

INSPECTION REPORT

ASHLYNS SCHOOL

Berkhamsted

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117578

Headteacher: Mr R Dalziel

Reporting inspector: Mrs M J Kerry
9931

Dates of inspection: 11-15 March 2002

Inspection number: 193554

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 13 to 18 years

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Chesham Road
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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs P Elderkin

Date of previous inspection: April 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
9931	Mrs M J Kerry	<i>Registered inspector</i>		Results and achievements; How well are pupils and students taught? How well is the school led and managed?
19677	Mrs M Cumbers	<i>Lay inspector</i>		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development; How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
2739	Mr I Benson	<i>Team inspector Sixth Form Co-ordinator</i>	Geography; Equal opportunities;	How well does the school care for its pupils and students? All questions as they relate to the Sixth Form.
19499	Miss B Baughan	<i>Team Inspector</i>	English.	
6044	Mr R Perkins	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Mathematics.	
19043	Dr D Lewis	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Science; Physics.	
28175	Mrs J Goodman	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Art and design.	
30899	Mr K Boden	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Design and technology.	
19152	Mr R Merryfield	<i>Team Inspector</i>	History.	
30937	Mr M Clay-Dove	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Information and communication technology.	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils and students?
03793	Mr J Ratcliffe	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	
22783	Mr S Block	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Music.	
15590	Mrs S Slocombe	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Physical education; Special educational needs.	
10895	Mr D Wasp	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Religious education.	
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IN THE SIXTH FORM

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This is a smaller than average, mixed comprehensive school on the outskirts of Berkhamsted. There are 784 pupils on roll aged 13-18. The majority of pupils come from two middle schools in Berkhamsted, but some come from other areas. About 25 per cent of pupils come from outside the Berkhamsted area, although they have attended Berkhamsted schools. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals is below average (five per cent), there are few pupils from ethnic minorities and no pupils with English as an additional language who are in the early stages of language acquisition. The number of pupils with special educational needs is broadly average (16.4 per cent) but the number with statements of special educational needs is below average (0.7 per cent). Pupils' attainment on entry is above average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective and improving school which provides a good quality of education for its pupils, both in the main school and the Sixth Form. Pupils achieve well, and reach good standards, with results which are above average in the main school and well above average in the Sixth Form. Standards are improving, due to the very good quality of leadership and management which has enabled the school to move forward significantly following a period of decline. Teaching is of good quality in the main school and very good in the Sixth Form. Strategic planning for the use of resources is good, the principles of best value are well applied and value for money is good. The Sixth Form is cost effective.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- The very good quality leadership and management which have brought about effective change, supported by a highly effective governing body.
- The good quality teaching, which promotes high standards and good achievement, especially in the Sixth Form.
- The fostering of personal growth and relationships through the wider life of the school, combined with strong academic and personal support to pupils as learners.
- The mature and positive attitudes pupils have to school life and work.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Standards of attainment in the main school, especially at age 16.
- The quality of evaluation of the impact of changes on pupils' learning and standards of achievement.
- Levels of attendance.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection in April 1997. Following the inspection the school entered a period of declining results: this trend has now been reversed and standards are once again above average in the main school. Results in the Sixth Form have improved to well above average. Teaching has substantially improved and the high proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has been very much reduced. The climate of the school has changed from one based predominantly on care to one based on achievement and supporting pupils' learning. There have been improvements to the curriculum in Year 9 and in religious education, and to provision for spiritual and cultural development. Overstaffing has been addressed, a deficit budget brought under control, and arrangements for professional development vastly improved. The monitoring of teaching and of the work of departments has been successfully established. Accommodation in science and food technology has been re-furnished, and information communication technology resources improved. The decline in attendance has been halted although it still needs to regain its previous levels.

STANDARDS

The table below shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and Sixth Form students at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-Level/AS-Level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	C	C	B	C
A-Levels/AS-Levels	A	A	N/A	N/A

Key	
<i>well above average</i>	A
<i>above average</i>	B
<i>average</i>	C
<i>below average</i>	D
<i>well below average</i>	E

Pupils reach above average standards at age 14 and age 16, and well above average in the Sixth Form. Standards at age 14 are rising faster than nationally. Average points scores in English, mathematics and science at age 14, not included in the table, were well above average in 2001. English results were weaker than science and mathematics but work observed during inspection shows that standards in English are improving. Following a decline at age 16, standards are now rising: this was seen in improved results in 2001 and was also observable in work seen in the school during the inspection. Sixth Form results have been well above average for the last three years. In lessons observed and work scrutinised, pupils were reaching standards which reflected those shown by results, and were sometimes better, especially in Years 10 and 11. Achievement is good in most subjects and at least satisfactory in all. It is very good in art. A comparison of the 2001 GCSE results with the results of the same pupils in the National Curriculum assessments at the end of Year 9 indicates that most pupils achieved as they should. Both boys and girls achieve well and pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Progress towards meeting the school's targets, including the very challenging target of 60 per cent A* to C grades at GCSE, is good.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Attitudes to learning are enthusiastic and pupils are well motivated. They take pride in their work and in achievements, both their own and those of others. They are keen to improve.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is mature, considerate and courteous. Pupils talk confidently and politely to visitors. They respect the views of others and respond well to the school's high expectations.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are of high quality. Pupils willingly undertake a range of responsibilities and are committed members of the school community.
Attendance	Average. The decline in attendance has stopped, but it needs to return to its previous level of above average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Year 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Very 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, and in the Sixth Form it is very good taken over all the courses inspected and sampled. In the 155 lessons seen, the majority of teaching was good or better and in only a few lessons (four) was it less than satisfactory. Examples of excellence (seven) were seen both in the main school and the Sixth Form. Teaching is good in all subjects including mathematics and science, and very good in English and art. Pupils' learning is also good, with a productive pace of working, good concentration and gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. Support for literacy is very effective, and sufficient use is made of information and communication technology to support learning, although this could be better in some subjects. Numeracy skills are not promoted well enough in subjects other than mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented make good progress. In the Sixth Form learning is very good, because teachers have a good command of their subjects. Students have sufficient competence in key skills to support their course requirements, and are competent learners at this level of study.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is of good quality and provides a broad range of options in Years 10 and 11 and in the Sixth Form: these meet pupils' needs and aspirations, and include an imaginative work-related option. The curriculum is planned to be inclusive. A very good range of extra-curricular activities complements the curriculum. Statutory requirements are not met in respect of the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11 and a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. The provision is well planned and managed and enables pupils to make good progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection. Support for moral and cultural development is good. Provision for social development is very strong, and enables pupils to grow and learn as part of a cohesive community.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Educational support and guidance has clear focus on the whole child as a learner. The monitoring of academic performance and personal development is good.

The school works well with parents and has their support. They are satisfied with what the school provides and are aware of recent improvement. The information they receive is of very good quality.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership of the headteacher and senior management team is very good, and has enabled significant changes to be made, which have successfully raised standards. Planning for change has been wide-ranging, imaginative and skilfully carried through. There is both the commitment and the capacity to bring about further improvement.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is highly effective. Governors are closely involved with the school, know it very well and are instrumental in supporting and initiating change.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Processes for regular monitoring are now in place, and increasingly well-directed use is being made of all kinds of data. Evaluation now needs refining to help bring about still further improvement. Heads of department are effective in monitoring the work in their subject areas.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Financial management is secure and the principles of best value are applied well. Although past staffing shortages have had an impact on standards in some subjects, this has been very well managed by the school, so that the effect is minimised. There are sufficient resources to support learning, including recent improvements in information and communication technology. Accommodation is satisfactory overall, although there are inadequacies in art and physical education. The library gives strong support to learning.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The high expectations the school has of pupils.• The approachability of the school.• The progress children make.• The quality of leadership and management.• The fostering of personal growth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homework.• Information about progress.• Teaching in areas affected by difficulties in staff recruitment, especially mathematics.

Inspection evidence fully supports the parents' positive views. It also supports the concern about teaching in mathematics. However, the school has done all it can to minimise the impact on pupils, and the situation is stabilising. Information about progress is of good quality and regularly shared with parents through progress reports. The quality of homework is good, and it is regularly set and marked, promoting independent learning at home. There is support through a homework club for those who need it.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The Sixth Form of this 13-18 mixed secondary school has 166 students. A wide area is served, but the majority of students move from the school's Year 11 for their Post 16 education. There is a gender imbalance, with three girls to every four boys. There are clear criteria for entry but these are applied flexibly to reflect the combination of courses students wish to follow. A wide range of subjects is offered leading to GCE Advanced Level as well as AVCE Business. Learning opportunities are also provided through a range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities. In many courses, key skills are taught. The standards reached in Post 16 examinations are well above average.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a developing and cost effective Sixth Form where standards in external examinations are well above average, achievement is good and students' learning needs are met. All of the students benefit from very good quality teaching and learning and, as a result, they make good progress. Students have very positive attitudes to school and to their work and good systems are used to monitor and support progress in their studies and personal growth. The school has a clear educational vision and direction for the Sixth Form, the day-to-day management of which is satisfactory.

STRENGTHS

- Standards in external examinations are well above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning are very good: students benefit from the high expectations teachers have of them.
- Students have very positive attitudes to school and their work, and high quality relationships with staff.
- Sixth Form teachers benefit from high quality continuous professional development opportunities to support them in their work.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- The successful implementation of strategies to achieve the objectives of the school's vision for the future development and growth of the Sixth Form.
- The establishment of careers education and guidance as an integral part of the programme for all Sixth Form students.
- Providing a sense of identity and purpose for students' study and social accommodation, which is currently inadequate in this respect.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. GCE A Level results are above average: progress and achievement of students are good. Teaching and learning are very good; leadership is strong.
Physics	Satisfactory. GCE A Level results are below average: teaching and learning are good; students' progress and achievement are satisfactory. Day-to-day management is good, but leadership is unsatisfactory.
Business Studies	Good. Results are about average. Teaching and learning are good as are students' progress and achievement. There is good leadership and management.
ICT	Very good. Results are above average. Students are well taught: their progress and achievement are good. Subject leadership and management are very good.
Art and Design	Very good. GCE A Level results are well above average. Teaching, progress and achievement are very good. Leadership and management are excellent.
Geography	Good. GCE A Level results are above average. Teaching, progress and achievement are good as is the quality of leadership and management.
History	Good. Results at GCE A Level are above average. Teaching, progress and achievement are good. The subject is effectively led and managed.
English	Good. Results at GCE A Level are about average, but were below that in 2001. Progress and achievement are good. The subject is well led and managed.
French	Satisfactory. GCE A Level results are above average. Teaching is good and progress and achievement are satisfactory. Leadership and management are good.

Other work sampled across the Sixth Form included design and technology and physical education where teaching was satisfactory; biology, chemistry, music and German where teaching was good and food technology and drama where teaching was very good. In all lessons students made appropriate progress.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Systems for individual monitoring and guidance are good within subjects and are supported by clear targets that are regularly reviewed by subject and form tutors. Development of the progress review system would further assist students and the school in tracking progress in academic studies and personal development.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Sixth Form	The strategic vision of the future direction and development of the Sixth Form is well articulated by the governing body and senior managers. Progress towards its achievement is slow. Day-to-day management of the Sixth Form is satisfactory. However, standards remain high and teaching is very good. The entitlement to basic careers education and guidance is not clearly acknowledged as an integral part of Sixth Form provision for all students.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the Sixth Form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good information about courses. • Teachers' accessibility to help students. • Good teaching and help to settle in. • Sixth Form is an enjoyable experience. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for careers advice before entry. • Advice about future careers. • Advice about progress. • Listening to Sixth Form concerns.

