of improvements in teaching, standards have risen since the last inspection.
157. Students start the course with very good grades at GCSE level. This provides a sound foundation for the course ahead. The students are very confident algebraically and this stands them in good stead through the initial modules. Girls work hard and make detailed notes to aid revision, annotating worksheets to emphasise important points. Appropriate selection of modules gives students a course suited to their needs. The very able students also study for the further mathematics examination. Very few students leave the course after one year; many study mathematics for its own sake.
158. Teaching is very good and teachers prepare lessons very well because they all have very good subject knowledge. Students are very mutually supportive and readily discuss their work with their teachers and their peers. The girls question teachers in detail if there is something they do not understand so achieving a thorough understanding. One Year 13 student admitted that some of the recent topics were difficult but clear and thorough explanation by the teacher enabled her to understand fully. There is a good response to the directed self-study lessons and this develops the girls' capacity for independent study. There is very good feedback to students on their work; this can be individual, small group or to the whole group. These techniques are effective in informing girls of their strengths and areas for development. Girls reinforce their understanding of their strengths and areas for improvement by a self-evaluation exercise after studying each module.
159. The department is very well organised and led; there is a detailed scheme of work that gives a framework for teachers to plan their lessons. The head of department is not complacent with the high results and has a clear vision for future improvements. There are adequate resources

to support learning, with computer software used to analyse and develop graphical work. The improvement since the last inspection is good.

## **Mathematics across the curriculum**

160. All students are sufficiently competent in mathematics to access all sixth form courses. Consequently, there is no course designed to support students who do not study mathematics but require a deeper understanding to help them in their chosen subjects. There is some informal support, if needed, for individual students. Recent recognition of this has resulted in consideration of such a course in the future. When required, there is good and efficient use of calculators in all subjects; in biology and chemistry, statistical analysis is used to good effect.

## **SCIENCE**

### **Biology**

Provision in biology in the sixth form is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Work in the subject is very well led, managed and taught and, as a result, the students rapidly develop a good understanding of biology in theory, practice and the wider world.
- There are too few specialist teachers to meet current whole-school curricular demands, let alone extend the sixth form curriculum and when sixth form classes are unduly large there are also significant pressures on time, space and resources.
- Fieldwork is no better than good as there are no residential field courses and the nature reserve is only at proposal stage.

### **Commentary**

161. The standards of the sixth-formers' work in biology are, overall, very good. The girls start in Year 12 with better subject knowledge than skills and fairly shallow understanding; by the end of this year they have a good grasp of all three areas of biology that becomes very good by the time they complete the full advanced level course. Over 20 students enter for the full qualification each year - the results have improved with time and were good in comparison with national norms in 2002, with a higher proportion of girls reaching the top grades in 2003. The biology standards of the current sixth formers - shown in the lessons observed, in their work and in talking with them - are good in Year 12 and very good in Year 13. In both years, the girls achieve very well - they clearly enjoy the subject, are quite often inspired (especially in Year 13), work very hard (even in the private study "DISS" sessions) and are highly motivated. As a result they learn very fast, in particular developing that deep understanding of the subject that is so important if they take it further (as many do); they also become very good learners, whatever their style, and whether working on their own or in groups, when collaboration and discussion are unusually mature.
162. The quality of biology teaching is very good. It is excellent in the extremely effective use of a range of appropriate teaching methods, resources and techniques to maintain a very high pace of work. The teachers' marking and assessment of the students' work and progress are very good too and their use of these techniques to help individuals achieve highly in biology is excellent.
163. Leadership in and the management of work in biology are also very good and ensure they contribute most highly to the girls' moral, social and cultural development. The Head of Biology takes up a great number and range of further training opportunities, puts the outcomes into practice quickly and effectively and also "cascades" the ideas enthusiastically to immediate and faculty colleagues as well as to the whole school. She leads the students very well too,



both in their studies and otherwise (for instance as they become effective biology mentors for Year 11 girls, which benefits both groups). Because some non-specialists deliver biology in the main school, the department is not able to extend the range of sixth form courses in the subject, or to develop a programme of residential fieldwork.

