

INSPECTION REPORT

FORT PITT GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Chatham, Kent

LEA area: Medway

Unique reference number: 118798

Headteacher: Miss M. C. Atkins

Reporting inspector: Brian Evans
1049

Dates of inspection: 31 January – 4 February 2000

Inspection number: 187270

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:	Community
Age range of students:	11 - 18
Gender of students:	Girls
School address:	Fort Pitt Hill Chatham Kent
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C Hoad
Date of previous inspection:	18 March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Brian Evans	Registered inspector	English as an additional language	What sort of school is it? a) The school's results and achievements?
			How well are students taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
			What should the school do to improve further?
John Edmond	Lay inspector	N/A	What sort of school is it? b) Students' attitudes, values and personal development?
			How well does the school care for its students?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
John Fletcher	Team inspector	Mathematics	N/A
Barbara Johnstone	Team inspector	Music	
		Performing arts	
Jacqueline Pentlow	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?
		Equal opportunities	
Roy Pitcher	Team inspector	Religious education	N/A
		Special educational needs	
Graham Preston	Team inspector	GNVQ	N/A
		Sixth form	
Stuart Rawcliffe	Team inspector	Science	N/A

Susan Schofield	Team inspector	Art	N/A
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Jacque Watson	Team inspector	Design and technology	N/A
		Information technology	
Patricia Wheeler	Team inspector	History	N/A
		Geography	
Richard Andersen	Team inspector	English	N/A
Ronald Bulman	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	N/A
		Latin	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Fort Pitt Grammar School is one of three girls' grammar schools serving the Medway urban area and is situated on an historic site in Chatham. There are 1035 students on roll. It is larger than the national average size for selective schools. The 195 students in the sixth form include 9 boys. The school's catchment area is extensive and students are drawn from 56 primary schools. Students come from a wide socio-economic background and many sixth form students are first generation university applicants.

Students enter the school in Year 7 with attainment levels that are above the national average. Six per cent of students are from minority ethnic groups, mainly from the Indian sub-continent. Three per cent of students have English as an additional language; none are at the first stages of language acquisition. Five per cent of students are entitled to free school meals which is below the national average. The number of students [3 per cent] on the school's register of special educational needs with statements of special educational need [0.3 per cent] is well below the national average. These percentages have changed little over the last four years but there has been an increase of 251 students since the last inspection in 1996.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school is well managed and led and enables students to develop self-confidence. Pastoral support is very good and both parents and students have great confidence and pride in the school. The learning environment and facilities are very good. Teaching overall is good. The school provides good value for money. The challenge for the future is to build on this very favourable base to raise standards of achievement above the current levels.

What the school does well

- Students' very positive attitudes to school which is expressed in their willingness to take responsibility for their learning.
- Very good provision for students' social, moral and cultural development which enhances their self-esteem and confidence as they move through the school.
- Excellent behaviour which enhances learning opportunities for all.
- Very good management of change by headteacher and deputy headteachers as the school has increased in size which has maintained a positive climate for learning in the school.
- Provides an attractive learning environment which stimulates learning for all students.

What could be improved

- Teachers applying analyses from the school's extensive performance database to guide students on how they can make better progress.
- Implement fully the current initiatives on monitoring of classroom teaching by senior staff.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 1996. The school has made good progress in developing information and communication technology as an integral tool in students' learning though its management and co-ordination remains weak because of difficulty in recruiting appropriately qualified staff. It has made very good progress in improving facilities and accommodation and in strengthening aspects of strategic planning in the school development plan. The school now complies with the requirements for a daily act of collective worship although there continues to be not enough provision for religious education for all students in the sixth form. Health and safety issues raised in the last report have all been addressed. Initiatives aimed at addressing the need to maintain a focus on high expectations have been introduced but the crucial one of monitoring and supporting good classroom practice is at an early stage although it is firmly embedded as a priority in the school development plan. Overall, the school has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Effective systems are in place to raise standards further.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	C
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A	

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

The overall profile of student attainment on entry to the school is below the average for selective schools. When additional significant factors which are particular to the Medway area are taken into account, the judgement is that students, by the age of 16, are achieving the standards expected and in line with their attainment on entry.

By the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 standards of work are well above average and broadly in line with that expected in selective schools. The proportion of students achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A* - C, 5 or more A* - G grades and 1 or more A* to G grades have been very high compared to the national average for the last three years. The proportion of students in 1999 achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C was below the average for similar selective schools. It was close to the average for 5 or more A*-G and very high for one or more A*-G. Over the last six years the school's average GCSE point score per student has risen at a rate that is above the national trend.

GCSE English language results in 1999 were above the average for selective schools. The proportion of students achieving grades A*-C in mathematics has improved over the past three years in line with the national trend. In the three separate sciences students achieved A*-C grades that were above the national average and for those entered for GCSE double award science were very high compared to the national average. However, the percentage of science A*-C grades achieved were below that for similar schools partly because students' investigative skills are a weakness in science. In the 1999 GCSE examinations there were particular strengths in modern foreign languages, history, religious education and biology.

In 1999, the average points score achieved by students in Key Stage 3 in each of the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science were comparable with each other and very high when compared with national averages. In English and mathematics students' average points score were below average when compared to similar schools. They were in line with similar schools in science. The overall trend in average National Curriculum points scores over the past four years has risen in line with the national trend. By the end of Key Stage 3, students, including those with English as an additional language, show great confidence and accuracy in their use of language and number and have above average information and communication skills.

The average A level GCE point score per candidate for 1997-99 is well above the national average. In English and mathematics the proportion of A and B grades was very high compared to national averages. Grades achieved in science show a drop over the past three years with the average point score in biology, chemistry and physics falling over the past three years. High standards are achieved in A level art and sociology with high proportions of students achieving grades A and B. In geography in 1999 the number of A and B grades was below that of selective schools and there were no A or B grades in history. Advanced level results in modern foreign languages and economics were in line with the average in selective schools.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent: reflected in the very good pace at which students work and in their capacity to work independently.
Behaviour, in and out of	Excellent: students are unfailingly courteous and good humoured to

classrooms	each other, staff and visitors.
Personal development and relationships	Very good: the development of self-confidence and ability to relate well to others is apparent through the school.
Attendance	Good: above national average.

Parents were unanimous in their appreciation of how well the school provided for the personal development of their daughters.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Good

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

The quality of teaching is good in all key stages and has improved significantly since the last inspection. Over a third of the lessons observed were very good or excellent and nearly three quarters were good or better. There were very few unsatisfactory lessons and no poor lessons. There was little difference in the quality of teaching between Key Stages 3 and 4. However, the percentage of lessons that were good or better were significantly less in the sixth form than in the other key stages and overall were less imaginative and stimulating.

Teaching is good in English, mathematics, design and technology, geography, history, information technology and very good in art, modern languages, music, physical education and religious education. It is satisfactory in science. Teaching takes place in a stimulating environment which encourages students' motivation and enhances their learning.

Most of the students with special needs have physical problems such as hearing impairment. Teachers are informed of the needs of each person on the special needs register and the students generally achieve the standards expected. Teaching is well supported by external agencies such as the educational psychologist, the school counsellor and the hearing impairment advisory teacher.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: it is generally broad and balanced at Key Stages 3 but does not conform with National Curriculum requirements in design and technology at Key Stage 4; wide range of A level courses and an Advanced GNVQ in the sixth form.
Provision for students with special educational needs	The school has an effective policy for meeting the requirements of students with special needs. The special needs Code of Practice is fully operational and the special needs co-ordinator together with the heads of year work efficiently to meet the needs of students.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good: students' social development is excellent, moral development is very good and students' spiritual and cultural development are good.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good: very effective support and guidance for students and in providing for their welfare. This makes a very positive contribution to educational standards and helps students to feel happy and secure.

Since the last inspection the school has maintained its good provision for all students' personal and academic development.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good: the headteacher has a clear vision on continuing to raise standards in line with the schools' aims and has led the school with great skill at a time of a rising roll. There is a good awareness and a shared commitment to raising standards by the senior management team. There is a weakness in the leadership and management of the sixth form.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good: the governing body fulfils its statutory duties in all respects except for the provision of religious education for all students in the sixth form.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good: the school carries out a comprehensive analysis of its academic and pastoral performance.
The strategic use of resources	Good: the school development plan outlines school priorities in the short and medium term and these are linked to resources and finance required. Facilities for teaching and learning are of a high standard.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Good progress. ◆ Good teaching. ◆ Students work hard. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Homework. ◆ Information about progress.

Inspectors' evidence confirms parents' views of the strengths of the school but found that homework is set regularly and is a good support to a student's independent learning. The annual written reports, which set out clearly what the students have studied, are good and meet statutory requirements. In some cases, however, teachers could be more explicit in evaluating progress and setting out what students must do to improve their work.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Standardised tests and Key Stage 2 levels on entry to the school show that the overall profile of student attainment is below the average for selective schools. There are additional significant factors which are particular to the Medway area. These include disadvantageous socio-economic features and the competition between many local grammar schools. When these are taken into account, the judgement is that students, by the age of 16, are achieving the standards expected and in line with their attainment on entry.
2. By the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 in work seen and from lessons observed standards are well above average and broadly in line with that expected in selective schools. In 1999 students achieved GCSE standards that were very high compared with the national average at the age of 16 but slightly below that for selective schools. The proportion of students achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A* - C, 5 or more A* - G grades and 1 or more A* to G grades have been very high compared to the national average for the last three years (1997-99). The proportion of students in 1999 achieving 5 or more GCSE grades A*-C was below the average for similar selective schools. It was close to the average for 5 or more A*-G and very high for one or more A*-G. Over the last six years the school's average GCSE point score per student has risen at a rate that is above the national trend.
3. GCSE English language and English literature grades in 1999 were above the average for selective schools. The proportion of students achieving grades A*-C in mathematics has improved over the past three years in line with the national trend although it remains below that for similar schools. Not all students are entered for the higher levels in GCSE mathematics. In the three separate sciences students achieved A*-C grades that were above the national average and for those entered for GCSE double award science were very high compared to the national average. However, the percentage of science A*-C grades achieved were below that for similar schools partly because students' investigative skills are a weakness in science. In the 1999 GCSE examinations there were particular strengths in modern foreign languages, history, religious education and biology.
4. In 1999, the average points score achieved by students in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 at the age of 14, were very high compared with all schools. The average points score achieved by students in each of the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science were comparable with each other and very high when compared with national averages. In English and mathematics students' average points score were below average when compared to similar schools. They were in line with similar schools in science. The overall rising trend in average National Curriculum points scores over the past four years has been broadly in line with the rising national trend. By the end of Key Stage 3, literacy skills are very high and girls, including those with English as an additional language, show great confidence and accuracy in their use of language. Students' number and information and communication technology skills are above average.
5. The average A level GCE point score per candidate for 1997-99 is well above the national average. In 1999 the average point score fell back but remained well above the national average and was the school's second best average A level point score. In English and mathematics the proportion of A and B grades was very high compared to national averages. Grades achieved in science show a drop over the past three years with the average point score in biology, chemistry and physics falling over the past three years. High standards are achieved in A level art and sociology with high proportions of students achieving grades A and B. In geography in 1999 the number of A and B grades was below that of selective schools and there were no A or B grades in history. Advanced level results in modern foreign languages and economics were in line with the average in selective schools. A large number of students are entered for A level general studies of whom a quarter attained A or B grades which was broadly in line with the national average but below the average for selective schools.
6. Most students make good progress as they move through the school but there are variations in subjects and key stages. Students make satisfactory progress overall in English in Key Stage 3 but teachers' expectations of higher attainers in Years 7 and 8 are not high enough. In Key

Stage 4 and in the sixth form, progress in English is good. Literacy and number skills develop well for students of all attainment levels. Good teaching enables students to make good progress in all aspects of mathematics at all key stages. Higher attainers make very good progress particularly in algebra and trigonometry. In science the standard of students' work seen during the inspection in Key Stage 3 was unsatisfactory but improving. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form satisfactory progress is being made by students in improving their knowledge and understanding of all aspects of science.