Inspection evidence supports students' positive views about the Sixth Form. However, the evidence also shows that careers advice, before entry as well as during Sixth Form courses, needs to be part of the entitlement so that all students can make appropriate plans and decisions. The inspection evidence shows that students find progress reviews useful but that other systems would help the school and students track progress both in their studies and personal development. It is clear that students have a number of forums for expressing views. Some views, about careers, the role of students in leadership positions and the identity of the common and study rooms, need to be discussed with students.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. This is a school which has suffered declining standards particularly at age 16 in recent years. This trend has now been reversed and standards are improving throughout the school. Pupils are achieving good standards once again, and the capacity exists to improve this still further. Standards in the Sixth Form are high and have shown steady improvement.

2. Pupils enter the school at Year 9, and results from Key Stage 2 tests are therefore not a reliable indicator of attainment on entry. Information from partner middle schools, from whom the majority of pupils come, as well as Cognitive Ability Test (CAT) scores, show that the intake is fully comprehensive, slightly skewed towards higher attaining pupils. Attainment on entry is above the national average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, but closer to national expectations in foundation subjects.

3. At age 14, pupils are reaching above average standards. For the last three years, average points score taken across the core subjects has been above average and it has been rising at a rate faster than the national trend. There was particular improvement in science and mathematics in 2001, and average points score overall was well above average. Results in English are not as strong, and have been in line with the average, although the percentage of pupils reaching higher levels was above average in 2001. In other subjects of the curriculum, results are in line with, or above, expectations, except in physical education (PE) where they are below. Compared to similar schools performance is above average. Both boys and girls perform better than pupils of a similar age nationally.

4. Standards of work seen in classrooms and during work scrutiny support the picture given by results. In all the core subjects, as well as in art and music, standards seen are above average. Standards in mathematics are not quite as high as last year's results would suggest, due to staff turbulence, but they are still above average. Standards of work seen are at least in line with expectations in all subject areas.

5. Pupils have just one year in the school before they undertake National Curriculum end of Key Stage 3 tests. This means that they need to settle quickly and make good progress in Year 9 in order to achieve good results. The effective links with middle schools, and the good quality teaching in Year 9, ensure that this does happen. Progress is at least satisfactory in all subjects. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9 achievement is good in English, geography, music, PE and religious education (RE) and very good in science and art. In English, achievement has been improved by the introduction of setting on the basis of prior attainment from last September, as well as by targetted literacy work.

6. At age 16, pupils are maintaining above average standards. In 2001 the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades was above average. This was an improvement on the previous two years. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to G grades and at least one GCSE pass has also improved and both these measures are now in line with the average. The average points score has also improved following a decline, and in 2001 it was above average. The trend in average points score over the past five years has been below the national trend, but this masks a decline between 1997 and 1999 followed by recovery in 2001. The standards reached by girls are above average, and those reached by boys are well above average. Pupils from ethnic minorities achieve as well as their peers. Achievement is in line with that of similar schools.

7. Standards in work seen in Years 10 and 11 are consistent with the external examination results. This indicates that the improvements in results last year are likely to be sustained. In all subjects, standards of work seen were at least in line with expectations: in all the three core subjects and the majority of the foundation subjects standards were above average. Standards of work seen in art were well above average.

8. As in Year 9, progress in Years 10 and 11 is good. A comparison of the 2001 GCSE results with the results of the same pupils in the National Curriculum assessments at the end of Year 9 indicates that most pupils achieved as they should. Achievement is good in English, information and communication technology (ICT), modern foreign languages (MFL), music, PE and business education, very good in art and geography and satisfactory in the remaining subjects. The difficulties in recruiting specialist teachers have affected achievement in mathematics and history. Standards in design and technology (DT) are improving and achievement is satisfactory overall, but there is too much disparity between different areas of the department's work.

9. The majority of pupils join the school in Year 9 with good levels of attainment in English. They speak confidently, using a wide range of vocabulary, and are comfortable with the language structures of formal English. They listen well in class, both to the teachers and, in group work, to each other. Most are fluent readers, with enough skill to cope well with the demands of their studies. Attainment in writing is more varied: presentation of written work is neat and careful, but accuracy in the use of spelling, punctuation and grammar, while still safely reaching expectations for age, is weaker. A substantial minority of pupils whose level of attainment was well below national averages in the tests for eleven-year-olds continue to have severe difficulties in reading and writing. These pupils benefit greatly from the school's intensive special needs support.

10. Pupils make progress in all these aspects of English as they follow their courses in other subjects. They benefit from the emphasis placed by all teachers on acquisition of subject vocabulary, and this affects their speaking and their writing. Improvement in written accuracy is slower, but most pupils gain enough knowledge about language to be able, when required, to correct errors in spelling and basic punctuation. By the time they sit their GCSE examinations, most pupils are able to write at length, in an appropriate range of styles and forms, with higher than average levels of accuracy.

11. Pupils use numeracy effectively in other curriculum subjects but standards could be even higher with greater co-ordination of the work and awareness of key subject staff. The school has appointed a numeracy co-ordinator to start work next term. In science, pupils complete calculations involving forces and chemical compounds accurately. They interpret graphs of respiration and photosynthesis capably. In geography pupils analyse and present population data in a variety of formats to good effect. In DT pupils measure accurately to the nearest millimetre and in food technology they weigh ingredients. In child development pupils calculate the cost of feeding a baby. In graphics they show sound spatial awareness.

12. Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) make good progress, with work mostly well matched to their learning requirements. Effective support, based on detailed knowledge of individual pupils, raises their confidence, self-esteem and achievement. Aided by computer-generated learning programmes, which they enjoy and use well, they make significant improvement in literacy and numeracy skills. Many pupils achieve well in GCSE examinations.

13. Gifted and talented pupils make good progress, although more could be done to support them in science. The provision of a third modern foreign language allows able linguists to achieve very well.

Sixth Form

14. Students in the Sixth Form reach well above average standards and their achievement is good. The average points score for those taking two or more GCE Advanced Levels has been well above average for the past three years. When the school's results are compared with those of all maintained schools or with those from all Post 16 providers, they are well above average. Early GCE AS Level results were disappointing but despite this the average points score for students taking A/AS Level examinations was 19.5 for 2001, compared to a national average of 17.5. Students taking GCSE re-sits do well compared to national averages, with almost all achieving higher grade passes.

15. Work seen within the Sixth Form indicated quite a variation in standards between subjects. Overall standards were above average. In art and ICT standards were well above average. In science, mathematics, geography, history and PE standards were above average, in English, DT, music and business education they were in line with the average and in MFL they were below average. Achievement is good in most subjects and at least satisfactory in all subjects. It is very good in art and ICT. Students have sufficient competence in key skills to meet the demands of their courses. The school's own analysis shows that most students achieve results at least as good as those which would be expected from their previous examination performance.

Overall evaluation

16. At the last inspection standards at age 14 and age 16 were judged to be above average. Following that inspection standards and results declined significantly. Standards are now once again above average and pupils are achieving well. The improvement is clearly linked to the significantly improved teaching. There is the capacity to raise standards in the main school still further.

17. Standards in the Sixth Form have improved since the last inspection. The average points score was then judged to be broadly in line with the average and it is now well above. Students achieve well as a result of the very good quality teaching which they receive.

18. The school has deliberately set itself a very challenging target in respect of the proportion of students gaining five or more A* to C grades to arrest the slide in results and ensure an upward trend. Even though that target has not been met, it is a realisable target as part of a determined and successful strategy to raise standards. The target for average points score was exceeded in 2001. Targets are informed by value-added data.

19. In addition, the school sets itself targets relating to, for example, size of intake, GCE A Level points score, and Sixth Form retention rates. Progress towards meeting all of these targets, as well as statutory targets, is good.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

20. Pupils enjoy coming to school and most attend regularly and punctually. Their attitude to their studies is committed. Pupils of all levels of attainment usually work hard and enthusiastically, showing pride in their work by the care they take with presentation. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is usually good, and pupils often remain well motivated even on the rare occasions when they are faced with indifferent teaching.

21. In the vast majority of lessons, pupils' attitudes are well inclined towards learning. They are prepared to make significant effort, to be excited by discovery, to share their work with others in the group or with the class as a whole. Presentation is frequently lively and informative. This is a significant improvement from the last inspection, when attitudes were judged to be unsatisfactory in one fifth of lessons seen in the main school. In lessons observed on this inspection there were only isolated instances of pupils not concentrating or behaving badly. In one third of lessons in the main school, pupils' enthusiasm and involvement were very good or excellent.

22. Relationships throughout the school are of high quality: they are warm and friendly and the atmosphere generally calm and good humoured. Lunchtime and break are well organised and pupils are free to associate and eat together as they please, whether or not they buy their food at school. Pupils are courteous and welcoming to visitors, behaving like young adults, talking confidently, frankly and sensibly about their school. They appreciate the time and effort that the teaching staff devote to helping them.

23. The school trusts its pupils, and they respond accordingly. There is little graffiti around the school, and pupils do not usually abuse privileges such as access to classrooms. They undertake responsibilities such as the mentoring of younger pupils and representation on the school and year councils with enthusiasm and confidence. They show a high level of personal maturity.

24. Because of the good standard of behaviour, the school rarely has to use the sanction of exclusion, and only does so when other avenues are exhausted. Exclusion has been used in connection with racist behaviour as part of the school's strategy to promote inclusion. The number of exclusions is average for a school of this size. There is no significant rising trend as reported at the last inspection.

25. The school has done its best to support some pupils worried by heavy workloads and staff changes in particular subjects. The pupils perceive the school to be treating them fairly and equally. Some bullying does occur, but pupils confirm that they know where to turn for help, and that this is quickly dealt with. They feel a very good degree of confidence in the support on offer.

26. Parents are appreciative of the ethos of the school, and the way the school educates the whole pupil. They comment on the effective use of pupil evaluation sheets, which encourage pupils to assess their own progress. Most think that the school expects pupils to work hard and helps pupils to learn and make progress whatever their ability. They think that behaviour in the school is good, and that the school is helping their child to become mature and responsible.

27. The level of attendance is broadly in line with the national average. This is not as good as at the last inspection when it was above average. Following that inspection, the levels of pupils' attendance, in common with other standards, began to decline. This decline has been arrested, but attendance has still not returned to its previous level. The school needs to continue the strategies it has been employing to raise attendance still further. Unauthorised absence is in line with the average.

Sixth Form

28. The current Sixth Form students have a high commitment to school and to their work. They take great pride in their membership of the school community and the range of opportunities it provides for them to achieve their academic and personal aspirations. The

good quality support provided by the tutors and subject teachers is greatly valued. Students benefit from a highly supportive ethos and take pleasure in contributing to the school's organisation, management and success. Many students show great maturity, are well organised, work hard and are keen to take responsibility, for their learning as well as in the wider life of the school.