## Physics

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

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- The A-level and AS level results are regularly above average.
- The presence of well qualified and experienced subject teachers.
- The very good use of ICT both in lessons and for Internet-based homework exercises to develop independent learning.
- The good working relations between the well-motivated students and their teachers.
- The need in some lessons to make more use of questioning strategies to identify student weaknesses and to extend the learning.

### Commentary

164. Apart from 2001, when results were satisfactory, the department has consistently obtained A and AS level results which have been above the national average. These results have compared well to those of the other sciences, although from a smaller number of students. However, this pattern was not repeated in the 2003 results due to a fall in the percentage of A-B grades, although all students studying physics obtained passes.
165. Standards of work seen in Year 13 indicate that students are making satisfactory progress and their levels of achievement are broadly satisfactory compared to earlier GCSE and AS grades. In one lesson on momentum, they were using data loggers to obtain results, these being analysed using ICT and the interactive whiteboard. One student was particularly skilled in this area as she quickly set up different screen displays, in order to compare results, which were then discussed by the class. They were also seen attempting a practice in the planning-practical paper. The discussion between the students indicated that most are able to cope with the range of skills involved. A particular feature of the Year 13 course is the head of department's development of computer based learning strategies. This consists of lessons that are based on Power-Point presentations, supplemented with notes and follow-up exercises, which the students can access at any time from the department's website. Work of students in Year 12 shows that they are slowly making the transition to more advanced work and are gradually gaining an understanding of the concepts of momentum and moments. Mathematical skills needed in calculations are still being developed and algebraic processes still cause difficulties for many students. Overall, they are making satisfactory progress and achievement.
166. The teaching of physics is at least satisfactory. The experienced and knowledgeable teachers ensure that the content of lessons is accurate and where formal notes are supplied, these are good and form a secure source of revision material. In other cases, students are expected to formulate their own notes from material presented in lessons. The quality of these notes is variable and this may affect future learning and revision. Homework exercises are well marked with constructive comments given to guide students in future work. In the more successful lessons, students are encouraged to contribute their ideas, so consolidating their learning and understanding. Questioning is well used to identify what the students have understood. However, in most of the lessons seen, more rigour in this area and a better match of pace and pitch to the students' abilities is required. The teachers relate well to the motivated students

and good working relations are clearly evident. There is a good retention rate for students studying physics and nearly all that are successful at AS continue with the subject in Year 13. This is indicative of their interest in the subject and the students' confidence in being able to reach the grades required.

167. The laboratory accommodation meets current requirements and the presence of a laboratory which has been converted to meet some of the ICT requirements for science is a particular bonus. This includes data logging facilities linked to an interactive white board and separate student computers, all linked to the school network. These facilities are particularly well used by this forward-looking department. No mention was made of physics in the last report. However, the department continues to function well and is making good progress in developing new schemes of work and new teaching strategies. The leadership of physics is good as there is a clear vision for the continued development of the subject and its teaching. The development of the department's student database is well used to monitor the progress of students. This compares individual progress with that of the group and so provides useful feedback.

## Chemistry

The quality of provision in chemistry is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- A modern and engaging syllabus.
- Very good teaching.
- Students are dedicated to their studies.
- Excellent standards in experimental and investigative work.
- Good assessment and monitoring of students' progress.
- ICT is not used fully in monitoring the progress of chemical processes and the logging of data directly through sensors.

### Commentary

168. In 2002 the percentage of students gaining A2 passes in the range A to C was above the national average. All the students obtained a pass grade, achieving better than can be expected nationally. Students achieve the same very good standards in AS level examinations. These very good standards are confirmed from the lessons observed and the analysis of students' work.
169. Students of all abilities are very well supported as individuals. Their work is completed with care and attention to accuracy and detail. They are highly motivated and they work to the best of their abilities at all times. Consequently they achieve very well and they make rapid progress in mastering the advanced academic and investigative skills of this course.
170. The quality of teaching is very good. Highly skilled teachers work well as a team to deliver the subject. In a Year 12 lesson the continued reference to commercial and industrial processes and the everyday applications of the chemicals studied brought great interest and relevance to the course. This enhanced the quality of learning. The teacher was very skilful in directing the learning so it kept looping back to previous times to secure the understanding on which the more challenging concepts were based.
171. Theoretical components of the course are taught well and to a very good standard. The students' practical experience is good and further challenges their scientific thinking whilst developing their skills of experimental enquiry, data analysis and interpretation. However ICT is not used fully to enhance the students' understanding, interpretation and presentation of data and to monitor experiments by direct sampling through sensors.