7. Students make very good progress in art and information technology in all key stages and in modern foreign languages in Key Stages 3 and 4. High attainers quickly learn to take on responsibility for individuality in their work. Sixth form foreign language students work hard but learn less effectively when lessons are presented formally. Progress is good in design and technology, physical education, religious education, performing arts and music in all key stages. In geography students make good progress in Key Stage 3, satisfactory progress in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form although the highest attainers at Key Stage 4 are underachieving. Students' progress in history is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
8. Students with special educational needs and those having English as an additional language make good progress. Students' skills in information and communication technology have significantly improved since the last inspection.
9. Since the last inspection attainment and progress in English, mathematics, information technology, physical education and religious education have improved. They have been maintained in all other subjects.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

10. Students greatly enjoy coming to school and remain very enthusiastic in the sixth form. Attitudes to learning are very positive, especially when the teacher has consistently high expectations, for example in some French and music lessons. Students concentrate very well and there are many examples of very positive attitudes to learning and of perseverance, in mathematics for instance, and in the mature approach of sixth formers to their lessons. The pace at which students work and their capacity to work independently and to persevere are good in all subjects and very good in many, for example, in science, art and physical education. Students have a strong desire to improve their work and take an intense pride in the finished product. Good examples of students taking responsibility for their own work, were seen in many lessons, notably in a Year 9 gymnastics lesson, where the students planned their own warm up routine and sequences, and in a Year 10 French lesson.
11. The overall standard of behaviour is excellent. Both students and parents consider that staff successfully maintain high standards and the inspection findings support this view. Behaviour round the school is highly civilised, with students behaving sensibly when arriving at and leaving school, and walking quietly and purposefully between lessons. They behave very well, when queuing outside classrooms or for dinner, and at break time. Respect for property is generally very high, though sixth formers leave their common rooms untidy in the evenings. There is very little litter. There are no temporary or permanent exclusions.
12. There were no examples of oppressive behaviour round the school, or of bullying or racism during the inspection. The school impresses on new students and their parents the need to consider others, and students react very positively. Respect for others' feelings, values and beliefs is high, and students are very supportive of those with special educational needs.
13. Many students take an active part in the day-to-day life of the school, for example there is enthusiastic support for the school council, whose advice is welcomed by senior management. Sixth-formers have been given an important role in helping run the school, preventing bullying and helping younger students. The school offers a wide range of very popular extra-curricular sporting and cultural activities, though time constraints can inhibit their take-up by some students. Several cited the difficulty of combining dinner and an activity in the middle of the day, which led to their giving up the activity.
14. Relationships among students and between staff and students are excellent and even the youngest students appreciate being treated as young adults. Students are courteous to each other and friendly to staff. They relate positively to each other and work well together in

lessons. Students react politely when addressed, and are friendly and helpful to visitors.

15. The last inspection report noted that the school expects and achieves very high standards of behaviour and the position is unchanged.
16. Students' attendance at 93.8% is well above the national average for all types of school, and close to that of most grammar schools. There is very little unauthorised absence, which is well below the national average for all types of school, and in the lower quartile for grammar schools. High attendance has a very positive effect on the attainment and progress of students. The legal requirements for recording and reporting attendance are met, though in a few instances, there were minor errors in recording.
17. Lessons start on time in the morning and after breaks. Students are on time at the start of the day and when returning from lunch. They display a responsible attitude to punctuality. The position on attendance is marginally better than at the time of the last inspection.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

18. The quality of teaching is good in all key stages. Of the 178 lessons observed over a third were very good or excellent and nearly three quarters were good or better. There were very few unsatisfactory lessons (2 per cent) and no poor lessons. These figures represent a significant improvement on those for the last inspection in 1996. There was little difference in the quality of teaching between Key Stages 3 and 4. However, the percentage of lessons that were good or better were significantly less in the sixth form than in the other key stages and overall less imaginative and stimulating. Teaching is good overall in English, mathematics, design and technology, geography, history, information technology and very good in art, modern languages, music, physical education and religious education. It is satisfactory overall in science. Teaching takes place in a stimulating environment and nearly every student is well-motivated. A framework for monitoring and supporting further improvements in the quality of teaching and learning is in place and well established as a whole school priority.
19. Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding of their specialist subject is very good. The teaching of basic skills is good in all subjects. It is excellent in modern foreign languages although in science there are occasions when students' technical accuracy, for example in spelling, are not addressed effectively.
20. Lesson planning is very good in most subjects and is characterised by clear objectives which are well understood by students. Teachers use time and resources well. However, in otherwise satisfactory lessons students become bored when lesson plans give too much emphasis to passive listening on the part of students. Teachers' expectations are good for students of all attainment levels but there are occasions when low expectations lead to a loss of momentum and work of a lower standard than it should be.
21. Teachers' methods and organisation are good overall. In mathematics, for example, many lessons include a variety of timed activities which sustain motivation and extend learning. However, in the sixth form, there are a significant number of lessons where the teacher talks for much of the time while the students take notes. No disruptive behaviour was observed in lessons during the inspection.
22. Teachers' use of information technology in their lessons has improved significantly since the last inspection particularly in English, mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. However, it is not uniformly developed across all subjects. For example, there has been insufficient development in history.
23. Teachers assess and mark students' work well. This information is used by many teachers in planning their lessons but it is not uniformly used to identify exactly what students have to do to make progress. For example, a subject teacher's planning for individual students does not have sufficient regard to the wealth of data on progress available in the school thus possibly leading to underachievement. Homework is set and planned to integrate with classwork. It is marked regularly and is a valuable part of the learning process for all students.
24. There is a close relationship between the quality of teaching described in the above paragraphs and the extent to which students acquire new knowledge and skills. Overall in both

key stages students of all attainment levels and students with special educational needs have very positive attitudes to their work. Most make good gains in learning across most subjects. Students demonstrate an impressive ability to apply their academic, physical and creative skills when given the opportunity in lessons. In similar circumstances the pace of learning is very good because students apply themselves with interest to the tasks set them.

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

25. The school offers a broad curriculum, which is balanced and meets the needs of the students in line with the curriculum aims of the school. Students have equal opportunities for success and develop all areas that make up a whole person.
26. Key Stage 3 meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and locally agreed syllabus in religious education. Time allocations to subjects are appropriate. At Key Stage 4 all students study a core of English language, English literature, mathematics and either a double science or separate sciences, religious education, information technology and physical education. Options on offer allow students to take nine full and two short course GCSE subjects. Good guidance is given which aims to provide a broad and balanced curriculum for the students. The shortage of time highlighted in the last report has been addressed. However, the school does not meet the National Curriculum requirements of teaching a design and technology subject to all students. The approach to experimental and investigative science is a serious weakness that affects the standards of most students. There is no literacy or numeracy policy within the school but a staff training day on literacy was held in October 1999 and both numeracy and literacy are being provided effectively within subjects. The planned monitoring of the curriculum by senior management has begun.
27. The school offers up to 24 GCE Advanced levels, and one GNVQ Advanced course, that cover all the major subjects required for progression to university and employment, and include a number of successful courses that give additional breadth including psychology, politics, sociology, music and economics. This provision is complemented by a general studies course in Year 12 that provides modules in religious and moral education, government and current affairs, issues in science, and recreational and sports activities. A number of these prepare students for the general studies course in Year 13 enabling the majority to gain a further GCE Advanced level. However, while there are some valuable components in the general studies course such as interviewing techniques, other aspects of personal and social education such as drug and sex education are not addressed. Furthermore, the legal requirement for religious education is not met within the limited curriculum time.
28. Extra-curricular activities are a strength in the school. They include club activities, additional support for most subject areas and a variety of off site activities. These enhance the learning of students of all abilities, enabling the more able students to extend their skill or knowledge and enabling students who wish to improve from a lower baseline to do so. Sporting and musical activities feature predominantly in this provision with activities every lunchtime and there is a comprehensive fixture list for inter-school events.
29. Liaison with many feeder schools is undertaken and many students write to younger students to facilitate a smooth transfer from one school to the next. However curriculum links are less strong. The business studies department has links with local industries and the sixth form has strong links with Greenwich University, using their premises for the school sixth form induction day.
30. Careers education in the sixth form is provided through specially arranged meetings and visits to universities and careers conventions that largely focus on higher education entry that meets the needs of four fifths of students who continue their studies. Students benefit from an experienced higher education co-ordinator who provides informed guidance and helps them prepare applications. Opportunities for work shadowing and job placements are currently limited to GNVQ students. A further group are involved in a Young Enterprise activity. All students have a personal tutor who provides valuable support and monitors academic progress, though tutorial time is otherwise less well used.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

31. Since the last inspection the school has maintained the good environment for students' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development although there is some variation within the elements. Social development is excellent, the provision for moral development is very good, cultural development is good and spiritual development is good. There is a worship team that organises the themes for the week and assemblies are provided for students on the two days a week. These assemblies offer a very positive social and usually also a moral and spiritual experience, although that may be implicit rather than explicit. On the days when there is no assembly the school fulfils the requirement of providing a daily act of collective worship for students by broadcasting a 'thought for the day'. However staff are not always sure how to use this to the best advantage and so this needs to be developed further by offering guidance to staff and possibly a time of reflection and prayer.
32. The provision for students' spiritual development within the curriculum is the responsibility of the individual departments and there is some variation. Some subjects such as religious education English and music offer a range of opportunities which include a spiritual dimension. In religious education the students routinely consider the spiritual basis on how beliefs affect life such as when studying baptism, the Passover and the 5 Ks in Sikhism. In English in a variety of texts students reflect on their own lives and values and those of others. In music the spiritual experience is particularly seen when students perform in assemblies. In other subject areas there are various occasional opportunities such as when considering ritual masks in art and the uniqueness of the individual in modern languages studies.
33. Provision for moral development is very good. Students are expected to behave well, take care of the school environment and respect each other. The school aims include being tolerant of others and respecting traditional values. The school offers a firm moral framework to help students distinguish right from wrong. A range of issues are included in the personal and social education curriculum, assemblies, and in the day-to-day work of the school. Moral aspects of topics such as alcohol abuse and racism are included in personal and social education and in religious education issues such as war, slavery and other ethical issues are discussed sensitively. History includes war and the holocaust and geography the conflict of environmental concerns and tourism. The students also consider the moral implications of the use of information technology and the data protection act. These opportunities enable students to understand the complex moral decisions that people have to make. The school is a caring community where staff and other adults within the school give good role models to the students. Ninety three percent of parents feel that the school values and attitudes have a positive effect on their daughters.
34. Provision for students' social development is excellent. There are many opportunities within lessons where students are able to work collaboratively in pairs and in small groups and these involve a range of activities. When making food in a lesson the students willingly invite others students to taste it and share as part of the evaluation exercise. A wide range of extra-curricular activities provide students with opportunity to mix with those of different age groups, and allow students opportunities to take responsibility. Citizenship is included in the personal and social education course and opportunities are provided for students to take responsibility in a variety of ways. Each form elects a representative to the school council, which is chaired by sixth form students. Students have the opportunity to be team captains of form teams and school teams. The sixth form students have a variety of responsibilities as form prefects, helping with clubs and organising charity events. School events, such as the school production, offer social responsibility in linking the community of the school to the local community. A number of students are involved in activities for senior citizens at harvest and both children and senior citizens at Christmas. The wide range of charity fund raising by all in the school enables them to consider the local, national and global society and in religious education the students also consider different social groupings.
35. Provision for students' cultural development is good, students are provided with a very good opportunity to understand their own culture through the use and understanding of the historic school site. In history the cultural history of the United Kingdom is considered and mathematics relates topics to the world around them. Throughout the English course, consideration is given to the change in language over time and there are examples from most subject areas. Students have opportunities to cook Mexican and Indian food, study world music including an African Day, consider different societies, such as Belgium and Brazil in geography, experience dances from different cultures in performing arts and study various world religions in religious education. There are also a number of school trips to visit and experience different cultures, either as part of the curriculum or as a social visit, and all of

these add to the students understanding of the wider world.