29. Students have very positive attitudes to their life and work. Their relationships with peers and their teachers are very good. Many of them are very active participants in lessons and not only answer, but also ask penetrating questions that often result in highly productive discussions to clarify or extend understanding of the topic. They respond well to good quality teaching that challenges and extends their knowledge and understanding but also stimulates their intellectual curiosity. In a small number of lessons, where some students lack confidence in their subject knowledge and are over-reliant on the teacher, or do not take an active role in learning and seek help when they find tasks difficult, less progress is made in learning. In the vast majority of lessons, however, students' attitudes and responses to the teaching and learning are very good.

30. Students generally have clear and realistic aspirations, often clarifying their routes to achieving them with their form tutor. They have good opportunities to reflect on their effectiveness as students as well as their attainment and progress. Most students approach to the progress reviews is positive, the evaluations of their own work and effort are open and honest and often show the level of self-discipline and personal commitment they have to success in their studies. The majority of targets, agreed by students and their teachers, are well defined and helpful in assisting them improve the standard and quality of their work. Some targets, in physics for example, do not always provide the same degree of clarity of support.

31. The process of application for a Sixth Form place is well defined and forms an important part of the induction process. The manner of selecting courses has caused some disappointment through clashes of the options with some of the students' preferred choices. That and the pressure of a new national approach to GCE Advanced Level courses have caused some disaffection among current Year 13 students. Their concern has been further fuelled by the disparity in grades which they gained in the first attempt and then subsequent re-sit examinations of their Year 12 GCE AS Level courses. Although grades improved on re-sitting, students feel uncertain about how they are progressing relative to the standards required. Despite these difficulties, they do remain positive about their future success.

32. The induction of new Sixth Form students offers clear advice about the levels of commitment and organisational skill they will need to be successful, as well as informing them about the support and guidance available to them. In these respects, induction provides a framework within which students can generally operate effectively. The development of subject-specific organisational and personal study skills is not, however, routinely part of all course provision and needs further attention. Many students have good study habits, are well organised and generally are effective as learners. However, not all feel that they have access to well-informed careers advice, before as well as during their Sixth Form courses, although they are well aware of the optional provision made for careers education and the excellent range of university prospectuses and other careers literature and ICT based programmes. Students value the good guidance and support for university applications that is provided by their tutors.

33. Sixth Form students make a significant contribution to the school's life, not just as role models but as mentors for Year 9, undertaking community service within and beyond the school, and as senior pupils in leadership roles as head students and school leaders/prefects. Many take an active part in the school's extra-curricular programme including involvement in music, drama, sport, exchanges and visits overseas as well as in charity work.

34. Many students make positive suggestions about how things can be improved, for themselves and other members of the school community through the year and school councils. Within the Sixth Form, they are concerned that, on occasions, they are not consulted about things that directly affect their life, such as study facilities or the role of school leaders. They are concerned that this year too much change has been undertaken too quickly and without sufficient thought and consultation. However, the vast majority of students in Years 12 and 13 are pleased to be in the Sixth Form. Their overall level of attendance is satisfactory.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

35. The quality of teaching and learning is good, and in the Sixth Form it is very good. There has been a very significant improvement in the teaching profile since the last inspection, when teaching was judged unsatisfactory in one in six lessons.

36. In the 155 lessons seen, four-fifths of the teaching observed was good or better and nearly one-third was very good or excellent. Examples of excellence (seven lessons) were seen in both the main school and the Sixth Form. The proportion of very good and excellent teaching is significantly higher than reported at the last inspection. This is a strong teaching profile, achieved despite quite a high turnover of teaching staff, and is evidence of the impact of the excellent procedures for induction and staff development operating within the school.

37. Teaching in Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11 is of equally good quality, with over two-thirds of the teaching seen at each key stage being good or better. There is a slightly higher proportion of very good or excellent teaching in Years 10 and 11. A small amount of unsatisfactory and poor teaching was observed, comprising four lessons in total, across Years 9 to 13. Teaching is good in all subjects in the main school except English and art, where it is very good, and mathematics where it is satisfactory. The teaching profile in mathematics has been affected by the relatively high proportion of lessons taught by temporary staff. In English a substantial proportion of the teaching was very good or excellent.

38. Strengths of the teaching are teachers' very good subject knowledge and their high expectations of pupils. Subject knowledge is very good in English, mathematics, science, art, MFL and music. In all other subjects, it is good.

39. These strengths were exemplified in some of the excellent teaching seen. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson on using textual evidence, a middle-attaining group was enabled to make very good progress in understanding because of the teacher's high-quality planning and challenging objectives, which made high-level demands on pupils. Again, in another English lesson, Year 10 pupils benefited from clear aims and a focus to the lesson, which was shared with them. Here also, expectations were very high, and the feedback to pupils, through the meticulous assessment of work, was good. This allowed pupils to understand what they were trying to achieve and become highly active participants in the learning.

40. In other examples of excellent teaching, in drama and in science, the teachers' subject knowledge was used to inspire and challenge pupils, who responded with high levels of involvement and achievement. In a Year 10 drama lesson on developing the role of the soldier in the trenches, the teacher's excellent knowledge and understanding, and the ability to transmit her own empathy to pupils enabled them to develop and sustain the characters they were creating. Similarly, in a Year 10 science lesson on photosynthesis, the depth of subject knowledge allowed the teacher to set very good targets and engage constantly in high-level discussion and questioning, which excited pupils and made them think.

41. Teachers manage pupils well and make sure that learning is the purpose of the lesson. Pupils make good progress and have a clear understanding that they are there to learn and achieve. They acquire knowledge, skills and understanding at a good rate, and work productively and with interest. The knowledge which pupils have of their own learning is good overall, but is not uniformly well supported across all subject areas. In some subjects, notably art and English, the use of on-going assessment is a strength of the department's work, but in other subjects this element of teaching, whilst satisfactory, is not a strength. In general, pupils are aware of how well they are doing in their subjects through the assessment and marking of their work.

42. A small amount of the teaching seen was less than satisfactory. In two instances, one in history and one in science, there was insufficient depth of content to the lesson to enable pupils to gain knowledge and understanding of, in one case, the causes of the First World War and, in the other, the solar system. In a mathematics lesson the work set was insufficiently challenging, and resources used had not been well organised before the lesson started.

43. The teaching of basic skills is good. There is better support for the development of literacy than there is for numeracy. Pupils benefit from the support given within all subject areas to the acquisition of correct technical vocabulary. This is evident in both their speaking and their writing. Whilst pupils do use apply numeracy competently in subjects other than mathematics, the area lacks co-ordination. The school has appointed a numeracy co-ordinator who is due to take up post shortly.

44. Pupils are taught to use ICT as appropriate to enhance their learning and presentation. They are taught to evaluate their use of ICT, especially the effect their work would have on their intended audience. A group of Year 9 pupils had produced a family tree in German, using word-processing software and importing graphics. In science, Year 10 pupils were seen using the Internet to research optical fibres and to produce an information leaflet using a desktop-publishing program. The art department makes good use of ICT in all years, teaching pupils to manipulate images and to help in a range of design projects. In history, pupils used an interactive website on the Reichstag fire. The use of ICT is sufficient to support pupils' learning, but it could still be improved in a number of subject areas.

45. The quality of teaching in personal, social and health education (PSHE) was satisfactory or good in the three lessons observed. In a Year 11 lesson on drugs awareness, a lively group of pupils were asked to evaluate information critically to prepare a presentation for the class. They already had quite a good knowledge of various drugs, their legal status and likely effects, but the teacher extended their knowledge by accurately targetted questions and further examples, which deepened pupils' experience. Good quality discussion was promoted by the approach taken, which treated pupils as responsible young people. In another Year 11 lesson on budgeting, although teaching was satisfactory, learning was marred by pupils' negative attitudes.

46. The co-ordinator for SEN works with subject teachers very effectively, ensuring that the

special needs of pupils are known and acknowledged in both lesson planning and teaching. In most subjects, work is well matched to pupils' learning requirements. Support staff work constructively with teachers enabling help to be targeted and focused on pupils with greatest need. Teachers and support staff have purposeful and constructive relationships with pupils, thus promoting pupils' confidence and interest in learning. Targets in pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) are well designed to assist in measuring their progress.

47. Gifted and talented pupils also make good progress, except in science where more needs to be done to support their learning in Years 10 and 11.

Sixth Form

48. In the Sixth Form teaching and learning is of very good quality. Nearly all the teaching was good or better, and two fifths of the teaching was very good or excellent. There were three examples of excellent teaching, and one lesson where teaching was poor. In some subjects, mathematics and ICT for example, teaching is better in the Sixth Form than in the main school.

49. Characteristics of the excellent teaching, which was seen in English, chemistry and physics, was the rigour of the exposition based on teachers' command of the subject, followed up by continuing challenge during individual or group work, and the fostering of students' independence in learning.

50. In a Year 12 lesson on Philip Larkin's poetry, the support given to students on an individual basis enabled them to undertake their own analysis of the text: they gained a very good understanding of the voice within the poems and were able to present this effectively to the class. In a Year 12 chemistry lesson, a short but intensive introduction challenged pupils at a high level, and this rigorous questioning continued into the group work and plenary session. In a Year 12 physics lesson there was excellent development of students' learning skills when they had to design experiments themselves. In the very small amount of poor teaching seen (one lesson), which was also in physics, students learned very little when they were given back a test on forces and motion in which they had done badly. Their need to understand the principles underlying the questions was not met, and so they would not be likely to improve their performance in the future.

51. Other strengths of Sixth Form teaching are high-quality planning, very high expectations and relationships with students on which very good learning can be built. Students receive good quality feedback from subject teachers in most courses. This helps them to improve their work, and is especially important as the arrangements for monitoring through Sixth Form tutors are rather informal. The use of course-work assignments helps to develop independent learning skills. As a result of this high-quality teaching, students expend significant effort; they are extremely well motivated and work productively. Key skills are taught through courses, and students have sufficient competence to meet the requirements of the courses they are following.

52. The quality of teaching in the general studies course was good or very good in the four lessons observed. Teachers use their own discretion in how they cover the topics. All the teaching seen included clear evaluation of the work undertaken, including in some instances formal assessment of written work. In a Year 13 lesson, ICT was used well to make presentations to the class. In all the lessons seen, students were well motivated, although in some classes attendance is low on occasions.

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

53. The curriculum is of good quality, although it does not meet statutory requirements in all respects. It is enriched by very good extra-curricular provision. The curriculum is planned to be fully inclusive. For example, pupils who do extra English instead of French are offered German instead so that they receive their full entitlement, pupils with SEN have full access to the curriculum, there is good provision for gifted and talented pupils, and for those taking the work-related option.

54. A good range of learning opportunities is offered in Year 9 and the school makes good use of liaison with the middle schools to ensure continuity in learning for pupils. For example, the literacy working group recently ran a training day which included staff from partner schools. In MFL, staff work within the partner schools to assess levels of oral competence prior to pupils' arrival. In ICT an induction course is used to consolidate learning and evaluate the level of attainment of pupils, and Year 12 ICT students help teach the course.