172. It is a combination of the students' absolute dedication and interest and the pace and rigour of the lessons that lead to good learning in this subject. The teachers know their subject well and they teach with enthusiasm and dedication. The teachers know their students well and they all receive encouragement and support appropriate to their interests and abilities. Lessons are taught with sufficient depth to challenge and extend the learning of the highest attaining students. The students work independently when required to do so to research their studies. They believe that the quality of their learning is very good and they are fully confident that it will enable them to achieve their ambitions.
173. The head of faculty leads this subject, in which he is a specialist, to a very good standard. The school has elected to change the syllabus to "Salter's A-level Chemistry". After careful trialling of the new syllabus, it was shown that standards had further improved. This modern and challenging course brings increased relevance to the subject through topics such as "Medicines by Design" and "Designer Polymers" Two technicians provide excellent support for learning through the maintenance and management of the more advanced equipment required for these courses.
174. This subject was not directly reported in the last inspection. However the standards in A-level examinations have improved year after year to reach the current situation where over 65 per cent of the students on this popular course are achieving the highest grades of A or B.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

175. There is an excellent follow through from the exemplary practice of seamlessly integrating the use of ICT in most subjects to enhance learning. There are many examples of student use in research and to present their studies. For example, when studying modern foreign languages students use PowerPoint to prepare presentations. Spreadsheets are used in business studies to investigate cash flows. In art students digitally combine and manipulate images and in physics data logging enables the students to verify the laws of motion and gravity. The students are very confident in using the computer as a very effective tool wherever it will enhance and extend their studies.

## **HUMANITIES**

Overall provision in history is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good teaching places strong intellectual demands on students to which they respond well.
- The preparation of students for examinations is very effective.
- The quality of debate and discussion in classes is very good, with pupils encouraged to express opinions and debate issues within a highly supportive atmosphere.
- Teaching and learning are reinforced by excellent resources both written and electronic.

### **Commentary**

176. Standards in history are very good. From 1999 to 2002 the average points score in A-level was over half a grade higher than that of girls nationally. In 2002 the percentage of students awarded grade A or B was higher than that for girls nationally. While the average points score for the school in 2003 was similar to that of 2002, the number of students achieving Grade A or B rose by around five per cent this year.
177. Achievement in history is also very good. Students make rapid progress in both Year 12 and Year 13 as a result of well-organised, challenging teaching and the acquisition of excellent habits of self-directed study. Soon after completing GCSE courses they are consulting an

impressive range of scholarly sources and by Year 13 have acquired further skills in historical analysis and advanced essay writing.

178. Teaching and learning are very good at this stage. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent, they prepare meticulously and use a wide range of useful resources. Year 12 students undertake role play on the 1640-42 parliament involving complex religious and political issues. Their debate reveals good subject knowledge for this stage of the course (including differences within various strands of Presbyterianism). An impressive feature of the teaching is the emphasis on examination technique: this includes careful clarification of examination terminology, consideration of different approaches to questions and out-of-school revision classes for those repeating modular examinations.
179. The preparation of Year 13 students beginning an extended essay as part of their examination is impressive; it includes a visit to Canterbury University library to consult sources. Teachers encourage a culture of self-study, initiative and personal research in the sixth form from which students benefit and appreciate. This is also indicated by the range of topics chosen by them for their extended essay from the reign of Cleopatra to the Falklands War. Assessment is very good. Written work is closely marked with constructive comments; students are clear about their predicted and potential grades and what they need to do to achieve them. Relationships within the department are excellent, students enjoy the subject and respect their teachers; virtually all students who commence the A-level course complete it.
180. History in the sixth form is very ably led and managed by the head of department with the same emphasis on teamwork, learning and standards and effective use of ICT which is found in the main school. Improvement has been good since the previous inspection. An admirable feature of the department is the way sixth form history students run a history club for the younger pupils with commitment, humour and enthusiasm. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

## **Sociology**

Provision in sociology as a distance-learning course is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The independent learning skills of students are very good.
- Tutor's marking and assessment is very helpful and linked securely to learning needs.
- The link teacher provides very good support, monitoring and encouragement.
- Direction is not available when it is needed most and this hinders progress in learning.
- Resources are as yet insufficient to support wider reading and research.