36. The school offers students in Key Stages 3 and 4 a broad and balanced personal, health and social education programme, which includes lessons in health, social, drugs, and citizenship education, along with careers. The teaching of personal, health and social education programme is good and most students absorb what they are taught, for example in a Year 8 lesson on alcohol they were clear on its effects. In the sixth form personal, health and social education programme is included in the general studies programme. The sex education policy meets statutory requirements.
37. The careers programme provides for an appropriate number of lessons included in the timetable for students in Years 9 to 11. The resources now available, including computer programs, a newly certificated library, and the local careers service, are good. The teaching of careers is satisfactory. Students value their one week of work experience at the start of Year 11, and another week is available for appropriate GNVQ students in Year 12.
38. As most sixth formers go on to university or college, the emphasis in Years 12 and 13 is mainly on preparation for further and higher education, though careers interviews and discussions with parents are offered to those intending to leave full time education.
39. Students with special educational needs receive the full range of curricular and other opportunities. If special equipment such as hearing aids is needed, the school acts promptly to ensure that the student concerned maximises her attainment levels. Students with specific learning difficulties are given good support.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

40. The school is very effective in its support and guidance to students and in providing for their welfare. This makes a very positive contribution to educational standards and helps students to feel happy and secure. The school has a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Pastoral staff know their students very well and students confidently turn to them or other members of staff for help. Parents appreciate the school's arrangements for introducing new students in Year 7, which start early in their last year in primary school. The good arrangements for transfer to university and college or for training for employment ensure that students move on with confidence.
41. Procedures for monitoring students' progress and personal development are very good. Heads of years in Years 8-11 retain pastoral care of their charges for four years, which provides some continuity. The school actively encourages tutors to maintain close contact with students' families. Students are very well supported in their personal development.
42. The high quality of co-operation and liaison between all staff on pastoral matters is an important feature of the school. Students appreciate greatly both the academic and personal support given. Such very positive views are still being expressed in Year 13. The school complies fully with child protection guidelines, and liaison arrangements with social services and other external agencies are very good. They include the employment of a counsellor to help students deal with personal problems. The school effectively supports students with special educational needs to meet the targets set in individual education plans and statements.
43. The school generally complies with legal requirements for health and safety procedures and has comprehensive procedures and instructions for promoting them, which are regularly monitored. Appropriate safety precautions were seen to be taken in all science lessons. Provision for medical care and first aid are very good. Sick students are appropriately looked after in a well equipped medical room. Regular tests are carried out on equipment, though there is insufficient evidence that all electrical equipment has been properly checked. The school responds quickly when notified of health and safety problems.
44. The school operates very effective measures for monitoring improving attendance. Procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour and for dealing with bullying and oppressive behaviour are very effective. Staff have high expectations of good behaviour and promote an orderly and cheerful atmosphere throughout the school. These expectations are fully realised by the standards of behaviour observed round the school. Students in all year groups and parents are happy that inappropriate behaviour is dealt with

rapidly and effectively. The high quality of pastoral care noted in the last inspection has been maintained.

45. Procedures for monitoring subject performance overall are at least satisfactory in all subjects and good in English, mathematics, art, information and communication technology, modern languages and music. In religious education they are very good. Satisfactory whole school assessment and marking policies are in place, though they are not always followed, for example in science, where many students' lesson notes go unmarked. There is a good review system which identifies students who are under-performing but this information is not always used effectively.
46. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are very good in mathematics, and in information and communication technology and good in all other subjects, except business studies, performing arts and physical education, where they are satisfactory. In mathematics there is a very good model for monitoring standards, but several departments, including geography and history, could do more to set appropriate individual targets for students. The head of the information and communication technology department reviews students' books with their teacher and has introduced well-managed systems for logging progress as students move between year groups in Key Stage 3.
47. When students have emotional or behavioural problems, the head of year, the special needs co-ordinator and any appropriate external agency keep records and give good individual support to the students concerned.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

48. Students enjoy coming to school and this is confirmed by parents. Parents consider that their children make good progress and that teaching is good. The school keeps them well informed and they are comfortable about approaching the school on issues concerning their daughter. It looks after students with special needs effectively, arranges the induction of new students well, and pays considerable attention to supporting students' and solving their personal problems. Inspectors are broadly in agreement with parents' views noted above. Parents have mixed view about homework, varying from too much to a concern about quality. Inspection findings suggest that for most students it is in line with the school homework policy and enhances students' independent learning. Parents feel welcome in school and believe that teachers have high expectations of students and are good at helping them to mature. The school provides an interesting range of extra-curricular activities
49. The school's links with parents are very effective. It consults parents when developing new policies that may affect them, for example the new home-school contract and the rewards and sanctions policy. It holds regular parents' meetings, and actively encourages informal contact from parents at any time. Parents are invited to a wide range of musical and dramatic productions, sporting events, cathedral services and other activities, including the Year 7 bazaar. The Friends of Fort Pitt Grammar School Association holds informative meetings for parents, and fund-raising activities which have raised substantial sums to support the school.
50. Parents' views are reflected in the encouraging and welcoming tone of the school's documentation. The quality of information to parents about the school is very good. The prospectus and its accompanying inserts and the governors' annual report to parents are informative. A readable and substantial newsletter is published every half-term. A school calendar and letters about specific school events and requirements keep parents informed on day-to-day matters. There is a clear booklet on choosing subject options at the end of Year 9. Students in Year 11 compile a National Record of Achievement, though this format is not continued into the sixth form.
51. The annual written reports, which set out clearly what the students have studied, are good and meet statutory requirements. In some cases, however, teachers could be more explicit in evaluating progress and setting out what students know, can do and understand. Students' reports are discussed with parents and there is a useful provision for recording parental comment. Parents of students with statements of special educational need are fully involved in the annual reviews of their children's progress. Home-school agreements were introduced in September 1999, but it is too early to establish their effectiveness.
52. The contribution of parents to students' learning at home and at school is good. Parents have

the opportunity to keep themselves informed of their children's homework and to support day-to-day progress through the homework diary. They are encouraged to use it to maintain a dialogue with the school and tutors do check assiduously to ensure that they do. Currently there are no parent volunteers working in school, though parents respond well to the school's request to give lifts to sporting events or to senior citizens to its social activities.

53. The last inspection report noted parents' enthusiasm for the school and that an overwhelming majority felt well informed, supported by staff and welcome at the school at any time. Communication was regular and effective and the quality of written information high. The position is broadly unchanged.
54. The special educational needs co-ordinator, the appropriate head of year and the external agencies regularly review the needs and progress of students with special needs. They act promptly to inform parents of any problems and give appropriate support when a student needs home or hospital tuition.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

55. The school is led by an experienced headteacher who has a clear vision on improving attainment levels in line with the school's aims. The growth in student numbers of the school has been managed very well. A particular tribute to the headteacher's leadership during this period of change is that, in partnership with deputy headteachers, the very strong ethos for learning and pastoral support for students has been maintained. The school's aims for students' further academic and pastoral development are reflected in the priorities set out in the school development plan and approved by the governing body. It is reviewed regularly and adapted appropriately when new conditions of funding, new initiatives or changes in staffing arise.
56. The headteacher and deputies work very well together and are a close-knit team. However, for a larger than average secondary school, the present senior management team is under pressure and the governors are addressing this issue by seeking to appoint posts to ease the range of their current responsibilities. For example, an immediate concern is the organisation, leadership and management of the sixth form as the larger year groups work through the school. A number of management initiatives are in the relatively early stages of implementation. For example, assessment data is used to set student targets but this information is not effectively used by teachers to guide students on how they can make better progress. There is a framework for the monitoring and evaluation of teachers' classroom performance as part of the whole school priority outlined in the school development plan. Its implementation is at an early stage.
57. Overall there is a good awareness and a shared commitment to improving standards within the senior management team. The headteacher's leadership style is based on sound consultative procedures and management responsibilities are delegated efficiently. Heads of department provide good leadership and management skills. The main weakness is that there is no coherent approach between subjects on improving and building on good classroom performance to raise standards further. The school's appraisal procedures are in abeyance until further guidance is given by the DfEE.
58. The governing body fulfils its statutory duties in all respects except for the provision of religious education in the sixth form. Committee minutes reflect the sound support it gives the headteacher and staff and its awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The governing body make a good contribution to enabling the school to make the best strategic use of its resources and ensure that specific grants and additional funding are spent appropriately. For example, its negotiations with the local education authority and other agents have been successful in financing new buildings and refurbishment so that, in spite of its recent increase in roll, facilities and accommodation are good overall. Educational priorities in the school development plan are supported through careful financial management. Governors oversee that the principles of best value, including comparison, challenge, consultation and competition, are applied in securing resources and services. Financial controls are very good. Funds for special educational needs are spent appropriately and provision for their needs are good. Teachers are given very good back-up by administrative and support staff who contribute significantly to the smooth day-to-day organisation of the school. The overall efficiency of the organisation of the school is good.

59. Significant progress has been made since the last inspection in the management of technology. Students have much improved access to information and communication technology although co-ordination across curriculum areas is not satisfactory. There are an adequate number of teachers to match the needs of the curriculum but the school is experiencing difficulty in recruiting senior staff in science and information technology.
60. Resources for learning are adequate. The quality of teaching of newly qualified staff and staff new to the school is very good and their induction is a strength of the school. The staff development programme is linked satisfactorily to the school development plan. The overall quality of leadership and management is good. Overall efficiency of the school as measured by academic and personal achievement and attendance is good. The school gives good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

61. The following are key issues which the governors, headteacher and staff should address to raise standards in the school;
- ◆ Apply more effectively the school's extensive performance database on students' standards by
 - setting students more challenging targets and
 - using the analysis to indicate to individual students on how they can improve their work and make better progress.Paras. 20, 23, 45, 46, 51, 56, 66, 76, 87, 134
 - ◆ Continue the current initiatives on monitoring of classroom teaching by the senior management team by
 - heads of department giving a greater priority in the time available to them for
 - monitoring and supporting classroom teaching;
 - greater sharing of good practice between departments and teachers.Paras. 18, 56, 58, 66, 67, 88, 105, 112, 119, 135, 168
 - ◆ To raise sixth form standards by
 - addressing the leadership and management of the sixth form;
 - applying a greater rigour by teachers in monitoring students' progress;
 - higher standards of teaching.Paras. 18, 56, 157, 163
 - ◆ Improve curriculum provision for design and technology in Key Stage 4 and religious education for all sixth form students in line with statutory requirements.
Paras. 26, 27, 145, 168, 170

62. Issues 2 and 3 above are identified as priorities in the current school development plan.

Other weaknesses which should be considered by the school for inclusion in the post-inspection action plan are:

- ◆ students' investigative skills in science throughout the school.
Paras 3, 5
- ◆ teachers' use of information technology so that it is consistent across all subjects.
Para 22

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	178
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	51

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	30	38	25	2	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y7- Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	840	195
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	43	2