55. The range of courses in Years 10 and 11 is good. A broad range of GCSE courses is offered including drama and ICT. The vast majority of pupils are able to study the options they have chosen. Modern foreign languages offer Italian to GCSE as a third language, and accelerated courses in other languages to AS Level for a small number of pupils. In DT the curriculum has in the recent past been restrictive with all pupils having to study resistant materials, but the department is now offering a more open choice of options for Year 10 which includes food technology, textiles, resistant materials, graphics and systems and control.

56. A PSHE course is timetabled for all year groups. This course includes appropriate sex education and drugs education. A strong programme of work-related careers education is in place with emphasis on acquiring skills used in the work place and good evaluation takes place of the learning after an extended, work-experience placement. Careers advice is given freely by staff, but is not currently well co-ordinated.

57. A well-planned policy is in place to cater for gifted and talented pupils. Considerable thought has been given to identifying these pupils using national assessments, Cognitive Ability Tests, teachers' reports, and personal knowledge of the pupils. The effective management of these pupils promotes a whole school approach and strategies have been identified to help teachers provide extended and accelerated work.

58. For some time, the school has worked actively on promoting awareness of literacy across the curriculum. It has a well established literacy programme, set up and led by the current head of English in 1998 as a response to the likely establishment of a national literacy strategy in the secondary phase. This work has been continued by the new literacy co-ordinator who joined the school in September. A cross-curricular literacy working group, with a budget, has recently planned and run a training day for all staff. All departments have taken responsibility for teaching the specific language requirements of their own subject, and common practices are in place, such as the display of subject vocabulary and use of the agreed marking correction code. The school librarian gives very good support for reading and provides well for specific groups, such as weak readers, pupils from minority ethnic groups and boys. A particularly imaginative and productive initiative by the school is the schedule for lesson observation with a literacy focus, which is being undertaken by the literacy co-ordinator and the literacy link governor.

59. Pupils with SEN are well provided for in a caring, supportive, and challenging environment. All pupils have full access to the curriculum. In place of studying one of the two MFL, some pupils have the option to take a work related learning course as a means of improving and broadening their vocational skills. This has proved to be successful and has interested and motivated pupils.

60. The school makes good provision for a wide range of SEN. At present it cannot admit non-ambulant pupils because of the nature of the school buildings, although modifications have been made in the areas of science, child development and in the minibus. Provision for pupils with SEN has continued to develop and good improvement has been made since the last inspection. There has been particular improvement in the quality and use of IEPs, the comprehensive training for all staff and the increase in expertise of subject teachers in matching tasks and activities to the needs of pupils. However this is still not consistent in all subjects and lessons: closer and more detailed monitoring would identify these inconsistencies.

61. Very good extra-curricular activities are provided in many subjects. Most subjects offer help and guidance for their pupils at breaks, lunchtimes and after school. Drama is a strength of the school; a full production of West Side Story was staged the week before the inspection. Interest in the choir and orchestra is growing and the number of boys involved is increasing. The PE department participates in competitive fixtures as well as offering a good range of leisure activities including badminton, netball, football, hockey, trampolining, swimming and athletics. Pupils engage in fieldwork day and residential visits in geography, and visits are organised to art galleries, museums and theatres. There is also a strong Young Enterprise group, and the opportunity to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. The range of foreign exchange visits to Canada, Germany and France is impressive, and a World Challenge trip is scheduled to visit Tanzania in 2003. This extensive range of activities helps to develop a positive ethos in the school and promotes self-esteem and independence in the students.

62. There are good links with the local community and events such as a carol service are hosted by the school. Links with local businesses mean that a good range of work placements can be provided.

63. Provision for the spiritual development of pupils is satisfactory. Significant efforts have been made to address the key issue highlighted in the previous report concerning the lack of provision for spirituality and the need for a fuller programme of religious education. The latter provision has now been extended and meets statutory requirements in Year 9 and the Sixth Form, but not in Years 10 and 11.

64. There is a full programme of year assemblies and these are monitored closely by the senior management team. On some occasions, assemblies provide opportunities for reflection on wider issues, as was seen in a very effective assembly which encouraged pupils to make the most of their opportunities in life through an entertaining and thoughtful account of the headteacher's own youthful experiences. Other assemblies lack a reflective dimension and form tutor times are mainly used for social and administrative purposes. As a result, the school still fails to comply with the requirements for a daily act of collective worship.

65. There are, however, other opportunities for spiritual growth within the school. The Christian Alpha group meets regularly and a carol service is organised annually. In addition, the school has hosted a whole town schools' RE festival. Within the curriculum, the spiritual

development of pupils and students is fostered particularly well in religious education, where spiritual issues and those of personal fulfilment are dealt with, especially in Year 9. It is also fostered well in English, with reflections on life in the trenches during World War I, and in art, drama and music.

66. The provision for moral development is good. A strong sense of shared purpose and respect run through the school and this is bolstered by a clear code of conduct, which helps pupils to distinguish right from wrong. An effective system of merits and awards is used to celebrate achievement and prize-giving assemblies and presentation evenings have been introduced to reinforce success. Teachers and Sixth Form students provide very good role models and the latter act as mentors for Year 9 pupils. Many initiatives to promote moral development in the school; for example, the school council engages in fund-raising for charities such as local hospices and the Red Cross. Moral issues such as drug abuse and bullying are dealt with effectively in the PSHE programme. Opportunities for moral development occur in English, drama, art, RE, history, PE and ICT.

67. The provision for social development is very good. An active school council is a very effective channel of communication between staff and students. The head boy and girl are very good ambassadors for the school and take part in meetings of the governing body. Sixth Form students in general are a strength in the school. They act as leaders or prefects, help younger pupils, take part in community service and help to organise extracurricular activities. Links with the local community are very strong through the Rotary and Lions Clubs and pupils and students are involved in organising events for senior citizens. Relationships throughout the school are very good and this helps to provide a safe and harmonious atmosphere for all pupils and students. Opportunities for social development are provided in most subjects, with an emphasis on group work and participation, especially in MFL, drama, music, geography, history, science and PE.

68. Provision for cultural development is good with an array of visits, exchanges and other activities to widen the horizons of all pupils and students. More than thirty students are involved in the Young Enterprise scheme in Year 12, and students have also been involved in World Challenge expeditions to India and Brazil. Cultural awareness is also fostered through many sports clubs, and music and drama activities. In the mainstream curriculum, cultural development is fostered particularly well in MFL, English, art and music. Pupils and students can celebrate the cultural diversity of Britain and that of the wider world, especially in RE, with a strong emphasis on multi-faith issues, and in English art and music. This important area of cultural provision is, however, less well developed in other subject areas.

69. Overall, the school makes good provision for the personal development of all its pupils and students, particularly in the area of social development. Good progress has also been made since the previous inspection in the area of spiritual provision.

Sixth Form

70. The range of courses in the Sixth Form is broad, provides a variety of routes to certification and, generally, meets the needs of those currently in the Sixth Form. The Sixth Form and its provision helps students progress into the next stages of learning and enjoys profitable links with a range of agencies, including the careers service.

71. The curriculum is of good quality and provides a wide range of GCE Advanced-Level courses, Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) Business, GNVQ Intermediate ICT, General Studies and other enrichment activities. In addition the key skills of communication, application of number and ICT are taught through the courses. Entrance

requirements vary according to the combination of courses being selected by individual students. Through tutorial counselling and guidance, every effort is made to ensure that choices are appropriate to meet the learning needs and aspirations of each student.

72. The Sixth Form curriculum provides good routes for progression from Year 11 into Post 16 courses and then into further and higher education, training and employment. This ensures equality of access for all students, their high commitment to learning and to success in their courses, as well as very good rates of retention.

73. Although the range of Post 16 courses is wide, choices are made from a series of option blocks. This has caused concern to a small number of students, as it has meant that they could not have all their first preferred choices. However, the school has changed the system for next year to ensure maximum flexibility of choice for all students. Given the constraints within which the Sixth Form operates, the provision is good, although there is some imbalance in the size of teaching groups. The enrichment courses offer good opportunities for students to broaden their learning experience as well as to take advantage of recreational PE and occasional RE conferences. The curriculum does not provide for careers education and guidance for all, nor meet the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

74. Traditionally, Ashlyns has put a high priority on the personal welfare of its pupils, and this principle has been maintained, although more emphasis is now being put on the monitoring of pupils' academic development to improve their attainment. The school is aiming to produce well-educated students with independence, responsibility, self-esteem and optimism. The student development team oversees the support processes and monitors the progress of pupils in their learning and personal development. Both academic achievement and personal development are incorporated in the progress reviews.

75. The monitoring of pupils' academic performance and personal development are good. Academic performance is carefully monitored within subjects; regular progress reports provide a clear view of how well pupils are doing in relation to their targets and indicate what needs to be done to improve. Pupils appreciate this overview of their progress.

76. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are generally good across the curriculum, but outstanding in art, very good in English, good in mathematics and unsatisfactory in science. Good use is made of end-of-unit assessments as well as regular marking. The regular feedback to pupils, orally and in writing when marking class and homework assignments, greatly assists them to improve the standard of their work. Work is marked carefully and in most cases includes well-pitched comment about the standard and quality of work. In Years 10 and 11 especially, marking indicates what pupils need to do to improve their work against established target grades.

77. The monitoring of pupils' subject performance is good, although it is outstanding in art, good in English, mathematics, geography, modern languages and PE and unsatisfactory in science. Performance data is well analysed and used by subjects to guide future planning of the curriculum as well as teaching and learning. Generally, assessment data is well used to monitor progress of groups of pupils as well as individuals. The progress review each term offers parents and pupils a benchmark against which future progress in their work,

effort, homework and behaviour can be judged. Any underachievement is carefully monitored and action is taken. Pupils agree targets with their form tutors. Targets are challenging and yet achievable and are regularly reviewed against the progress that pupils are making in all aspects of their work.

78. Both subject teachers and form tutors undertake a monitoring role, the latter being the main point of contact for parents at the academic tutoring sessions. This professional partnership ensures that progress in all aspects of pupils' academic and personal development is rigorously monitored. Pupils in Year 11 may be provided with a mentor as part of the drive to raise standards and enable pupils to reach their potential. This provision is not only for those on the GCSE grade C/D borderline, but others who, with support, could further improve their grade and average points score.

79. Pupils feel well supported and know to whom they can go for help. Educational and personal support and guidance is provided by the form tutors, who stay with their groups as they move up the school whenever possible. Personal development, careers and life skills information is provided by the PSHE curriculum, and in time spent with form tutors. Sixth Form students mentor some pupils in Year 9, and staff give extra support to students in Year 11 as their exams approach. To support pupils who need extra help with their studies, the school runs a homework club in the library after school. A group of lower-attaining pupils are following an imaginative work-related option instead of studying a modern language. They are closely supported and encouraged, with extra input on study and life skills, career research and their technology course work.

80. The co-ordinator for SEN manages the process for the identification and assessment of pupils' needs very effectively. Records are comprehensive and accessible to staff. Pupils' record folders would benefit from a list of contents, and documents need to be filed in a more orderly way so that access is made easier and quicker.