### **Commentary**

181. There are no A-level results available as this subject was only introduced in 2002. Results at AS level in 2003 show 50 per cent of students achieved A and B grades, but numbers were too few to make any significant judgements.
182. Present standards in Year 12, based on the first marked essays, reveal a widespread but average level of attainment at this early stage. Students' ability to plan and structure their essays is weak and they lack theoretical and empirical evidence to bolster their explanations and arguments. There are, however, some excellent features particularly in the grasp of factual knowledge, understanding and interpretation. Year 13 students have achieved a very good standard, where evaluative skills are much more evident and there is a firmer grasp of the subject matter and methodology. Students have benefited from further research and reading. Given the nature of a subject new to the students and delivered as a distance learning course, students' achievement in such a short time is very good.

183. Teaching is good because it helps the students to learn, particularly by helpful marking and assessment which are securely linked to their learning needs and showing them clearly what they must do to improve. Very good support by the link teacher ensures both the monitoring of progress and constant encouragement of the students. Formative feedback does not reach the students quickly enough, especially at the start of the course, to support learning effectively. Also, the level of student commitment is not immediately obvious until the work is marked. The students nevertheless have a very high level of commitment and rise commendably to the challenge of self-learning. They quickly develop very good independent study skills, use their study time effectively and support each other well. Some relish and rise to the challenge with great motivation and enjoyment. However, a very few students who need constant reinforcement of their learning are not able to sustain their motivation and effort without the presence of a teacher and so drop out of the course.
184. Management of the course is very good and the teacher in school provides the important link between tutor and students in a concerned way and with a commitment to improvement. Resources are satisfactory but need to be increased to support learning more effectively.

### **Religious education**

Provision for religious education is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results in 2002 were well above average.
- Students are achieving very well, some with little prior learning in the course topics.
- Attitudes to the subject are very positive.
- Students develop high-level independent learning and research skills at home, in private study and in class.
- Teaching is very good; with secure subject knowledge, highlighting exam requirements and with high expectations of students.
- Learning is very good, leading to very good progress over time.
- Opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding through spoken contributions, explanation and argument are strong features in both course topics.
- The subject is very well led with well established systems for target setting, monitoring, and student support.

### **Commentary**

185. The GCE A-level examination results in 2002 were well above average for all maintained and selective schools, as were the proportion of students gaining the highest grades. These results were similar to those in 2001, which was a major improvement from 2000 when results were below average and are in the top quarter of schools across the country. This was better than the target set for the subject in the school development plan. The average point score for each student taking the subject was significantly higher than the average of all schools. Three times the number of students were entered for the exam than in previous years. Results in 2003 were average, but the students' improvement has remained high.
186. The standards of work of current students are well above average. In Year 13, students are achieving in line with predictions based on their GCSE results and have attained well at AS level in 2003. In work seen, they develop from expressing personal views on morality and ethics to being able to link these to schools of thought. When exploring philosophical theories and how they relate to each other, they can apply their learning to case studies and human situations. Their grades have been improving as the course progresses. They provide full explanations of the theories of philosophers, clearly set out for later retrieval, an essential requirement in a course which features the linking of their work on philosophy with their work on ethics. Learning goals are understood by all students and reflected in their range of work,

using specialist language, evidence, examples and argument with increasing confidence and accuracy.