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	2	1
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	23	10

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	26

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	19
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	26

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.2
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	0	187	187

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	185	185	183
	Total	185	185	183
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	99 (99)	98 (98)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	84 (95)	96 (96)	85 (78)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	187	187	187
	Total	187	187	187
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (96)	100 (98)	100 (98)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	100 (93)	99 (97)	80 (78)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	0	152	152

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	144	151	152
	Total	144	151	152
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	94.7 (92.4)	99.3 (96.7)	100 (98.9)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	58.3 (50.5)
	National	37.8

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	0	N/A
	National		N/A

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	0	77

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	N/A	20.6	20.6 (22.7)	N/A	7.0	7.0 (7.1)
National		N/A	19.2 (19.0)		N/A	2.8

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	8	100
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	0
Indian	32
Pakistani	9
Bangladeshi	4
Chinese	6
White	969
Any other minority ethnic group	10

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of students excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	58.21
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	232

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.7
Key Stage 4	23.0

Financial information

Financial year	1998-99
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	£
Total income	2157999
Total expenditure	2092440
Expenditure per student	2140
Balance brought forward from previous year	134342
Balance carried forward to next year	199901

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1036
Number of questionnaires returned	268

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	49	47	2	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	59	40	0	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	51	44	1	1	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	54	12	5	1
The teaching is good.	46	50	2	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29	52	16	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	35	3	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	83	17	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	28	55	12	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	59	38	2	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	62	36	1	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	53	40	4	3	0

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

63. Students' average points score at level 5 and level 6 in Key Stage 3 national assessment tests in 1999 was very high compared with national averages, and comparable to those for mathematics and science. The results at level 6 were slightly below those of earlier years. During 1996-99 English results were slightly lower than those in mathematics and science while remaining very high in relation to national averages. 1999 English results were below the median when compared with selective schools and below average in comparison with similar schools. The proportion of GCSE grades A*-C in English and English literature was very high in 1998 and 1999, set against national averages; these results were in line with recent years for English and showed improvement from earlier years in English literature. Students entered for English in 1999 did worse than in the average of their other GCSEs, and those doing English literature did significantly worse. In 1998 English was significantly better and English literature slightly better than other GCSE results, while in 1997 English was significantly worse. The trend is thus inconsistent. Results in both subjects in 1998 and 1999 were above national averages for selective schools. The proportion of GCSE grades A*-G in 1998 and 1999 was above national averages and above those for selective schools. A level results at grades A-B were very high compared with national averages in 1999, showing an improvement on 1998 and a return to the levels of 1997. A-E grades were above national averages during those years.
64. Standards of attainment are well above average overall. Above average attainment seen in lessons at the end of each key stage is confirmed by the high quality of examination results. At the end of Key Stage 3 students speak confidently, relevantly and clearly and listen well to one another. They can read aloud very competently and research information well. Written work is always grammatically sound: it is fluent and often enjoyable, though some technical weaknesses persist. By the end of Key Stage 4 students engage in well-focused discussions and can speak articulately. Their reading displays good understanding of a range of material. Writing is competently planned and organised, covering a wide variety of tasks well and only occasionally lacking in appropriate style. Sixth form students have the confidence to disagree and argue, and occasionally express their views strongly. They react to texts at a deeper level than earlier, both intellectually and appreciatively, and usually write in a mature style, handling details with assurance and expressing insights and responses that are always appropriate and sometimes original. Standards of literacy in all years are high, and students are constantly encouraged to think carefully about language and styles of expression.
65. Rates of progress range from satisfactory overall in Key Stage 3 to good thereafter. Though progress in Year 9 is also good, it is less marked in Years 7 and 8, because teachers' expectations, particularly of high attainers, are not uniformly high. Progress over time as seen in writing is good. Students with special educational needs make good progress because of classroom teachers' sensitivity to those needs and the students' own keenness to learn.
66. Students' response in lessons ranges from good in Key Stage 3 to excellent in the sixth form, the overall judgement being very good. They are always interested in their work, try hard in lessons, and enjoy excellent relationships with peers and teachers. They are attentive, collaborate very well, and frequently enjoy their tasks. Standards of behaviour are impeccable. Some students occasionally lack confidence in themselves as learners. Virtually all take great care over presentation of classwork and homework.
67. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching is at least satisfactory in all lessons in Key Stage 3, including an excellent lesson on persuasive writing in Year 9 and some very good examples in all three years. It is good or better in three quarters of Key Stage 4 lessons, and in all seen in the sixth form. Teachers have very sound knowledge and plan lessons and units of work very well. Lessons are well timed and paced and homework usually extends rather than merely continues classwork. Marking of work is consistent, accurate, regular and detailed: comments are sometimes extensive and combine criticism with targets for the future. Questions are well used in Key Stage 4 to test students' knowledge and to extend their understanding. Sixth form teachers strike a good balance between challenging and supporting students and facilitate rather than direct their learning. Occasional weaknesses in teaching include loss of momentum and slack pacing in a Year 7 and Year 8 lesson, low expectations in another Year 8 lesson and dull presentation in one in Year 10. Several teachers failed to

revisit objectives before lessons ended. Learning is good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. In Year 8 students make good advances in understanding the structuring of a novel and learn new vocabulary and consolidate earlier knowledge in Year 7. They learn how to reapply earlier knowledge to fresh situations in Year 11. In all years, students are clear about the nature of their tasks and usually know how well they are doing. In a Year 9 lesson, they learnt by experience which methods of tackling an activity did not succeed.

68. Leadership and management in English are good. The extensive revision of schemes of work and development of collaborative planning has strengthened teaching and improved the range of students' learning opportunities. They now have little scope to be passive learners. Students' access to information and communication technology has also improved since the last inspection. It is a regular component in units of work and some good subject software has been created. Curriculum provision is now good, but there is insufficient stress laid on consistently challenging and developing higher-attaining students in Key Stage 3. Assessment arrangements are good overall, though there are weaknesses in moderating teacher assessment throughout Key Stage 3, and work on standardising portfolios of students' work needs accelerating. Regular procedures for monitoring the work of teachers and students do not at present exist. Library stock is balanced and satisfactory in range, though accommodation is restricted.
69. The department has responded well to the last inspection. Teaching time in Year 8 has been increased, and English is now taught in a suite of seven specialist rooms. The provision of material from other cultures has improved. Attention should now be given to strengthening assessment procedures; ensuring that talented students in Key Stage 3 are consistently challenged and stimulated; creating systems for evaluating and supporting the work of colleagues and students; and establishing closer working links with drama which is taught within the performing arts department.

MATHEMATICS

70. From 1996 to 1999 the average level of attainment achieved by students in their end of Key Stage 3 tests was well above the national average for students in all schools. Over the same period results improved at a slightly greater rate than the national improvement. 1999 results were below the average for students in similar schools. From 1997 to 1999 the percentage of students attaining GCSE Grades A*-C was well above the national percentage for all students and all students nationally. Over this same period the percentage of students attaining GCSE grades A*-C was below the national percentage for similar schools. The percentage attaining GCSE grades A*-C has improved slightly over the three years to 1999, reflecting the national trend. Students generally attain higher levels in mathematics than their average in other subjects. From 1997 to 1999 the percentage of students attaining A level grades A and B at the end of their sixth form was well above the national percentage for all students and all students nationally, and above the average percentage for similar schools. The percentage attaining A-Level grades A-E was above the national percentage for all students and above the average percentage achieved in similar schools.
71. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is well above average. Students are competent when working with numbers. They work confidently with percentages and decimals and apply these skills to complex problems. Standards of mental arithmetic are very high and calculators are used only when appropriate. Some members of the lower sets experience difficulties with fractions, but these problems diminish with practice. Students work with algebraic expressions and manipulate and solve equations. Most can represent algebraic equations graphically, and those in the top sets work confidently and accurately with quadratic equations. All undertake investigations competently and use analytical skills to generalise their conclusions. Students calculate areas and volumes accurately, applying these skills to complex shapes and solving realistic problems. Careless mistakes often occur. They are quickly recognised and usually corrected.
72. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is well above average. Students work accurately with algebra, manipulating and solving complex equations with confidence. They represent equations graphically and use graphs to solve equations. Highest attaining students use graphs to solve quadratic equations and all use trigonometry to calculate the sides of triangles. The top sets understand and use the sine and cosine rules. Algebra and trigonometry are a

particular strength of the department. A good investigation into Pythagoras' Theorem showed computers being used to aid calculations and present conclusions. All students have very good computer skills. An example of computer use was the study of how quadratic graphs transformed as the coefficients changed. These very high standards are sometimes spoiled by careless mistakes often caused by the inaccurate use of negative numbers.

73. Attainment in sixth form A level groups is well above average. Students are competent in all branches of mathematics, are confident in their ability and generally work accurately. Standards of algebra, calculus and mechanics are high. They analyse problems thoroughly and select appropriate methods to solve them. Computers are well used, particularly when using numerical methods to solve differential equations. Some students experience difficulties when required to generalise relationships that are identified when summing various series.
74. Overall, progress is good at both key stages and in the sixth form. Written work indicates that students make good progress over time, in small but significant steps, drawing on previously learned knowledge and skills. For example, algebra progresses from simple substitution in Key Stage 3, to the solution and application of complex equations in Key Stage 4. Work on data handling in Key Stage 3 is extended to calculation of correlation and cumulative frequency in Key Stage 4. The most gifted students make very good progress at both key stages, particularly in algebra and trigonometry. Good progress is the result of teaching that structures learning, providing a variety of activities which match the learning needs of all students. Where progress is restricted, it is usually the result of difficulty in recalling previous learning and untidy work that makes revision difficult. Complex and drawn out explanations by teachers occasionally slows progress, particularly for students whose confidence is low. Students who are unwilling to make errors find it difficult to start some sections of work and this slows progress.
75. In both key stages and the sixth form, attitudes to work and general behaviour are excellent. Students show courtesy and consideration for teachers and each other. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent. At both key stages, work is generally neat and tidy. Students approach their work with enthusiasm and are proud to share their learning with others. When given the opportunity they work well in groups. The work of some students at both key stages is untidy. This leads to errors and work that cannot be used for revision. Books show a few instances of work being left uncorrected. Sixth form students work at a brisk pace and show an enthusiasm for their work. Their work is usually neat, tidy and well organised.
76. Teaching and learning was satisfactory or better in every lesson observed. In over three-quarters of lessons teaching and learning was good. In just under half of lessons at Key Stage 3 and in one-third of lessons at Key stage 4 it was very good. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and teach enthusiastically. The most effective lessons meet the learning needs of all students. Continuity of learning is based on consolidation of earlier learning, which is developed during the lesson. Very good lessons are based on learning objectives clearly explained to students, and include a variety of activities sustaining students' motivation, and extending learning. One such Key Stage 3 lesson was designed to ensure that the equivalence of fractions and decimals was consolidated. In a Key Stage 4 lesson on circle theorems challenging work which deepened students' knowledge was provided. In an effective sixth form lesson on differential equations students moved through a series of increasingly difficult tasks. The work challenged students and extended their learning. In less effective lessons progress slows when teachers give lengthy explanations, and extension work for the more able is either not planned or not used. In these lessons, the highest attaining students are not sufficiently challenged. Occasionally opportunities for collaborative group work are missed. For example, an investigation in Key Stage 4, where students were not given the opportunity to share ideas and learn from colleagues. Homework is set regularly and makes a significant contribution to learning. Students frequently mark books but teachers do not always monitor this and errors are sometimes repeated. Classes are well managed and standards of discipline are very high.
77. The department is well led and benefits from a team of teachers who are committed to their students. Assessment procedures are very good. Formal tests are used to predict the potential of each student. These predictions are used to establish attainment targets for the department and individual students. Assessments are not used to identify areas of individual weakness and, therefore, not used to inform students how they could improve. Mathematics is well supported in other curriculum areas. Science, design and technology, modern foreign languages and physical education provide realistic contexts for students to use their

mathematics skills. The department is not fully aware of these contributions and is, therefore, unable to use them appropriately.

78. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last report. Teaching, learning and marking is now regularly reviewed and some improvements have been secured. There is the potential for further improvement in all of these areas.

SCIENCE

79. The intake of the school is above average with the majority of students having reading ages above their chronological age and over half the intake having level 5 or above in science.
80. At the end of Key Stage 3 the number of students reaching level 5 and above is very high in comparison with the national average. When compared to schools of a similar type the number of students gaining level 6 and above is broadly in line with their average but for level 7 and above it is below this average. An intake with a high proportion of level 5 students should achieve a consequently high proportion of level 7 students at the end of Key Stage 3. In the past there has been insufficient progress from Year 7 to Year 9; however, this year's results show a rising trend. At GCSE level the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades in separate sciences is above the average for girls' schools. The percentage of students gaining A* - C in double award science is twice the national average of all schools. When compared to schools of a similar type the school is in the lower quarter of the performance tables.
81. The results at advanced level do not show the achievement that would be expected, the average point scores in each subject falling over the last 3 years. Advanced level sciences are underperforming in relation to intake.
82. The standard of written work produced by students during Key Stage 3 is very good, above average and complete. Discussion with students revealed a less secure grasp of knowledge and concepts indicating a greater need for the consolidation of lesson material. Students were able to describe the basic structure of animal and plant cells, but were unsure whether the plant cell wall was made of cells or part of the cell. Some were unsure of the colour of chloroplasts. Students in Key Stage 4 showed impressive understanding of scientific concepts and were able to clearly describe the principles of convection based on particle theory and describe the inter-relationship between respiration and photosynthesis in plants. Students in the sixth form showed a good grasp of concepts in biology and could describe enzyme specificity and the stages of cellular respiration. In all years, the standards of literacy were very good but with weaknesses in spelling. Students demonstrated good numeracy skills, Year 11 students clearly explaining lines of best fit in graph work. Year 8 students could calculate percentages and use estimation effectively to determine whether calculated results matched observations. Whilst students demonstrated good use of information and communication technology to present their work, its use during lessons, whilst evident, did not contribute significantly to the curriculum.
83. The attitudes and behaviour of students in all lessons was exemplary. The relationships between teacher and student were very good and the students were mutually supportive of each other in their learning. The work of students from all years was equally of a very good standard, students routinely completing both class and homework.
84. In all lessons in Key Stage 3 teaching was satisfactory or better. Where lessons were good, the pace and challenge of work was appropriate. For example, in a lesson about the oxidation of magnesium, work started by looking at burning. Students then competently and safely carried out practical work. Following this, students were helped, by means of effective questions, to produce a word equation for the reaction based on their observations. Where lessons showed weakness, there was over-reliance on teacher direction, and a need for attention to the visual impact of delivery. There was a need to match the nature of practical exercises to the competence of students. For example, a Year 7 lesson made slow progress due to the inability of students to assemble laboratory stands and clamps.
85. In all lessons in Key Stage 4 teaching was satisfactory or better and very good teaching was observed. Where teaching was particularly good, the lesson was delivered with pace and the material was challenging. For example in a lesson on functional groups in chemistry, students had been asked to learn tests for homework. Well-structured oral questions then sampled the whole class, reinforcing knowledge of the tests. A practical exercise followed where students

correctly and competently identified unknown substances using the tests they had learned. Discussion of the results obtained, taking contributions from the whole class, further consolidated learning. Where teaching was less satisfactory, there was a tendency to rush introductions and insufficient discussion of the scientific principles of techniques to be used or reasons for the practical work. There was over reliance on teacher delivery and a need to relate science more to real life and the interests of students. There was insufficient stress on investigatory aspects of the work. The teacher gave likely results and conclusions before students had been able to consider the results on their own.

86. In the sixth form, all teaching seen was satisfactory or better, materials were well prepared and students were encouraged to develop responsibility for their own learning and had opportunity to increase presentational skills. There is a need to carefully balance the theoretical and practical aspects of science in order that each contributes fully to the learning process.
87. The departmental marking and assessment policy matches that of the school but there is a need for this policy to be more consistently applied. Comments are written on work, these are congratulatory and supportive rather than clearly setting targets for students so that they know how to improve. The department has made good efforts recently to collect and record assessment data on all students. The use of data to monitor student performance is developing and in future will allow better tracking of students. There is a need to identify where students are in their learning and plan effective teaching strategies enabling students to progress.
88. At the time of the inspection the head of science post was unfilled, and had been vacant for some while, due to the inability to recruit a suitable candidate. The new subject heads have made commendable efforts to improve the department but the lack of leadership is slowing progress since important decisions in policy and direction need to be taken. It is essential that the vacancy be filled as soon as possible. Schemes of work are being developed for all years and it is essential that there is a clear overview of the science curriculum as a whole with similar overviews of each key stage. Common format for modules should be discussed and agreement reached on the structure and content of the scheme in order for it to be a useful and clear working document. Whilst the management of Investigatory work in science has recently improved, there is still a need to develop a clear and effective policy on the role of practical work in science and the teaching and assessment of the coursework component for GCSE.
89. Currently there are nine teachers and eight laboratories; this already creates pressure on laboratory space. In the light of increasing numbers of students entering the school there should be a long-term strategic plan for the science department to ensure laboratory and teacher provision matches the number of students to be taught. Resources in the department are satisfactory but there is a need for textbooks for double award GCSE science students. There is an over reliance in the department on photocopied materials resulting in large reprographic charges and paper management problems for students. This policy should be reviewed to arrive at a more cost-effective way of working. There is a need to review the provision for practical work in the sixth form. The resources within the department for information and communication technology are insufficient for effective class use. The service provided by the laboratory technicians is superb. Their understanding of what is required by teachers is excellent and the way materials are set out for lessons reduces classroom management problems. There is a need to review the time allocated to technical support since the technicians are currently working to capacity.
90. There has been a satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. The review of Key Stage 3 materials has been started this year. Recent advanced level changes and the re-written schemes of work are enabling a successful transition to A level from GCSE Chemistry.

ART

91. The attainment of students at Key Stage 3 is very high; students are working at a level well above national expectations. At Key Stage 4, the level of attainment is very high. The proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A*-C have been 100 per cent for the past three years, which is well above the national average for all schools and above the national average for selective schools. Over the last two years students have performed better in art than in other subjects in the school. A level grades A-B are well above the national average for all schools and above average for selective schools. All students entered for A level, gained grades A-E, which is above the national average for all schools and selective schools. High standards in all examination results have been maintained and improved on since the last inspection.
92. By the end of Key Stage 3, students demonstrate a very high level of knowledge and skills and making and understanding. They understand concepts and processes, apply technical skills very competently and have a well-developed knowledge of art and artists. Critical studies projects, such as a comparison between the work of Georgia O'Keeffe and Cezanne show a high standard of literary skills. Year 9 students use media appropriately and demonstrate a very good understanding of composition when producing still life drawings. At Key Stage 4 students achieve very high standards when interpreting whole class themes and show a well developed knowledge of subjects and their styles. In Year 11 students produced excellent three dimensional forms after researching historical, sources, natural forms and the use of computer imagery for the project of Body Armour. In the sixth form, students are working at well above the national average. They work with a high degree of individuality and show in depth analysis and exploration of ideas and styles. Studies of Urban Decay in A level textiles show a very high level of conceptual and personal response.
93. All students make very good progress over time and in lessons during their stay in the school. They arrive at the school with a wide range of previous experience. By the end of Key Stage 3, students have made rapid gains particularly in the area of technical skills in relation to observational and analytical drawing. An increasing knowledge of a wide range of artists and a developing ability to link styles with a particular artist raises standards. For example, Year 7 students made very good progress when they painted using the style and techniques of Van Gogh. The work at Key Stage 3 provides a firm foundation for Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Students take much more responsibility for their own work and high achievers quickly take on an increased demand for individuality. The development of research and preparation skills is significant in the positive effect it has on examination results at both levels. In the sixth form students show a growing depth of understanding and sophistication in the handling of a wide range of media.
94. Attitudes and behaviour are very good at both key stages and in the sixth form. Students are highly motivated and respond very well to the challenges of the work presented. They organise themselves effectively, work collaboratively and show respect for each other. This was particularly evident in the sixth form where students critically analysed each other's project work, offering a high level of support with constructive and positive comments. A high degree of pride is shown in their work, with folders and sketchbooks reflecting a wide range of stimulus, which have been researched and recorded in their own time. They are increasingly confident in themselves as artists and aware of what they can achieve. The quality of well presented homework and projects reveal very positive attitudes to this subject.
95. The quality of teaching and learning is very good across all key stages and in the sixth form. Teachers have a very good command of their subject and offer a range of specialisms. They have a very good relationship with students based on mutual respect and the high expectations demanded across the age range create an excellent learning ethos. Projects are well planned and use interesting resources linked to artists and cultures. This ensures that students experience a range of approaches and make very good progress in developing their knowledge and technical skills. This was particularly evident in a Year 9 class where students enthusiastically pursued a range of activities before producing high quality designs for a clay head. The detailed constructive and diagnostic marking reflects the teachers' dedication to raising standards. A major strength at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is the emphasis given to independent learning and thought. The high quality of individual attention and knowledgeable advice plays an important role in raising standards. In the sixth form students are treated as individual artists and very well supported.
96. This is a very good department which is well led and teachers are dedicated to improving

attainment. Documentation gives good guidance to staff. It details structured and progressive schemes of work, assessment and monitoring procedures, all of which are fully implemented. A marking policy is in place but the practise would benefit if teachers utilised the effort grade. General assessment objectives are built into all planning but these would have more meaning to students if they were linked specifically to the project. The curriculum is well planned with progression through the key stages. However at Key Stage 3 there is a predominance of fine art and a wider range of printmaking and three dimensional work would broaden experience. Since the last inspection, a new purpose built block has been built and this has rectified the accommodation problems. Information and communication technology has now been built into all projects and a new computer suite gives good practical access. The ethos of the subject is promoted by the high profile of the department in the very high quality display of students' work around the school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

97. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above national averages in 1999 and similar to previous years. GCSE courses in food, textiles and graphics have been offered over the past 3 years in response to students' choice for optional subjects. Results are in line with national comparisons for selective schools. They have remained at the level since 1997. An A level course is offered only in home economics. The group sizes are too small to make valid comparisons with national averages. Results in 1999 were good when compared with the performance of GCSE candidates.
98. Overall, standards in Key Stage 3 are close to national averages. Although some work is correctly assessed at high levels, evidence from lesson observation and work sampling shows much work of average standard. There is a wide variation in standards and pace of learning skills, across the subject but students' knowledge of materials and processes is very good. By the end of the key stage students can make a good range of series of dishes and know how to modify recipes. They design and make items such as an overnight bag demonstrating sound construction and design skills with fabric. In working with resistant materials students make a child's toy using wood and plastic incorporating a simple electronic circuit but their practical skills with these materials are below average. This is partly due to a slow pace in working through the unit but also reflects their lack of experience in a workshop. Students have good drawing skills and graphics is a strong element in the textiles folders but beyond this, designing is a weakness. Standards could be better. There is an over emphasis on the mechanics of the design process which does not lead to creative designing.
99. Standards in Key Stage 4 are good. Students complete GCSE coursework to very high standards, combining computer generated and hand drawn graphics, careful presentation, and well-researched material with very good practical skills. A small number of students take A level home economics and they achieve above average standards when compared with their performance at GCSE. Students have a good understanding of the role of nutrients, for instance the importance of folic acid and iron in the diet of pregnant women and of the dishes which meet these needs.
100. Students have good literacy skills. They are particularly skilful at written evaluation exercises which identify strengths and weaknesses in products or their own work. They have a wide vocabulary and use technical terminology correctly. Numeracy skills also support learning in design and technology and students estimate and measure accurately and present data using line and block graphs. Students analyse nutritional values of food using a computer program and much of their course work is presented using information technology.
101. Progress in working with food and fabric is sound in Key Stage 3. The curriculum is taught as three modules per year on a rotational system. Some students will complete a module at the beginning of the year, others at the end; yet they cover the same work with little account taken of gains in knowledge, skills and understanding from other modules. The department needs to analyse common skills and ensure better continuity of learning as well as progression in the level of content. The pace of progress through examination course is always brisk and both teaching and learning are well focused on the needs of the syllabuses.
102. Teaching in design and technology is good overall. Two thirds of lessons seen were good or very good. One lesson was unsatisfactory where the pace of learning was slow and expectations too low. Staff have a secure knowledge of their specialisms and draw on this to

make lessons interesting and relevant. All teachers make learning objectives explicit which focuses lessons well. Good organisational skills in food lessons enable a great deal to be completed in a short space of time and students know that all teachers have high expectations both of behaviour and the quality of their work. They arrive at lessons early so that they can make the most of their time and they take a great deal of pride in their work. Homework could be better used to cover details of theory so that students make good use of workshop time in learning the skills they need to cover in Key Stage 3.