81. The procedures for annual review fully meet statutory requirements. A high percentage of parents or carers attend reviews. They regard the school as approachable and helpful and are appreciative of its encouragement, care and support for pupils with SEN. Pupils with statements of SEN receive their full entitlement to help from well-trained support staff.

82. Arrangements at the time of transfer to the school are well thought out and implemented for pupils with SEN. Information is obtained from previous schools, and pupils and their parents invited to spend time in the special needs department. This assists pupils in settling into the school routines with confidence. They are well provided for, encouraged by staff, and their progress is measured and recorded throughout their time in the school.

83. Although procedures for monitoring attendance are very thorough, some tutor groups still have relatively low levels of attendance. Parents are asked to avoid taking holidays in term time, but this request is not always heeded. Follow-up of absence is swift and good contact is maintained with the education welfare officer. Lunchtime and break time are carefully supervised. Procedures for promoting good behaviour and the elimination of bullying and oppressive behaviour work well, as shown by the standards of behaviour seen at the school. The student development team monitors behaviour and involves parents as necessary. The school has an anti-racist policy in place and has used sanctions against those few pupils who indulge in racist behaviour.

84. The school takes its responsibility for the health and safety of its staff and pupils seriously. The buildings are generally safe but parts are not clean. Fire drills are carried out, though no log was available to check how often. Risk assessments and the maintenance of safety equipment are carried out annually by the local authority, and an asbestos survey has

been done. Disabled access is not yet available to all areas of the school. Trips such as those for the Year 9 activities week are carefully assessed for educational value and safety considerations. Arrangements for first aid and looking after sick pupils are good.

85. Child protection systems are in place and work well. The deputy headteacher is the designated person, with two additional trained members of staff who can act in her absence. Members of staff know to whom they need to go to report such issues, and this is part of their induction. The process usually works swiftly enough when it is needed, and the school is adequately supported by local authority procedures and staff.

Sixth Form

Assessment

86. Students' work is regularly assessed within subjects and monitoring is undertaken both by the subject teacher and form tutor or Post 16 co-ordinator. This process ensures that targets are regularly reviewed and, where support is needed, it is provided. A variety of methods are used to assess work: the marking of regular assignments, tests of knowledge, understanding and skills, projects or extended assignments or fieldwork all contribute to the body of work evaluated in the progress review.

87. There is, however, no overall system in place to provide consistency to the assessment of students' work. Not all subjects use examination objectives or have agreed standards against which they assess and grade work. This is certainly the case in, for example, physics. However, students feel that the assessment and detailed marking of their work helps them to judge their effectiveness and use the teachers' comments to provide an indication of what needs to be improved in their next assignment. The identification of students' learning needs is well done as part of the transition and induction arrangements as students move from Year 11 into the Sixth Form.

Advice, support and guidance

88. The application process and induction day are effective. They provide students with a clear set of expectations about the courses they will undertake, the expectations teachers have of them and the study and organisational skills they will need to be successful. Their points of contact, for help, support and guidance are their form tutors and subject teachers. Both tutors and teachers give generously of their time and provide students with sound and helpful guidance. Many students find the transition from GCSE to GCE AS Level work demanding. Subject teachers readily provide, through their approaches to teaching and learning, very effective links that help students gain in confidence in their new courses.

89. Tutorial work, that includes a range of opportunities for tutors to offer support, guidance and advice, also contributes to the monitoring of students' progress in their subjects and personal development. However, the time is limited and, on many occasions, tutors find other time to counsel members of their group about individual areas of concern. Careers advice from tutors is very sound. A careers' adviser is in school at appointed times in the week. However, students have to seek out the adviser, and many find it difficult in

both Years 12 and 13 to fit an interview into their busy and already pressurised timetable. There is an extensive range of information about further and higher education and all students, thinking of applying for higher education courses are encouraged to visit campus, city and new universities. The careers library is extensive and caters well for the needs of Sixth Form students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

90. The school has very effective links with parents, as shown by the largely positive responses in their questionnaires. Parents returning the questionnaire identified a number of strengths, particularly the approachability of staff, the quality of leadership and the high expectations the school has of its pupils. These strengths were largely reinforced by comments at the well-attended parents' meeting.

91. The quality of information provided for parents is very good. Weekly Agenda newsletters keep parents and pupils informed of what is going on at school. Annual written reports and frequent progress reports are detailed, and with regular parents' evenings provide a good picture of pupils' progress. Parents are invited to information evenings and to the Year 9 and Sixth Form option choice evenings. Pupil diaries have space for weekly parental comment, and teachers are responsive to comments made. Where there is cause for concern, whether in work or behaviour, parents will be involved via the student development team.

92. Plentiful information is provided at intake and points of transition. The prospectus is informative and accessible. However, parents are not told that they can withdraw their children from lessons covering sex education or RE, or from the daily act of collective worship. The governors' annual report gives good information about the school's achievements. The governing body is well supported by current and former parents acting as governors.

93. The approachability of the school has improved, and the head teacher's weekly "surgery" is much appreciated. Parents feel that their opinion will be listened to, and that queries will be dealt with promptly by the school. They are confident that the school would approach them if their child had a problem.

94. Parents are encouraged to join the parents' association, which organises fund raising and social events, and also to help in school if they can. They help in the library and with hearing pupils read, and their contribution is much appreciated.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

95. The headteacher and senior management team, in partnership with the governing body, provide the school with very good leadership. This has enabled improvement since the last inspection to be well directed and highly effective. The changes necessary to halt a decline in performance and reverse the trend in results have been skilfully managed, and the results are now being seen in improving standards.

96. The headteacher has given strong leadership during a time of considerable change and upheaval. He has maintained an unwavering commitment to changing the climate of the school from a focus on care to one of academic rigour and achievement, whilst keeping hold of the need to work with and educate the whole child. The clear direction for the work of the school in raising achievement is expressed through the well-formulated school development plan. The planning incorporates suitable numerical targets against which progress can be evaluated. The headteacher has set the agenda of improving teaching and learning, and this is fully shared by the senior management team. The roles and responsibilities within the team have been thoughtfully matched to individuals, whilst keeping a clear focus on whole school priorities. The effect has been to promote particular objectives, such as the better use of data and a strong system of continuing professional development, which will support the overall objective of raising achievement. There has been very strong commitment from the team to school improvement.

97. The governing body is highly effective. Governors are closely involved in the life of the school, visiting classrooms, attending departmental meetings and spending a typical day with a group of pupils. Governors are linked with individual departments, and evaluation of the contact with the link governor forms part of departmental review. The work of committees is effective and well informed, and governors know very well the strengths and weaknesses of the school. They play a significant role in shaping the direction of the school, in the decision to appoint a finance manager for example. They are also active in reviewing the use of resources, and in monitoring financial expenditure. The recent introduction of monthly management accounts is an improvement in this area, and allows governors access to better quality management information in order to fulfil their role. The governing body fulfils its wide-ranging statutory requirements well, with the exception of those relating to RE in Years 10 and 11, and providing an act of collective worship daily for all pupils. The innovative arrangement of having a joint chairman is an imaginative way to share the burdens placed on governors, and ensure continuity for the school by allowing governors who might otherwise leave to continue in role. The way in which the role will be shared has been carefully thought through and works well.

98. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance is good, and there has been significant progress on the key issues raised at the last inspection. Monitoring of the work of departments is now well established, and includes self-review. The process of review with a line manager is regularly carried out and is useful. Monitoring is stronger than evaluation. In order to improve the performance of departments still further the evaluation element of this process needs to be made sharper and more critically focused on raising standards. Otherwise, there is danger that review affirms priorities already set by heads of departments rather than critically appraising them.

99. Effective action has been taken both by the senior management team and within departments to raise standards, by re-structuring the design technology department, for example. This impetus needs to be carried further through rigorous critical thinking about actions which are taken and the effect which they have on learning in order for improvement to be sustained. Heads of department provide good leadership within their subject areas,

and have been highly instrumental in raising standards. The co-ordinator for SEN provides very good leadership to the department, which is very well organised and managed. She provides helpful and informative training sessions for subject teachers and support staff and her expertise is highly valued by the school.

100. The monitoring of teaching has wisely been kept separate from observations based on performance management, and has as its focus the improvement of teaching and learning. A programme of focused observations is being introduced, and this needs to be developed further within departments. Data is increasingly being used to inform departmental review and to set whole school, departmental and individual pupil targets. It is well used in the main school, and is beginning to inform monitoring within the Sixth Form.

101. Arrangements for the professional development of staff, including the induction of new staff, are outstandingly good. Training is well conceived, informed by the needs of its recipients, and well organised. The tracking of the impact of training through into classroom teaching is a model of good practice. All staff, including administrative staff, are involved in training. Performance management has been introduced effectively.

102. Planning for the strategic use of resources is good. The appointment of a finance manager has meant that more detailed financial information is being made available with schedules which provide additional information within each budget heading. Financial systems are becoming more sophisticated. The financial problems experienced after the last inspection, including the setting of a deficit budget mentioned in the last report, have been brought under control and the most recent audit reported favourably. Planning for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the building, which is a major burden on finances, has been sensible. It has included an audit of the capacity and condition of the premises. There has been good planning and management of the re-furbishment of the science and food technology areas. Forward planning is sufficient to allow governors and the senior management team to take a view of the likely future of the school. Outline planning is in place for the next two years. The analysis of the state of the organisation forms a part of planning for the future.

103. The match of teaching and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory. The school is no longer overstaffed for the number of pupils. The school has experienced significant problems in the area of staffing in the past two years and has had to rely on supply or temporary staff in a number of subject areas, including mathematics in which staffing is currently unsatisfactory. Despite the very best efforts of the school to manage the situation, this has had an impact on standards in mathematics, and to a lesser extent, other subject areas. The senior management team and heads of department have ensured that the effect has been as small as possible. There are strengths in staffing in a number of areas including English, science, art and music: in PE staffing is good because teachers' varied specialist subjects mean that pupils benefit from a range of expertise. The school has recently improved its provision of support staff by increasing the allocation of time for administration, reprographics and examinations. Support staff hours are now about average for a school of this size.

104. The quality of accommodation is satisfactory overall; the school occupies a spacious and attractive site and has some fairly unusual features such as its own swimming pool, and chapel. Accommodation is satisfactory in the majority of departmental areas; it is good in science where the school has recently refitted nine laboratories, and in RE where the high quality display, and the use of artefacts enhance the classroom. In DT, although accommodation is satisfactory, there are no dedicated areas for electronics, or systems and control, and the small size of the textiles area limits the activities that can be undertaken. Accommodation is unsatisfactory in art, where overcrowded rooms are poorly lit and not

conducive to group discussions or attractive and stimulating display; it is also unsatisfactory in PE, with a very poor gymnasium, insufficient indoor space and shabby changing rooms. Despite the fact that the school has a rolling programme of maintenance, repair and development and now employs its' own "in-house" painter and decorator, many areas are still either shabby or dingy and not very clean. The school recognises this and has made enhancing the learning environment one of its major priorities for development.

105. Resources are satisfactory overall; in many subjects, such as mathematics and music, they are good; in the latter there is a good sound library and instrument stock and very good ICT resources. There are six rooms with access to ICT including a room for science and the library. Although the number of computers is below average, access is good. In MFL resources are unsatisfactory as, at present, not every pupil has a textbook. In DT resources are unsatisfactory, as there is a shortage of hand tools, some outdated and non-operational machinery, and limited access to computers. Resources for pupils with SEN are identified and targeted effectively. The SEN budget is managed well providing for good support and an appropriate range of materials.