187. Students in Year 12 are attaining above average standards as a result of effective teaching and planning which provide early routines and very good support for learning skills. In one lesson, they investigated current newspapers for examples to clarify the problem of evil for philosophy and theology. Students were able to categorise causes of evil, to demonstrate very good understanding of human choice and acts of God and to evaluate effectively the implications of these for belief and ethics.
188. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very well as a result. The principal features of teaching are very good subject knowledge both of the course and the examination requirements, giving confidence to the students. Teachers set clear tasks based on learning objectives and use praise and discussion well to help girls develop their own ideas and build on their own experiences. Students' improving skills are evident in the way they manage increasing knowledge and in the literacy and accuracy which are features of their written work. Good introductions and ending of lessons ensure students are clear about what is expected of them. Teacher expectations are high and teachers share the scheme of work with students and this supports high level independent learning and research skills at home, in private study and in class. Students learn very well. They are attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles that they experience. Students work well together. Opportunities for students to demonstrate their understanding through spoken contributions, explanation and argument are strong features in both course topics.
189. The subject has excellent leadership and management with a significantly increasing number of girls choosing the subject. The course has been established well. There is a commitment to high standards in the subject, with all students given targets and provided with helpful routines from the start of the course. Students' progress is monitored regularly and linked to grades, and marking is accompanied by helpful comments on how to improve. Students have adequate practice in extended writing and exam questions to familiarise themselves with what is required and to reflect on their own needs. Students' performances in the past are carefully analysed and adjustments made to course content and challenge. Accommodation is good and resources are very good. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection, particularly in standards and progress.
190. All students not taking examinations in the subject have adequate provision; this includes a day conference each year. Year 12 students focus on choreographing a dance presentation around a religious theme and Year 13 students consider an issue relating to science and religion. These are supplemented by formal and informal religious studies modules in the critical thinking AS level course. None of these were able to be sampled during the inspection.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

191. The work of groups studying advanced level technology in the sixth form was also sampled. Standards are good in Year 12 and very good in Year 13 (and last summer nearly all the technology candidates reached the top grades of A and B). The sixth formers' folders and lessons show mature understanding and application of the subject and its problem-solving approach to designing and making, as well as some very good, though restricted, work with computers. The students' results at the end of Years 12 and 13 are very good and improving and the staff add a great deal of value as the students work through the course, with the quality of teaching being overall very good. The department is planning initiatives to broaden the sixth form curriculum such as vocational alternatives and a programme of visits and visitors and joining more national competitions.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

Provision for art and design is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning are excellent. Teachers have very good command of their subject.
- Students' excellent attitudes to study provide opportunities for intellectually and aesthetically demanding work.
- Sixth formers develop a very mature approach to independent research and the creative development of their work.
- Students apply critical judgements, analyse works and record their thoughts with insight and a high level of fluency.

### **Commentary**

192. Standards were below the national average for A and B grades in 2002. However, results in 2003 are very high and the number gaining A and B grades is double that of the previous year with over half the pupils now achieving an A grade. Standards at AS level continue to be high.
193. Post-16 artwork is of a very high standard. Students work skilfully with a very wide range of drawing and painting media including oils and acrylic. In their sculpture and assemblage work, students tackle themes with a high level of confidence and maturity. Sketchbooks and journals show work of the highest quality. The written work is of the highest calibre. The research of artists' work and reflections upon their own practice shows students' commit much energy and thought to their written studies. The work of the highest attaining pupils shows a rigorous approach to visual analysis and a scrupulous recording through both drawing and writing of the stages through which their work evolves. Pupils rarely fall below a very high standard in terms of the breadth of depth of their research and preparatory studies.
194. The students achieve very highly. Their technical understanding improves rapidly and their more autonomous approach to work underlines their growing maturity. Preliminary studies and sketches are intelligently annotated. Students develop very good quality individual research studies and inform their own practice from a wide range of influences, both European and non-European. Their research into artists and art shows students applying critical judgements, analysing works and recording their thoughts with a high level of insight and fluency.
195. Teaching and learning are excellent. Teachers have very good command of their subject and a thorough approach to lesson planning. Most of the teaching is based on students' individual tutorials with the teacher. This is very effective and enables the teacher to gain a deeper knowledge of the students' work and ideas. Excellent teaching was seen. Teachers' guidance and challenge extend their students' understanding or interpretation of the themes they have chosen to follow. Students work very constructively to meet the challenge set.
196. Students' attitude to study is excellent. AS level students working in directed non-supervised lessons were able to achieve much that the teacher had set because of their excellent attitudes to learning. Students worked in a highly focused manner. Their mature approach to discussion enabled them to lend support to one another where required. Students carry out extensive independent study in relation to their coursework.
197. Very good leadership has provided a focus for the continuing development of the subject. There is a clear direction to the work of the department, including the development of students' independent individual learning within the framework of AS and A Level. The school has successfully addressed the issues highlighted in the previous inspection report.