103. There is a common system for assessing students work but not for monitoring of teaching by the head of department. This is needed to ensure consistent standards across the skills areas. The new accommodation including a well-equipped workshop negates weaknesses in health and safety and the lack of resistant materials course identified in the last inspection. The school did not meet the statutory requirement to teach design and technology to all students in Key Stage 4 at the time of the last inspection. This continues to be the case mainly because of the lack of facilities.

GEOGRAPHY

104. Teacher assessed attainment in geography at the end of Key Stage 3 over the past 3 years was well above the national expectation but broadly in line with similar schools. Over the past 2 years the percentage of students who reached level 7 was above average. During the same period, GCSE results were in line with the average for all students in selective schools. In 1999 the number of A*-B grades increased substantially on the previous 2 years though the number of A* grades was down on 1998. Subject performance indicators show that geography results in 1999 compare favourably with most other subjects. Advanced level results since the last inspection, with the exception of 1997, are below that expected in similar schools in terms of A/B grades.
105. In work seen within the school, attainment at Key Stage 3 is well above the national expectation and broadly in line with similar schools. Students can write accurately using appropriate geographical terms and illustrating their answers with maps or diagrams when necessary. Presentation skills are good. By the end of the key stage students have a good knowledge and understanding of the patterns and processes they have studied. For example, a Year 8 group demonstrated their knowledge of rivers when looking at factors causing flooding. Throughout these years, students have developed the appropriate geographical skills when, for example, using and deducing information from maps and presenting information on maps and diagrams using appropriate graphical techniques chosen by themselves. Throughout the key stage students have a number of opportunities to develop their enquiry and field work skills using the surrounding locality as a resource thus addressing one of the key points for action made in the last report. Students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress at Key Stage 3, but a minority of higher attainers is underachieving.
106. At Key Stage 4 attainment is well above the national expectation but broadly in line with that expected in similar schools. Students deepen their understanding of patterns and processes such as weather systems and land use patterns for example. They consolidate their range of fieldwork and enquiry skills and can exercise decision-making skills. Progress is satisfactory but there is evidence to show that some of the most able students are not being sufficiently challenged to produce GCSE A*-A grade written answers. Advanced level students attain levels broadly in line with those of similar schools. Students have a very good knowledge of local geography with the Medway, Sussex Coast and Tonbridge used to illustrate topics studied. Knowledge and understanding is at an appropriate level. Essay answers are well researched, analytical and use substantiated judgements. Progress is good overall.
107. Throughout the school at all key stages students respond positively to their lessons showing an interest in the subject and getting on with their work purposefully. Behaviour is excellent.

Students work co-operatively together in pairs or groups mutually supporting one another in their learning. Students take care with the presentation of their homework and develop the capacity for personal study as they move through the school.

108. The quality of teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4 is good. Sixth form teaching is satisfactory. The teaching issue raised in the last report has been addressed though more can be done to ensure a sufficient range of teaching and learning strategies, particularly in the sixth form. Teaching strengths are based on a good subject knowledge and understanding of the demands of National Curriculum and public examination requirements. Lessons are well planned and discipline is very good and is based upon excellent relationships within the classroom. Resources are used effectively and day-to-day assessment is used as a positive tool in the raising of standards. In the best lessons teachers used skilful questioning to challenge their students and involved the students fully in their own learning, as was seen in a Year 7 lesson on quarrying in the Medway area and stretched the most able seen in a Year 9 lesson on tourism.
109. The department is managed effectively. Administration is good and resources are efficiently deployed. A pleasant learning environment is provided with displays of students' work and other geographical material. The concerns raised in the last inspection report have largely been addressed. Opportunities for students to improve their enquiry skills have been increased successfully and a start has been made on the inclusion of information and communication technology skills in the teaching of geography although not all geography teachers are confident in using computer technology. However, more needs to be done in providing strategies to extend the performance of the most able, which need to be clearly identified by the department.

HISTORY

110. On the basis of teacher assessed levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 over the past three years, students achieve well above the national expectation but broadly in line with similar schools. The percentage of students achieving level 6 and above has been rising steadily over the period. During the same period, GCSE results have also improved. However during 1997 and 1998 results were below the average for selective schools and it is only in 1999 that results show a significant improvement, in that year A*-C grades being above those of similar schools, though the percentage of students achieving the higher A*-B grades were lower. Subject performance indicators show that students' history results in 1999 were better than in most other subjects. At A level, with the exception of 1998, grades are lower than would be expected when compared with selective schools. In 1999 there were no A or B grades achieved by the eight candidates entered.
111. In work seen within the school attainment at Key Stage 3 is well above the national expectation but broadly in line with similar schools. Students have good oral skills and can write accurately to describe and explain historical issues using appropriate historical vocabulary. They have well developed research skills and are able to extract information from a variety of source materials to answer historical questions. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of the major events and issues of the periods they are studying and know and understand why some events can be interpreted differently. By the end of the key stage, students have acquired appropriate evidence analysis skills, they can distinguish between primary and secondary sources and understand about reliability and usefulness of sources. Progress is satisfactory overall with lower attaining students and those with special educational needs making better progress whilst higher attainers are not sufficiently challenged in most lessons.
112. At Key Stage 4 attainment is well above the national expectation and in line with that expected in selective schools. Students have an in-depth knowledge of the periods they are studying. They have good essay writing skills and higher attainers have excellent skills of analysis using sophisticated language and appropriate historical terms as was apparent in the sample of work seen on Hitler's rise to power and the history of Germany in the 1930s. By the end of the key stage, students have developed their evidence analysis skills still further and all students make good progress during their GCSE course. A change of syllabus to twentieth century history has increased the numbers who wish to study at A level. There are sixteen students in Year 12.

Written answers suggest that these students are achieving at the standard expected for A level students at this stage of the course. However, they are reluctant to engage in debate and far too passive in their learning.

113. In all key stages, students are well motivated with very good attitudes to learning. They show a positive response in lessons. Behaviour is excellent. Relationships within the classroom are good, both between students and teacher and between the students themselves. They co-operate well in group learning and mutually support one another. Students take care with their homework, complete it on time and develop the capacity for personal study as they move through the school.
114. The quality of teaching is good. It is good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and satisfactory in the sixth form. Teaching is based on good subject knowledge and understanding of the demands of the National Curriculum and public examination requirements. Teachers manage students well. Most lessons are well planned, setting objectives that students understand. In the best lessons teachers set high expectations, challenged students appropriately, used time and resources effectively and involved students in their own learning. Examples of this were seen in a Year 7 lesson on castles when students were required to make judgements about where to site a castle using a set of criteria and in a Year 11 lesson on the evaluation of source material requiring the students to make judgements about the reliability and usefulness of sources of evidence. Where teaching was less successful or unsatisfactory, there was evidence of poor planning and teachers failed to challenge or inspire the students. Overall the department has paid insufficient attention to the need to develop strategies to extend the performance of the most able students, a key point identified in the last inspection report.
115. The department functions efficiently on a day to day basis. However, the overall planning for curriculum development and for the monitoring of teaching and learning is inadequate. The department development plan sets out the aim to raise standards but no strategies to do this have been identified. Continuing staff development has not been seen as a department priority. A number of issues raised in the last report have not been addressed. There has been insufficient development in the area of information and communication technology which is still not being used systematically in the teaching of history. There has been no policy within the department to identify the most able students. Furthermore, materials, available within the department, suitable for students of differing abilities, were not used in lessons during the week of the inspection.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

116. Overall, standards of information technology are well above average. Teacher assessed levels of attainment at the age of 14 were well above the national average in 1999 and evidence from observation of lessons and analysis of students' work substantiates this assessment. GCSE results were below national average in 1998 but a significant improvement in 1999 took results to the average for selective schools. GCSE grades have been affected by the high turnover of information technology teachers over the past few years. The school has been unable to recruit a second information technology teacher to work with the head of department. Parents have expressed concern at the many changes in staffing and rightly noted the impact on attainment of students. A level information technology is taken by groups that are too small to make valid comparisons with national statistics but students have not attained levels in line with prior attainment.
117. By the end of Year 9 students are confident in using a full range of industry standard software as well elements of control technology. They complete individual tasks, which involve analysing and solving problems using information technology applications. Students investigate databases to decide on which is more appropriate for particular jobs and write detailed reports of these findings. They compare the material available for research purposes through electronic and text sources and use the Internet well. The high standards of information technology skills are enhanced by students' regular access to computers in school. A large number of students also have access to computers at home and this is a significant advantage

in giving them extra time to consolidate the skills they learn in school. Students have a good command of language and use technical terms accurately in their work, Numeracy skills are also of a high standard, as illustrated in the sophisticated use of formulae in compiling spreadsheets.