106. The school library is of very good quality. It is staffed by a qualified librarian who has head of department status in the school; there is also a part time general assistant during term time. The book stock greatly exceeds the recommended provision for a school of this size and, although some of the stock is out of date, the ratio of books to pupils is still very good. The librarian has added a section for music CDs and this is well used in conjunction with the music department. She consults with teaching staff and with pupils when making up her stock order, and has control of a budget, which she uses very well. Provision of ICT adjacent to the library is good. Overall, the space is at least adequate for the current school population, but it may need to expand as numbers grow. The library makes a valuable contribution to the quality of pupils' learning.

107. The SEN department is located in a suite of small rooms, providing a quiet location and space for small group and individual teaching. It is some distance from the main area of the school, approached along narrow congested corridors and up a flight of stairs, and this area needs improving so that it is more attractive and welcoming.

108. The principles of best value are applied well. National data are used for comparisons of results and attendance. The local authority's model of predicted performance is used to evaluate results. No comparisons of patterns of expenditure are carried out at present, but all expenditure is monitored with an eye to obtaining best value. There is a good level of challenge and debate within the school about what should be provided and how best to do it.

109. Good attention is paid to cost effective expenditure, employing a decorator rather than relying on a series of small contractors, for example. This is an important factor in a building which requires continual maintenance. Procedures for obtaining competitive tenders are in place and were used, for example in the science re-furbishment. The appointment of a finance manager has allowed better use of the time of the deputy head who can now spend more time on pupil-related matters. Governors provide time and expertise in ensuring contracts are effectively carried out.

110. Parents are consulted through surveys, such as the one on communication. Their feedback has led to changes in the arrangements for parental consultation. The school council allows the pupils to have a voice, and the head boy and head girl have access to the governing body through attending meetings.

111. The school provides a good quality of education for its pupils, who have above average attainment on entry and come from a broadly average social context. It is an effective school achieving good standards in both attainment and achievement. The quality of leadership and management is very good and has enabled the school to make very good improvement since its last inspection. Resources are managed well. Although it has quite high unit costs, the school still gives good value for money.

Sixth Form

Leadership and management

112. The school currently has a clear set of aims and values within which good curriculum provision is made, students are supported and further opportunities to extend learning are offered within the Sixth Form. The governing body and senior management team have a clear vision for the further development of the Sixth Form and some of the priorities in the development plan relate to that. Central to that vision is the establishment of a more robust framework of student entitlement that will include an academically rigorous curriculum, enrichment programme and support for students' progress as learners and individuals. Progress in implementing the development plan priorities is slow. It will take significant intellectual rigour and managerial skill to translate the vision into strategies that can be successfully implemented without compromising the school's aims and values, and maintain standards and quality in the Sixth Form.

113. The school adopts a sensible and coherent approach to the organisation and management of whole school issues. This enables the Post 16 co-ordinator and his assistant to focus on those issues that need their attention. They both receive good support in their work from the headteacher and senior team. A wide range of information and data informs the co-ordinator's work, including that relating to the analysis of external examination results, progress and value-added information and target grades.

114. The day-to-day management of the Sixth Form is satisfactory. A committed team of tutors and the assistant co-ordinator ably support the co-ordinator of Post 16 provision in his work. Together they provide good support for students and, especially for those in Year 13 preparing applications for places in higher education. Morning registration periods are profitable when there is a clear focus, such as monitoring progress in the offers of places in higher education that students receive. On some occasions registration may be followed by a PSHE activity. However, the success of these sessions is highly dependent on the punctuality of students' arrival in school, as some of them travel a considerable distance.

115. The admission and induction of students is well done and the flexible use of the criteria for entry enables the potential needs of a much wider range of learners to be met. As a result, the number of Post 16 students is increasing and students are playing increasingly a more important part in the school and in the wider community.

116. There are good procedures for monitoring students' progress. The school's student development team, of which the Post 16 co-ordinator is a member, monitors the progress of all pupils' and students' progress in their academic work and personal development. They take action where there are concerns and involve parents when appropriate.

117. In the Sixth Form, the regular progress reviews provide an important opportunity for students to evaluate their own work, for teachers to comment and for targets agreed by both to be set. There are, however, no formal procedures between progress reviews to monitor

students' effectiveness in terms of: their effort, attendance at lessons, commitment to and participation in the learning, or punctuality in meeting assignment deadlines. Some monitoring takes place informally but this is dependent on the tutor and the time which is available.

118. The year councils are an effective means of constantly hearing students' opinions and suggestions for changes and improvement. Student opinion is also gathered through tutorial time and quality assurance questionnaires. These are extremely useful channels for the discussion of future changes needed within the Sixth Form.

Resources

119. A good balance is maintained between the staffing costs of the Sixth Form and those of the main school. Within these tight financial constraints good provision is made. As in the main school, the principles of best value are well applied to decisions relating to Sixth Form expenditure. Students contribute views on a range of matters and are consulted about others within year councils and tutorials. Increasingly Sixth Form students are undertaking leadership roles within the school and are contributing to its effectiveness. Standards are very high and teaching is consistently very good. The cost effectiveness of the Sixth Form is good.

120. Resources within Sixth Form courses are generally good, especially in mathematics, science and ICT, but are unsatisfactory in DT. The provision and availability of ICT is good and networked machines across the school, including in the library, are used well. The library provides very good support for students' learning in a range of subjects that effectively use its services. Teachers are generally well qualified for the subjects they teach and excellent professional development opportunities support them in their work. Accommodation is adequate overall; it is good in mathematics, science, history and ICT but unsatisfactory in art and PE. The Sixth Form study area and common room lack identity and do not provide adequate support for students' learning.

HAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

121. The governing body, headteacher and senior management team should:

- Improve standards further, particularly at age 16, by:
 - * providing better support for numeracy across the curriculum;
 - * improving the quality of provision for RE for pupils in Years 10 and 11 and for physics in the Sixth Form;
 - * ensuring that all departments use ICT effectively to support pupils' learning;
 - * improving attendance to its former level;
 - * continuing to ensure that the staffing of all departments is of the highest possible quality.

- Refine monitoring, self-evaluation and evaluation procedures so that:
 - * the impact of developments on pupils' learning is critically appraised, especially within departmental review;
 - * the future development of the Sixth Form is closely monitored and changes judged in relation to their effect on the students' learning experiences.

Sixth Form

- Improve leadership and management of the Sixth Form by:
 - * devising and implementing the strategies required to achieve successful development of the Sixth Form.

- Improve the quality of education in the Sixth Form by:
 - * establishing careers education and guidance as an important part of the core provision for all Sixth Form students;
 - * improving the study and social accommodation provided for the Sixth Form, ensuring that it has a sense of identity and purpose.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 9 - 11	102
	Sixth Form	53
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 9-11

Number	4	22	46	27	2	1	0
Percentage	4	20	47	26	2	1	0

Sixth Form

Number	3	19	29	1	0	1	0
Percentage	6	36	55	2	0	2	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for the Sixth Form here as each lesson represents more than two percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y9–Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	618	166
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	32	0

Special educational needs

	Y9–Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	8	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	118	1

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	24

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	21
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	22

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.5
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.0
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 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	111	80	191

National Curriculum Test/Task Results	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	68	92	93
	Girls	60	69	73
	Total	128	161	166
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	68 (64)	84 (74)	87 (75)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	35 (27)	59 (49)	55 (38)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments	English	Mathematics	Science	
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	73	92	90
	Girls	64	72	70
	Total	137	164	160
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	72 (70)	86 (81)	83 (75)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	35 (35)	61 (50)	53 (38)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	92	86	178

GCSE results	5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G	
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	49	87	90
	Girls	50	76	84
	Total	99	163	174
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	56 (42)	92 (92)	98 (95)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	42.5
	National	39.0

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

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

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form (Year 13)

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations:	Year	Male	Female	Total
		2001	25	30

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	25	30	55
	Average point score per candidate	20.1	19.1	19.5
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18	17.5

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	25	30	55	2	1	3
	Average point score per candidate	19.6	18.7	19.1	6	12	8
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	2
Pakistani	7
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	766
Any other minority ethnic group	6

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	4	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	25	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

Y9 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	47.94
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.35

Education support staff:

Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	279

Deployment of teachers:

Y9 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	71.4
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Average teaching group size:

Y9 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.8
Key Stage 4	22.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2001
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	£
Total income	2,121,300.00
Total expenditure	2,116,400.00
Expenditure per pupil	3049.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	0.00
Balance carried forward to next year	7500.00

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	27
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	35

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out
Number of questionnaires returned

784
217

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	48	9	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	41	49	7	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	23	55	11	2	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	50	21	7	3
The teaching is good.	26	60	10	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	43	20	4	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	62	32	4	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57	37	4	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	37	43	16	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	53	37	4	0	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	41	5	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	21	47	14	3	16

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

ENGLISH

Overall, the quality of provision in English is good.

Strengths:

- Test and examination results are improving: standards are rising.
- Pupils are making good progress.
- Teaching is very good overall and a substantial proportion of it is very good or excellent.
- Management of the department is very good.

Areas for improvement:

- Further improving standards in Year 9.

122. The overall standard of pupils' English when they join the school in year 9 is higher than the national average. Most are confident speakers who are able to express ideas and opinions fluently, using an appropriate range of language. The majority also read competently, with enjoyment and, as a result, their writing is lively and engaging. However, a significant proportion of pupils have not reached the levels expected for their age, and their reading ability makes it very difficult for them to cope well with the courses they will follow. For these pupils the school provides immediate and effective support through systematic individual work using a computer program, and through extra help in class.

123. The most recent results in the National Curriculum tests for fourteen-year-olds, taken after less than a year in the school, are in line with national averages, as they have been for some time. However, above average numbers of pupils achieved the higher National Curriculum Levels. Work seen during the inspection showed attainment above national averages in all aspects of English, with good progress made since pupils joined the school. This confirms the rising standards beginning to be seen in results in 2001. In almost all cases, writing is very well presented, showing that pupils take their work seriously. Higher-attaining pupils express themselves very well on a range of topics; they write at length, appropriately and correctly, using a sophisticated range of vocabulary and structures. Average and lower-attaining pupils, including those with SEN, do well, covering the full range of National Curriculum requirements and making good progress through Year 9.

124. The most recent results in GCSE English and English literature are in line with national averages. There is clear improvement over the last three years, particularly in the proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades in English. All pupils in the year were entered for the examination and all, including those with SEN, achieved a pass grade. Work seen during the inspection was very good in the highest sets in Years 10 and 11. For instance, a class in Year 10 examining Shakespeare's use of language and imagery in extracts from *Antony and Cleopatra* showed very good understanding of the text and of the viewpoints of the characters. A top set in Year 11 worked productively in analysing Keats' use of ballad form in *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*, drawing on secure knowledge already acquired. The highest-attaining pupils write extremely well. Their folders contain pieces with a range of purposes including literary analysis, expression of opinion in order to persuade, and imaginative and personal writing. Expectations of pupils who have difficulties in reading and writing are also high: they are given very firm support in structuring their thinking and their writing and they too cope well with their Shakespeare text, showing understanding of plot and character. In all lessons observed, pupils spoke clearly and listened well.