## **BUSINESS STUDIES**

Provision in business studies is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The quality of leadership and management is very good and provides a clear vision for the subject.
- There is a high degree of staff commitment to raising standards further.
- There is some unevenness of student performance on different units of the course; teachers are developing strategies to address these problems.
- The department still needs to develop its business links, an issue identified in the previous inspection report.

### **Commentary**

198. Results in the A-level examinations for 2002 were well above the national average and showed an improvement on the 2001 results which were already above the national average. There has been a small increase in the percentage of students attaining the highest A to B grades; all students attain an A-level pass. The percentage of students attaining the higher A to B grades is about 45 per cent, which is somewhat below that in most other A-level subjects taken in the school. The results in the AS level examinations in 2002 were in line with the national average for that year; the unvalidated results for 2003 show a significant improvement.
199. Students in Year 13 attain standards that are above and often well above those expected nationally. They achieve very well and invariably improve by at least one grade between the end of Year 12 and the end of Year 13. Students in Year 12 achieve well in relation to their prior attainment. Strong foundations in subject knowledge are built in Year 12 through their studies of markets, pricing, production processes, marketing strategies and the more complex problems of accounting and finance. The emphasis on application of theory to real life business issues is a strength. As students move through Year 13 they demonstrate very well developed skills in analysis and critical evaluation based on an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the subject and bring these skills of application to bear on demanding and challenging business issues. Some quite outstanding work was seen in a Year 12 lesson on the production process, when undeterred by the novelty and challenge of the problems presented to them, they responded positively with their own solutions pushing the lesson to its boundaries of learning. Standards of written work and case study analysis are always good.
200. Students benefit from teaching that is based on very good and often excellent, subject knowledge which is deployed very effectively in many lessons to create a dynamic but rigorous learning environment which fully stretches and challenges all students. In these lessons the intellectual challenge, interest, analysis and application is constantly building on the use of theory and terminology. There is very good progress due to the combination of excellent questioning, the very good selection of activities and the pace of lessons and the very high expectations. The students benefit from their teachers' excellent subject knowledge and enthusiasm. Teaching strategies are always good, based on a variety of resources which are well deployed to promote learning. However in a few lessons teaching is not sufficiently challenging and opportunities to extend application are not fully developed. As a result students do not undertake higher order analysis, critical evaluation, or extend application of their skills to other problems in a different context. In some lessons there is also evidence of over reliance of textbook use. Homework is always set that reinforces what is learnt in lessons and standards of teachers' marking are very good. Students are highly committed to their studies and ambitions for their future.



201. The quality of leadership and management in the subject is very good. There are clear strategies in place for raising standards: schemes of work are well developed; assessment is used effectively to monitor student progress and to inform curricular planning; and a clear action plan is in place with well-defined priorities for development of the subject. In addition the head of department has a clear vision for future provision in the subject, including the introduction of a vocational pathway and a full programme of visits and visitors is being developed.
  
202. The head of department runs master classes in business studies during the lunch hour and plays a leading role in the whole school Industry Week in the summer term, which the DfES has asked the department to use to create a resource to be distributed nationwide. This has been rewarded with Pathfinder in Enterprise status. The department also runs a Youth Enterprise Scheme. Students came second last year in the Bank of England's competition, making a presentation on interest rate policy.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
<b>The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	1	1
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	1	1
<b>Overall standards achieved</b>		<b>1</b>
Pupils' achievement	2	1
<b>Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities</b>		<b>1</b>
Attendance	2	2
Attitudes	1	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	1
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
<b>The quality of education provided by the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well pupils learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	1	1
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		1
Accommodation and resources	2	2
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	3
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	1	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	1	1
<b>The leadership and management of the school</b>		<b>2</b>
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

*Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).*