118. Evidence from the inspection supports the school's view that standards in Key Stage 4 are improving. The good standard of work from Year 11 students means that the majority will be entered for the full GCSE examination although the time allocated was designed to cover a short course. The standard of course work is good. Students demonstrate a high degree of knowledge and understanding of the ways in which computers are used in business; for example, they create a customer data base, use a spreadsheet to draw up a balance sheet and model different pricing structures to alter profit margins. They make imaginative use of desktop publishing to make advertising leaflets and business stationery and produce informative slide presentations to a professional standard.
119. Current attainment in the sixth form is close to national averages. By the end of the course students have a good understanding of the impact of information technology on business and the home. They use integrated software in problem solving activities and have sound writing and numeracy skills in line with course requirements.
120. Students make very good progress in information technology across the school. They are motivated to learn and respond well to the focus on individual learning which is a feature of the best teaching. Students take a good deal of responsibility for their own progress and are keen to work in the information technology room outside lesson time, completing homework for example. The computers in the library are also well used by students wanting to complete homework or find information from CD ROMS or the Internet. Students are confident in discussing the impact of information technology on society and aware of the moral and legal issues concerning the use of computers.
121. The previous inspection identified the need to develop cross-curricular information technology. This is beginning well in a number of subjects including English, modern languages, mathematics and science. In response to the inspection recommendations senior managers have produced a costed three year development plan to provide more computers as well as staff training. Control technology now forms part of the Key Stage 3 programme and students write sequences, for example, to control the operation of traffic lights.
122. The quality of teaching was good or very good in two thirds of lessons observed and the remainder was satisfactory. The scheme of work and teaching style is well matched to the ability and interests of students in providing work which challenges them to reach very high levels of information technology skills and knowledge. Those students who have had many changes of teacher have covered the same work but without the benefit of constant challenge to ensure that they sustain a very brisk pace of learning. This has an impact on their competence and confidence. Students are very well motivated independent learners. They are aware of their own progress through detailed monitoring which forms a regular part of each lesson.
123. Management of information technology as a subject is sound and there is a strong commitment from the department and from senior management to raising attainment. Cross-curricular information technology is growing but lacks coordination to help staff identify training needs and opportunities to broaden its use in all subjects. Good improvement since the last inspection is underpinned by the substantial investment in computers.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

124. In 1999, results achieved by students in tests set by their teachers at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above the national expectation, and higher than in the previous two years. In 1999, GCSE results in French at A*-C were well above the national average and higher than those in selective schools. In German, results in the range A*-C were well above the national average, and slightly higher than the average for selective schools. Results in Spanish were well above the national average and in line with results in selective schools. In all three foreign languages, results at A*-C have risen in the last three years, and all students entering for GCSE have gained grades in the A*-G range. In 1999, five students entering for A level French gained higher than average grades compared with selective schools, including three at

grade A. A level results in German, from a similar entry, were in line with the average for selective schools, with two students gaining grade A. One student entering for Spanish in 1999 gained grade A. In recent years, A level results in French and German have been broadly in line with those gained in similar schools, although in Spanish they have been well below.

125. Within a few weeks of starting French in Year 7, and German or Spanish in Year 8, most students can understand lessons delivered entirely in the foreign languages, extract detail from taped conversations and most can converse fluently about themselves, their interests and daily lives. By the end of the key stage, most students use a range of tenses to talk and write about past and future events and can express their opinions on topics such as pocket money and fashion. Many students use computers creatively to produce posters, menus, and record the results of surveys in graphic form. In Key Stage 4, students demonstrate a wide range of vocabulary and grammatical knowledge in descriptive writing and group discussion with their teachers or the foreign language assistants. In the sixth form, students can simulate real life situations such as job interviews or adapt their written style to business letters. They write persuasively, but with varying degrees of accuracy, on various topical issues, including healthy living and the environment. They interpret statistical evidence and base their arguments on research, using authentic texts and the Internet.
126. In Key Stage 3, students make rapid and substantial progress, often learning the essentials of a topic such as the weather, or ordering a snack, in one or two lessons. In Key Stage 4, they develop and consolidate the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in anticipation of the high grades they mostly achieve at GCSE. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs benefit from extra support and attention from their teachers, making good progress as a result. Sixth form students work hard with teaching staff, but they learn less effectively in formal grammar lessons than when teaching is more imaginative.
127. Students have very good powers of concentration and usually show interest in their work. Their enthusiasm flags towards the end of lengthy double lessons. They react swiftly and positively to instructions in the foreign languages, so most lessons proceed at a brisk pace. Classrooms are usually busy and productive places, where a humorous atmosphere often prevails. In all key stages, students work co-operatively in groups and pairs, offering mutual support or confidently seeking help where required. Most exercise books and folders are neat and attractively presented, and bright displays in classrooms reflect students' pride in their work.
128. Teaching is always at least satisfactory, and in Key Stages 3 and 4, the majority of lessons are either good or very good. In both key stages, some excellent teaching was seen. Sixth form lessons are usually well taught, although a minority is barely satisfactory. Teachers use the foreign languages consistently for presenting and organising lessons, and expect from their students a good level of fluency in French, German or Spanish. They plan most of their lessons well with a series of short exercises, culminating in a practical activity such as a café simulation or a debate on school life. They focus their students' attention, using flashcards, overhead projectors or real objects, and enliven their presentations with mime and music. A few lessons, based largely on textbooks and worksheets, are less inspiring. Teachers regularly set and mark homework, often using it as the basis for the next lesson. They involve students in their own assessment, but refer insufficiently to National Curriculum levels or what students can do to improve.
129. The department is well managed, with carefully considered policies and schemes of work. Formal discussions and planning have, since the last inspection, resulted in improvements in the curriculum and standards of attainment. The sharing of ideas and good practice is inhibited by the lack of a central administrative area, but also because monitoring and appraisal of teaching are not well developed. More can be done to improve assessment, make better use of information and communications technology, and enrich the studies of sixth form students.

Latin

130. All students have the opportunity to learn Latin from their second year in school. In recent years this provision has expanded during Key Stages 3 and 4, so that some higher attaining students have progressed to GCSE level. The subject is formally taught, using translation techniques and involving grammatical analysis. Most lessons are characterised by a good-natured, inquisitive and often humorous approach to teaching and learning. Students

sometimes write ghost stories, or create posters and newspaper articles. In addition to developing students' linguistic skills, the course gives students additional insight into the influence of Roman culture in local and European history. The manipulation of language has a beneficial effect on students' awareness of English and foreign languages. Students also have the opportunity to increase their knowledge of classical society, civilisation and mythology through fieldwork at famous historical sites, in England and abroad.

MUSIC

131. The 1999 GCSE results for students achieving the higher A*-C grades were above the national average, but below the national average when compared with selective schools. In the past three years there has been some variation in both examination results and in the number of students taking the examination. There is now an upward trend with a very good take-up rate for the subject in the present Years 10 and 11. The 1999 A level examination was taken by one student who achieved a pass grade. There have been similar results in the previous years. The teaching of A level has been part of a consortium arrangement, but from the present Year 12 onwards the course will be taught at the school.
132. At the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 attainment is above national expectations in composing, listening and appraising. It is well above national expectations in performing. In the sixth form, attainment is in line with course-related expectations. Students in Year 7 learnt about brass instruments and wrote their own fanfare which they successfully notated. They showed a good understanding of different rhythmic and melodic patterns when composing and were able to play the fanfares fluently on classroom instruments. Year 10 students confidently identified the elements used in an example of African music. They sang Siyahamba in harmony, demonstrating accuracy of pitch and a sensitivity to the other parts. In Year 13, the students' own general musical knowledge and their understanding of the use of harmonic progressions enabled them to make an analysis of an extract of music by Wagner. They could identify the use of motifs, pedal notes, sequential melodies and the French sixth and make appropriate comments about orchestration. Students achieve high standards in relation to their age and ability. Students with special educational needs and the more musically able make good progress.
133. Students in both key stages have very good attitudes towards the subject. They are well behaved and work collaboratively, when required. They enjoy practical activities and always work with interest. In the sixth form students are conscientious and have a committed approach to their work. All students are enthusiastic in their response to extra-curricular provision.
134. Teaching in both key stages and in the sixth form is good or very good, resulting in the quality of students' learning being good or better. The previous inspection report highlighted the need for students to be more musically involved when learning. This has now been successfully addressed. Teachers have good musical skills and make effective use of musical demonstration to aid students' learning. Good focus is given to developing students' aural and notational skills. Challenging activities are provided for students which enable them to gain confidence in all aspects of the work. For example, in a Year 9 lesson very good teaching had a positive impact on students' learning. Students were able to understand how a modal scale was used in a piece of music. They performed both aurally and from notation and were confident when playing the different parts. They recorded the performance showing good rhythmic impetus and accuracy of pitch. They improvised a question and answer section, demonstrating good ensemble playing. Very good diagnostic marking by teachers ensures that both students' musical and literacy skills are successfully extended. The teaching of music technology is in the early stages of development. In the previous inspection, this was not in place. There are good assessment procedures and students are involved in their own self-assessment after a unit of work. Homework is regularly set to re-inforce students' work in class. The subject makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
135. Extra-curricular provision is very good and involves over 200 students. This provision enables students to experience a range of different musical styles and to gain a wider knowledge of the musical repertoire. There are various instrumental and choral groups and some are attended by members of staff. Over 100 students receive instrumental lessons and students perform well in school assemblies and in concerts both in and out of school. Some students are

involved in county instrumental and vocal groups. Students have performed at the Guildhall, Rochester and there have been leaver's services and carol services at Rochester Cathedral. In all these, students achieve high standards of musical performance. The school is often asked to provide music for special occasions by the local education authority.

136. The head of department has been in the post for a year and provides effective leadership. She has a clear view of how the subject is to develop. She is well supported by a part-time colleague. Visiting instrumental teachers make a valuable contribution to the work of the department. The accommodation is very good. The number of different size rooms in the music house enables a range of rehearsals to take place at the same time, thereby providing further opportunities for performance skills to be developed. The resources are good and include computers and software.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

137. Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 exceeds national expectations. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 by students following the core course is in line with national expectations. In 1999 the small number of students completing the GCSE short course in physical education obtained very good results with all students gaining grades A* to B. The GCSE full course started in September 1998 and so no examination results are available for comparison. However, inspection evidence shows they are expected to be in line with the national average of selective school students. The advanced level course started in September 1999 and the limited evidence available indicates that they are in line for results of selective schools. There is no formal physical education for students in the sixth form although recreational activities are available.
138. At the end of Key Stage 3 students understand the necessity of warm-up exercises and have a good understanding of the safety aspects associated activities and apply them appropriately. Students are able to use their skills in a variety of effective game situations in hockey, netball, football, gymnastics and dance. In gymnastics they perform a good range of balances and movements using small and large apparatus along with an increasingly competent ability to link them together. Students' netball and gymnastics skills are strengths. Students use the correct terminology in gymnastics and apply their knowledge of angles accurately in netball positional play. By the end of Key Stage 4, many students lead warm up sessions with confidence and umpire in an efficient manner. They transfer skills learnt in other areas to new situations such as when learning self-defence skills. They use the fitness room sensibly to develop their own fitness programme. The GCSE students show a good level of performing trampolining skills. A number of students have achieved success at local and national levels both as individuals and as teams, especially in netball. The planning and performing areas of the curriculum are both good. Evaluation skills in terms of modifying tactics in a game by changing players to use the strengths of the team and by giving advice on variations or additions to sequences are good. A weakness is seen in peer analysis of individual skills, although it is better at Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3.
139. Good progress can be seen within lessons, within key stages and from one key stage to another. This is seen in particular in netball where Year 7 have relatively poor ability to mark and are taking part in small games, to Year 10 where the students can play and umpire a high quality game. Progress in gymnastics is also seen in the refinement of movements and in the development of more difficult physical movements.
140. The attitude of the students towards physical education is excellent. They change promptly for lessons, are always prepared to attempt the activities and maintain a high level of work output even over a double lesson. All students work very well as individuals, in pairs, in small groups and as teams.
141. Teaching is good with a fifth of the lessons seen being satisfactory and a fifth being very good or excellent. There is no difference in the quality of teaching between the key stages. All staff have a very good knowledge of the subject and use it to maintain interest by giving examples to the students and relating the activity to a real situation. Planning of lessons is also very good so that activities build up the skill and then incorporate it into a small or full game situation. Adaptations of the games in positioning or points scoring enable the skill to be used in a situation that enables learning to develop at the faster rate.