125. The teaching of English is very good overall. Much of it is very good, and some of it is excellent. The great majority of teaching was good or better and none was unsatisfactory. All members of the team are highly committed, hard working, and ambitious for their pupils' success. The course they deliver is meticulously planned to give a rich experience of English language and literature, while following the demands of the National Curriculum and the requirements of the public tests and examinations. The three-part structure for lessons recommended in the National Literacy Strategy is followed to very good effect. A class in Year 11, for instance, started with very good use of whiteboards to check quickly on the factual knowledge and understanding of all pupils of their novel *Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry*. The teacher then demonstrated by use of an overhead transparency how to use evidence from the text to support literary analysis. The lesson finished with a whole class review of what had been covered and how it related to examination requirements.

126. Relationships are positive and class management is clear and effective. Teachers arrange their rooms and the seating of the pupils to give the best possible opportunities for learning and there are very few occasions when behaviour is less than good. Activities are varied within the lesson to provide opportunities for speaking and listening, reading and writing, sometimes as a whole class, sometimes in groups and sometimes as individuals. Teachers take particular care to involve all pupils actively in oral work, and this focus on the individual is also shown in the thoroughness with which written work is marked, always with a comment to indicate strengths and weaknesses and a clear target to work for.

127. Leadership and management of the department are of a very high standard. The head of department has been in post for just over a year. Most of his team are new to the school and cover a wide span of teaching experience, from a former head of department to a newly qualified mature entrant to the profession. In a very short time, he has created a department that is consistent in approach and, in the work seen during the inspection, highly effective.

128. The work of the department is carefully monitored, through scrutiny of pupils' work across classes and through observation of lessons, not only by the head of department himself, but also by two of the school governors who are linked specifically to the English curriculum and the provision for literacy. Observation is clearly and intelligently planned to be both general and specific, with deliberate focus on particular aspects of teaching the subject. Action taken as a result is effective: for example, the underachievement of boys has been tackled by adjusting texts and topics. As well as keeping a firm overview of work within the school, the head of department also has strong links with partner schools, both middle schools and other 13-18 schools. The department has recently achieved the status of Leading English Department, whereby it leads development in the LEA for teaching Shakespeare and for the provision in English for pupils with SEN.

Drama

Strengths:

- Achievement in drama is very good, with well above average results at GCSE.
- Teaching of drama is very good and some is excellent.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good.

129. Drama is now taught to all pupils in Year 9, although until this year it appeared only as an optional GCSE course in Years 10 and 11. There are no National Curriculum Levels for drama, but work in the one Year 9 lesson seen showed standards which are above the national average. Results at GCSE are regularly well above national averages, and these results are confirmed by the very good standards in classwork and in the coursework folders.

130. Pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 take the subject very seriously and make excellent efforts to understand and put into practice the skills they are taught. Pupils in Year 9 entered wholeheartedly into work based on homelessness, using the time given for reflection to take on a given role which they sustained through a series of stimuli and developments arising from them, using movement, spatial awareness and speech. The review discussion in the last part of the lesson showed how well they had understood the dramatic requirements and the demands of the exercise. The lesson seen in Year 10 showed similar ability to discover and develop a role – this time in work based on existence in the trenches in World War 1. Pupils explored ways of conveying status in drama, use of still group images and the creation of stage sets through improvisation. They worked extremely well in groups. The standard of presentation work was very high, both by those presenting and by those watching, and such was the quality of relationships in the class that pupils were able confidently to explore deep, even raw, emotions.

131. Teaching is always very good and at times it is excellent. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject and very high expectations of what the pupils can achieve and how they should work in lessons. Relationships are extremely positive, between pupils and staff and among the pupils, and because of this a great deal is achieved. The scheme of work and the lessons are very well planned, making excellent use of time and resources. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop spiritual, moral and cultural awareness, through the work they do in lessons and through extra-curricular activities, such as visits to the theatre. In the small sample of lessons seen, very good use was made of music, lighting, other members of staff, and the drama teachers working in role themselves. Very good on-the-spot assessment is a feature of all lessons; there is also very good response to written work in Years 10 and 11.

132. Leadership and management are very good. Both members of the team are new to the school. In the eight months that she has been in post, the head of drama has made a strong impact, establishing coherence through a clear and comprehensive scheme of work.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Pupils' attainment in tests at age 14 and in GCSE mathematics is well above average.
- Teaching by established staff, and their pupils' learning, are good in both key stages.
- Departmental leadership is strong: teachers share a commitment to high achievement.

Areas for improvement:

- Staffing problems have had a negative impact on pupils' learning and its continuity.
- Information and communication technology is not used sufficiently in mathematics.
- The use of numeracy across the curriculum lacks co-ordination.

133. When they come to the school, pupils' standards are above the national average. They make satisfactory progress as they move through the school because the overall quality of teaching is satisfactory. The good teaching provided by the established staff is diminished by the effect of recent staffing recruitment difficulties that reduce overall quality. By the end of Year 11 pupils continue to work at levels above the national average. Pupils with SEN also make satisfactory progress, nearly all pupils achieving a grade G in the 2001 GCSE examinations.

134. Pupils' attainment in 2001 mathematics tests at the age of 14 is well above the national average. There is a broadly rising trend in results. Pupils' performance in tests is well above that for similar schools. Pupils achieve better results in mathematics than in English and similar results to those in science. There is little difference between boys' and girls' results. The percentage of pupils attaining GCSE grades A* to C in 2001 is well above the national average. Results are significantly better than in most subjects. There is little difference between boys' and girls' results. The very good 2001 results in both Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations occurred because staffing then was more stable and established teachers in the department had, and continue to have, very high expectations of all pupils.

135. Inspection evidence shows that overall attainment at age 14 is above average. More able pupils achieve commendable results in the UK Mathematics Challenge competition, six of them gaining gold or silver certificates. In their schoolwork they are confident in dealing with recurring decimals, solve simultaneous equations and determine lengths and angles of similar figures. They show strong skills in investigating paving slab patterns, generalising their results algebraically. Average-attaining pupils complete calculations involving powers of numbers, understand congruence in geometry and find the mean and median of a set of data. They sometimes make careless errors in calculations because answers are not checked. Lower-attaining pupils can add and subtract decimal numbers and understand the principle of symmetry in straightforward examples. They are less confident in dividing 117 by 6 by a written method and also make careless calculation errors, such as $4.60+2.25=5.85$, which they should check as a matter of course.

136. Attainment at age 16 is above average. More able pupils manipulate surds, solve non-linear equations by graphical methods and use sine and cosine formulae to solve triangles. They determine lengths of arcs and areas of sectors of circles and calculate standard deviations of statistical data. They show very high-level investigational skills in their GCSE coursework. Middle-ability pupils solve a variety of linear equations and inequalities, can convert numbers to standard form and use and understand trigonometric ratios in right-angled triangles. They make occasional errors in simplifying algebraic expressions involving powers, for example by equating $2n$ and n squared. Lower-attaining pupils use ratio to rewrite recipes, calculate perimeters of various shapes, recognise some types of quadrilateral and produce pictograms and basic pie charts to represent data. They lack sufficient expertise in algebra to use this in their GCSE coursework investigations.

137. Pupils' attitude to work and their behaviour are good. They listen attentively, contribute well to discussions and settle to work on tasks set conscientiously. They present their work in exercise books diligently. In a few instances pupils drift in attention towards the end of a lesson or coast once they have finished a task.

138. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall in both key stages. The established teachers are of high quality but at present, nearly half of the main school mathematics classes are taught by temporary staff. Most established staff are inevitably heavily deployed in the Sixth Form. This has a significant negative effect on what would otherwise be a good teaching profile in the main school.

139. Teachers have secure knowledge and understanding of mathematics and are enthusiastic about it. This transmits to the pupils, enabling them, not only to make steady progress in their grasp of mathematics, but to enjoy the subject themselves. Teachers manage pupils effectively and are punctilious about giving homework and collecting it in. For example, in a well taught Year 9 lesson the teacher wasted no time by gathering homework as pupils completed a short mental test and arranged to receive any missing items at a specified time later. Firm class control ensured that pupils tried hard and made good headway with the work. For the most part, teachers plan lessons well, routinely incorporate numeracy and literacy skills and set work that challenges all pupils in the class. They involve pupils effectively in class discussions and use resources well. For example, in a very good Year 11 lesson on the trapezium, the teacher very skilfully used prepared transparencies on the overhead projector to help pupils visualise how to determine the area. This enabled pupils to gain a very clear understanding of the derivation of the formula for the area and then to move quickly on to finding approximate areas under curves using the trapezium rule.

140. Where teaching is satisfactory, rather than good, there is too little pace or variety towards the end of a lesson and work is set at too low a level so that pupils begin to lose interest and their achievement drops. On occasions there is a lack of a suitable plenary to sum up what has been learned and to draw together ideas from pupils themselves. Teachers are beginning to incorporate ideas from the National Numeracy Strategy successfully but need to develop greater variety in starter activities and more purposeful plenary sessions. Numeracy across the curriculum also needs to be more coherent. A numeracy co-ordinator has been appointed and will take up post shortly. The use of ICT is under-developed.

141. The department is very well managed and it shares a commitment to high achievement for all pupils. Despite the serious staffing recruitment and retention difficulties the strong leadership is maintaining standards as far as is feasible. Inevitably certain priorities have been addressed while others, such as numeracy across the curriculum and the use of ICT, have received less attention. Monitoring of teaching is good with a regular programme of visits. There has been good progress overall since the previous inspection although hampered by the recent staffing difficulties. Pupils' recall of past learning is better because teachers often review previous work at the start of lessons to consolidate pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils' mental skills are encouraged more overtly but some occasionally use calculators unnecessarily. The IEPs for pupils with SEN indicate clearer mathematical targets, where these are required. Assessment arrangements are effective although they lack commonality: if teachers' best practice in this area were shared standards could be higher and pupils better supported.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is good.

Strengths:

- The achievement of pupils at age 14 and their results in National Curriculum tests.
- The quality of nearly all the teaching in Years 9 to 11.
- The relationships with, and management of, pupils.
- The quality and presentation of written work by pupils of lower attainment.

Areas for improvement:

- The attainment of gifted and talented pupils in Years 10 and 11, and of some girls.
- The monitoring of teaching and taking effective action.
- The use of learning objectives to focus the purpose of the lesson.
- The procedures used to ensure that pupils have a secure knowledge of their own learning and develop effective study skills.

142. When they come into the school in Year 9, pupils' levels of attainment are above average. By age 14, when they take the national curriculum tests, they achieve results which are well above national expectations, with the number of pupils gaining Level 5 or higher, and the number gaining Levels 6 and 7, well above average. In comparison with similar schools, their results are also well above average. Since the last inspection, the results gained by pupils have broadly mirrored the national trends, and showed a big improvement from 2000 to 2001. These high standards are reflected in the work of pupils in the current Year 9, where the highest-attaining pupils produce written work of high quality and show, especially in class discussions, a very good understanding of the ideas which form the basis for the subject.