142. The management of the department is very good and teachers work very well together as a team. The schemes of work and other documentation are regularly revised and this revision ensures that the best ideas are used. There is a consistency of approach and work within the department. Extra curricular activities are numerous and enable students of all abilities to develop their skills further. Displays around the school in all areas used by the department are very good they are effectively used to stimulate student's interest in the subject. The relaxed relationships enhance the learning process. Opportunities for the social development of the students are provided as captains of form and school teams and with older students helping to run the club activities. The limited resources and the shape of the gymnasium inhibit progress to some extent but the school is making the best use of what they have. Assessment within the department takes place at the end of each module of work. However, it would be helpful if the criteria for Key Stage 3 assessments are put on display and thereby involve students in monitoring their own progress.
143. Since the last inspection, good progress has been made. The issue of the use of outside coaches has been addressed so that they are now teaching in line the national curriculum. The facilities have been improved by providing new netball courts. The new sports hall is close to completion. Standards have also risen in Key Stages 3 and 4 and examination courses have been introduced at GCSE and A level.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

144. By the end of Key Stage 3 students achieve standards which are above those expected for the Locally Agreed Syllabus. These standards continue to improve throughout Key Stage 4 and by the end of the key stage virtually all students pass the short course GCSE at levels A*-C. This is significantly better than the national average results. In the sixth form, the small group of students in 1999 achieved results at A level and A/S level, which slightly exceeded national average scores. This level of attainment can vary considerably each year with the students who opt to pursue this particular subject.
145. Progress in Key Stage 3 is good. The students are very competent in their literacy skills. Previous work shows that these are used in a wide range of extended writing to develop their knowledge and thoughts about religion. Letters, diaries, stories, observations and explanations take many different forms as they study symbolism, rites of passage and relationships in six major world faiths. This progress is seen in more complex investigations in studies of myths, the Passover and Jesus. The students' group studies of evidence for and against the resurrection of Jesus was impressive and displayed good oral, written and information and communication technology skills. In Year 9 the quality of work shows maturity in studies of the impact of world faiths on rites of passage such as the Sikh sacred thread ceremony, the Jewish bar mitzvah and Hindu and Christian marriage customs. A written consideration of marriage vows was generally thoughtful and balanced. By the end of the key stage, the students have a thorough grasp of the fundamental ideas of religion.
146. During Key Stage 4 this progress accelerates during the short GCSE course. Moral and religious studies consider a wide range of relevant issues such as prejudice, abortion, sex, marriage and divorce, euthanasia, war and suffering with special reference to Christianity and Islam. In the sixth form A level and A/S students study courses related to the philosophy of religion and ethics, Islam, Hinduism and New Testament studies. All students follow short philosophy of ethics and religion courses. Although the quality of the programme of study is good, there is insufficient time allocated to meet the statutory requirements.
147. Progress is good although in Years 9 and 11 the reduced time allocation affects the rate of progress so that it is only satisfactory. Students have a diligent attitude and class discussions are often thought provoking throughout each year group. For example, a Year 11 class which was studying the question of suffering used a range of sources to develop ideas which were widely discussed in a disciplined manner throughout the class. Students readily worked individually, or in small or large groups.
148. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers' planning is good at all key stages, for example, when enabling students to develop their ideas about war and suffering in Key Stage 4. Their good level of knowledge and understanding allied to the planning and high quality relationships enabled mature judgements to emerge from the students. Pace and challenge in lessons is good. The marking of work is thorough. The common assessment tasks and the students' self-evaluations promise to help raise standards both in teaching and learning still further.

Students have visited Rochester Cathedral, two churches, a mosque, a synagogue and a gurdwara. The departmental handbook describes a wide range of experiential learning but these were not very evident during the inspection and there were few opportunities for reflective thought in lessons.

149. The head of department provides good leadership and teachers work well together. The development of the short GCSE course since the last inspection has been a success. The Year 8 'Day of Islam' is an effective cross-cultural experience.

BUSINESS STUDIES

150. Standards in GCSE business studies are broadly in line with national average for selective schools and well above the national average for students in all schools. In work seen in Years 10 and 11 the standards of students' work broadly reflects the GCSE results in business studies. Business studies students have a sound understanding of a business context and, for example, in one lesson showed how government policy impacted on businesses. Progress is satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory and good use is made of homework to consolidate learning.

ECONOMICS

151. GCSE economics results are lower than in business studies though higher than the national average for all schools. High attainers in economics use supply and demand analysis confidently and most can apply specialist concepts to everyday contexts. In general, students have strong literacy skills reflected in good folder work and use number effectively in, for example, calculating changes in inflation and taxation rates. Students make at least satisfactory progress in the lessons and in folder work completed, and are mostly achieving appropriately though in some cases, a small number gain lower than expected grades. Teaching is very good and illustrated well in a Year 10 economics lesson where the teacher made good use of students' everyday knowledge to introduce new economic and business concepts.
152. Standards in GCE advanced level in economics are line with selective schools. Standards in GCE A level economics closely reflect recent results. Students have a sufficient range of knowledge and differ in the extent to which they can apply theory and ideas. The higher attaining in a Year 13 lesson considering economic growth, had a strong grasp of theory and could see how the different economic factors interrelated and could accurately identify the appropriate graphical model. Economics students mostly make very good progress and are achieving standards above those expected when looking at prior GCSE attainment. This includes a number of lower attainers who have more recently adjusted to the demands of the subject. Teaching is very good with a varied mix of classwork that fully involves students in the learning process and engages their interest. Question and answer work is effective in developing and confirming students' understanding.

PERFORMING ARTS

153. The performing arts course is taught to all students in Key Stage 3. Each art form is taught as a discrete subject at the beginning of each year and then students rehearse and perform one combined arts production. In work seen, standards in Key Stage 3, and in the newly established GCSE courses in Key Stage 4, are at the national average.
154. Students acquire good skills in each of the art forms at Key Stage 3. In a Year 7 dance lesson, students improvised their own dance drama based on the idea of a dream. They were effective in creating a piece which showed a good control of expressive movement. In a Year 9 drama lesson students performed group improvisations showing skilled use of dialogue and the ability to make objective and appropriate comments about their performances. Students with special educational needs and higher attaining students make good progress.
155. Students in both key stages have good attitudes. They work co-operatively in groups and are attentive whilst others are performing. They are very responsive to extra-curricular provision.

156. Teaching is overall satisfactory, with good teaching in dance and music. In all the art forms emphasis is placed on the process of improvising, rehearsing and performing and opportunities are given for students to evaluate their work and to suggest ways of improvement. The quality of students' learning is good and this was evident in a Year 9 music lesson when students were using a pentatonic scale to create a piece in ternary form. Good teaching had a positive impact on students' learning and enabled them to develop ideas through improvisation, to effectively rehearse and then to achieve a final fluent performance. The subject makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
157. Very good opportunities are provided for students to take part in school productions and to attend dance and drama clubs and many students participate. Students have performed in productions of *Oliver* and *the Wizard of Oz*. In March there is a production of *Half A Sixpence*. Students have attended a Young Vic performance of *the Arabian Nights* and their assistant director has visited the school for an improvisation workshop.
158. The performing arts course has been in place for just over a year and the head of department has successfully established the subject within the school curriculum.

SIXTH FORM – An overview

159. There has been a steady improvement in overall student attainment since the last inspection. There is a very good range of GCE A levels on offer. In all lessons sixth form students show considerable concentration and application and that helps to ensure they make at least satisfactory progress in their learning. The quality of teaching is good but a significant number of lessons lack enough rigour, sparkle and imagination which would enable students to reach even higher standards.
160. A major strength of the school is the contribution that sixth form students make to the life of the school. For example, their active participation involves organising younger students' learning, organising sports and charity events and assistance in running the school council. Sixth form students provide very good role models for younger students in the school and gain valuable experience from the leadership opportunities and responsibilities that are offered to them by the school.
161. The current leadership of the sixth form is shared between three staff and they do not work as a coherent team to develop provision. Good procedures for monitoring of student progress need to be linked more rigorously to the whole school priority of improving teaching, learning and assessment. The school is currently seeking to appoint a head of sixth form to address this issue.
162. The tutor area is poorly maintained and its untidy appearance detracts from the overall positive ethos of the sixth form and the very good learning environment generally around the school. Tutor time is not used efficiently.

Advanced GNVQ business studies

163. Students following the general national vocational qualification (GNVQ) at advanced level in business studies, while wholly successful, achieve fewer merits and distinctions than might be expected. Students have satisfactory theoretical understanding and show good planning, research and evaluation skills. They make satisfactory progress though at times the range of their practical experience and developing personal skills are not always reflected in the grades awarded. Sixth form students make good progress in their learning through their research in the local business community. The less effective and unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by excessive teacher presentation in which the students spend too long listening to the teacher or reading aloud from the textbook. Those lessons are insufficiently clear about what the students are meant to learn.
164. Students do not always make as much progress as they should in GNVQ business studies. In order to improve the department should improve the quality and range of teaching and learning through more staff development, including sharing good practice. There is not enough rigorous monitoring and evaluation of student performance in order to identify areas for improvement.

Sociology

165. Standards in GCE Advanced level sociology are very high with all students being successful and 68 per cent of students gaining grades A or B compared with the national figure of 42 per cent for selective schools 34 per cent for all schools. On average, sociology students achieve better in the subject compared with their other GCE Advanced levels.
166. Students make excellent progress and have a strong understanding of the different sociological perspectives and are able to apply these in their study of specific aspects of society and social behaviour. Their folder work shows good personal organisation of a range of information and secure analytical and evaluative skills in essay work
167. Teaching is excellent in its methodology and challenge, providing a range of activities that combines video, group work, teacher presentation and discussion, enabling students to sustain interest and involvement over the long lesson. Learning is consolidated through a variety of student activities including table analysis to interpret demographic trends, and teacher devised summary sheets to analyse and compare theoretical perspectives.

Psychology

168. Standards in GCE Advanced level psychology have varied considerably in the last two years. In 1998 standards were high with all students being successful and over two thirds gaining grade A or B which is higher than the national average for selective schools and much higher for all schools. There has been a fall in overall standards with 25 per cent gaining grade B, and though all students were successful, most achieve better in their other GCE Advanced levels.
169. Current student progress is satisfactory with Year 12 students showing good research and information technology skills and beginning to more critically evaluate research evidence. Year 13 students have a firm theoretical understanding and use it effectively to evaluate contrasting explanations of psychological behaviour. In that year, most students show standards close to that expected for selective schools.
170. Teaching is well planned and includes structured learning sheets and guided discussion, as well as access to the Internet to stimulate interest and develop data retrieval skills. Year 12 students responded well to an animal language investigation and showed considerable independence in accessing and retrieving information from a website.

Politics

171. In work seen, standards in this newly introduced A level subject are at the national average. Students make good progress in acquiring an understanding of the development of political structures including the United Nations and the European Union and of devolution in the United Kingdom. They are articulate and research their presentations with reference to a range of media and Internet resources. Note-taking is good and provides a good basis for essay-writing, revision and consolidation of their knowledge and understanding. Students are well motivated and contribute sensibly to discussion and debate.
172. Teaching is good, enthusiastic and well planned. It is based on good up-to-date resources which are designed to stimulate enquiry skills. Essays are marked constructively and teachers' comments provide good advice for students on improving their standards.

General studies

173. General studies had 56 entries in 1999 of which 25 per cent gained grades A or B and 86 per cent gained passes, broadly in line with the results for all schools though below those for selective schools.
174. The course in Year 12 provides modules in religious and moral education, government and current affairs, issues in science, and recreational and sports activities, with a majority continuing preparation for the GCE Advanced level in Year 13. The course in Year 12 endeavours to meet a number of needs including the requirement for religious education, continued personal and social education, as well as a preparation for the general studies requirements.
175. Teaching is satisfactory across the different modules with particular strengths in the more practical sessions such as that devoted to interview technique where students were interested and gained considerable insight into the process. Other general studies lessons in, for example, science and government, addressed important issues that engaged students in valuable discussion though more formal essay writing proved less interesting.