143. GCSE results in 2001 were in line with the national average in terms of average points score. However, more detailed data shows that although fewer than the expected number of pupils gained the highest grade, A*, more than expected gained the middle grades B – E. These pupils took the National Curriculum tests two years ago and, in relation to their attainment at that time, their achievement in Years 10 and 11 is broadly as expected. In comparison with other subjects in the school, pupils gained GCSE grades which were slightly below average.

144. In lessons, the work of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is above average. Throughout the ability range, pupils show a good level of literacy and numeracy, and clearly take care to present their work carefully. The best work is of very high quality, and shows that these high-attaining students are improving in their ability to undertake extended writing, for example in the quality of their investigation reports, and in the presentation and interpretation of experimental results. If this improvement is maintained, the current Year 11 is well set to show improved grades in their GCSE examinations in the summer of 2002. Nevertheless, given their performance in the National Curriculum tests at age 14, the school could do still more to support these high-attaining pupils.

145. Teaching in Years 9 to 11 is good; it was good or better in more than half the lessons and some teaching was excellent; there was one example of poor teaching. In the best lessons, the teacher ensures that pupils are continually challenged to think deeply about the subject, and learning is very good as a result. In these lessons, pupils are always actively involved in the learning process and bring considerable intellectual effort to bear on the task in hand. For example, in an excellent Year 10 lesson, pupils had to interpret complex graphs based on data collected by computer about photosynthesis in pondweed. Not only were several variables included in the data, but pupils needed to understand the concept of a

limiting factor in order to complete the task successfully. The excellent explanation given by the teacher meant that learning was also excellent with pupils gaining a very good understanding of the experiment and the underlying biological ideas. In two similar Year 9 lessons on oxidation of magnesium, not only did pupils gain in knowledge of the reaction taking place when magnesium is heated in air, but they also gained an insight into the scientific method.

146. Throughout the school, teachers plan their lessons well, explain the work carefully and support it with well-conceived experimental work. They use an excellent system of self-assessment sheets to help pupils to monitor their own progress, but a rigorous system of assessment based on national standards is only just coming into use and its effects have yet to be seen. Generally, teachers support all their pupils well, including those who have SEN, but in some lessons even more could be done to support gifted and talented pupils in their quest for the highest grades.

147. Where teaching is satisfactory or good, rather than very good or excellent, this is often because the lesson objectives shared with the pupils at the beginning of the lesson are defined in terms of the material to be covered in the lesson, rather than the skills which pupils are expected to acquire. In a small proportion of lessons, pupils failed to use their time profitably, either because they were too easily distracted or because the activities they were asked to complete were insufficiently demanding.

148. Development of literacy skills is good, and teachers often ask pupils to prepare and deliver presentations to the rest of the class. This activity supports good learning in science, as well as developing pupils' literacy skills and self-confidence. Numeracy skills are satisfactory and teachers are careful to ensure that pupils' learning is not inhibited by an inability to cope with the mathematics needed. There is currently little use of ICT, but what there is, is very good, and many pupils word-process their work. A new science computer room was opened only a few days before the inspection and is already being put to good use. The department is well placed to develop this aspect substantially.

149. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The head of department has rightly made the raising of attainment a priority since the last inspection and has met with considerable success. He has changed the structure of the department in response to changing circumstances. He has a very clear vision of the department, he is keen to lead, and communicates this vision well to his colleagues. His leadership has already resulted in good improvement in the results in the National Curriculum tests taken at age 14, but is yet to become apparent in GCSE results.

150. The head of department has in place a good system for monitoring staff, but time constraints have prevented it being as effective as it should be. This should be a priority for development. There are also some good systems for assessing pupils' achievement and monitoring their progress towards the targets set by the department. But application of these procedures across the department is not uniform enough to give really good data from which the department can move forward into the next period of its development.

151. Both teaching and pupils' attitudes to the subject have improved since the last inspection and, in particular, nearly all teachers use class discussions and question and answer sessions as a powerful tool for raising understanding. There is now a clear management focus on raising attainment. The department is well placed, following the restructuring of the recent past, to move forward quickly and enable all students to achieve their potential.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths:

- The quality of teachers' planning, which supports very good teaching and learning.
- Assessment procedures.
- The leadership and management of the department.

Areas for improvement:

- Accommodation.
- Opportunities for rigour in the development of observational drawing skills.
- Opportunities for pupils to work with artists.

152. Attainment of pupils on entry to the school in Year 9 is just above national expectations. At age 14, after less than one year in the school, standards in art are above national expectations. All pupils develop a sound knowledge of basic skills and techniques, use a range of materials to produce work in two and three dimensions and develop a working process which prepares them for the demands of the GCSE art course. At age 16, standards are well above the national average. In 2001, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C at GCSE was very high; it has been well above the national average consistently for the past three years. At age 14 and at age 16, achievement is very good, because of very good teaching, monitoring of pupil's progress, assessment and target-setting procedures.

153. Teaching, as observed in lessons and from the evidence of work scrutiny, is very good in Year 9 and in Years 10 and 11. All teaching seen in lessons was at least good and two-fifths was very good. In all years, very good planning by teachers ensures that pupils' knowledge and use of specialist language is constantly reinforced and extended and that pupils have opportunities to use ICT as a creative tool when producing art work. Pupils are challenged to attain high standards of work and teachers' clear expectations of behaviour result in a productive and positive working atmosphere. In Year 9, pupils' work is frequently monitored and assessed, so that pupils have a clear indication of how well they are achieving in relation to National Curriculum Levels. In Years 10 and 11, pupils' project work is regularly reviewed against GCSE Assessment Objectives. Focussed questioning and guidance comments in pupils' sketchbooks are used regularly to ensure that pupils meet their targets. Pupils produce lively and visually stimulating sketchbooks and are encouraged by teachers to make these sketchbooks central to their working processes. Marking of classwork and homework by teachers is consistent and informative. However, pupils need more opportunities to develop a rigorous approach to larger scale observational drawing.

154. The curriculum is rich and varied, with opportunities for gallery visits and access to planned sessions in the art department in extra-curricular time. However, there are no opportunities for pupils to gain increased breadth of experience by working with artists. Leadership and management of the department are excellent. The head of department has developed an ethos where pupils' learning is central to all planning and activity and teachers work as a team. The head of department's enthusiasm, commitment and hard work set standards which fully reflect the aims of the school and which have resulted in continuous improvement. The thoroughness and high quality of departmental documentation is evidence of the level of thought and caring which is at the heart of the department's success. Performance management is used effectively and constructively by teachers for reflection on and revision of working practice in the department.

155. The art rooms, although basically sound, are cluttered and, in some cases, inappropriately furnished with classroom tables and chairs. Sink areas need refitting and lighting is inadequate. The sensors fitted to strip lighting cause the lights to cut out intermittently, which is disconcerting for pupils and teachers. The addition of some spotlights or halogen lighting to create focussed display areas would result in a much improved atmosphere. The state of accommodation in the art department has not been addressed since the last inspection, and it is unsatisfactory. However, the range of materials used has been extended and the development of contextual studies and the use of sketchbooks are now a successful and notable part of pupils' artwork. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY (DT)

Overall, the quality of provision in DT is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Hard working teachers who are committed to improving standards for pupils.
- Standards in food and nutrition, and in child development.
- Accommodation and resources for food subjects.

Areas for improvement:

- Raise standards in resistant materials.
- Review the accommodation for resistant materials, systems and control, graphics and textiles to create welcoming and stimulating surroundings in which pupils can learn.
- Provide appropriate equipment and resources to enable each of these areas to provide a modern technological experience for pupils.

156. Standards for pupils aged 14, as measured by National Curriculum teacher assessments, are just above average. This is close to what inspection evidence suggests, but the school does not carry out standardisation procedures to ensure consistency. The figure for those pupils attaining Level 5 or above has fluctuated over the last three years but the general trend is upwards.

157. GCSE results in 2001 were well below average. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades was well below the national average: the proportion gaining grades A* to G was also below average. However, this is a slight improvement on previous figures and represents a check on the overall downward trend. Further analysis of the figures reveals that food and nutrition results were better than those in resistant materials. Entry numbers for food and nutrition have been small, which makes valid comparisons difficult, but results have varied from well above average to just below. Child development results were well above average in 2001. This represents a rising trend.

158. In work and lessons seen, standards for pupils aged 14 are average. At the beginning of Year 9, pupils enter the school with varied background experiences of technology and the school has devised a range of modules to improve practical and design skills in a context of improving pupils' independence and personal organisation. This is beginning to have some effect and, consequently, pupils' achievements are satisfactory. For the majority of pupils, however, these skills are not well developed in the short time available.

159. Some higher attaining pupils are able to follow a good design methodology to produce independent research, analyse a design problem and present design folios with a good standard of written and graphic work. For example, pupils working on a textiles project had

supported their work with information on well-known clothing designers from various sources, including the Internet. Pupils with SEN were fully involved in the practical activity and although written and graphic work was weak, they had produced a well-made appliqué panel for a wall hanging. Boys and girls in the group were attaining similar standards.

160. The majority of pupils do not have a good understanding of design processes. The work of some pupils in resistant materials, for example, is not always supported by quality design and development work. Pupils working to design and make a torch were developing competent skills across a wide range of materials and processes, but there was little evidence of research into these areas and folders contained simplistic graphic work with little concern for quality of presentation.

161. Standards for pupils aged 16 are average. Overall, pupils maintain satisfactory progress from Year 9 but there is a difference between the quality of work produced in food and nutrition and that produced in resistant materials. Because of staffing difficulties and the pressure placed upon staff, accommodation and resources by a restrictive curriculum which required all pupils to study resistant materials, the achievement of pupils in resistant materials is lower than food and nutrition. Whilst present Year 10 pupils benefit from a more open option system, the residual effects of this can still be detected in the quality of work of many Year 11 pupils.

162. A few pupils are able to develop good resistant materials design folders. For example, higher-attaining Year 11 pupils designing and making toys were able to conduct in-depth research into genuine design situations, analyse the tasks and propose imaginative solutions. They were not, however, able to present their ideas using good two- and three-dimensional graphic work or manufacture the product with skill, accuracy and appropriate constructional techniques. The need for pupils to move from area to area because of pressure on accommodation and resources creates a difficult situation for teachers to manage and results in some poor working practices, with consequent adverse effects on standards.

163. Year 11 pupils in food and nutrition have a good understanding of the scientific background to the subject and apply this to current work. For example, one pupil was able to use his knowledge of photosynthesis from science when contributing to the discussion on milk production. A high level of technical vocabulary was used in the lesson. Pupils in child development have compiled extensive folders with detailed notes, from which they write thorough case studies. The course makes a valuable contribution to the social, moral and cultural development of pupils through the discussion of such topics as parenting skills and pre-school provision. The sole male pupil on the course is fully involved in the work and attains comparable standards to the girls in the group.

164. Teaching is good. In nearly two thirds of lessons teaching was good or very good, and in the remainder it was satisfactory. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. Flexibility and a willingness to 'team-teach' has helped partially to overcome staffing difficulties and has provided good role models as pupils see both male and female teachers working in areas outside normal gender stereotyping. This has been beneficial in developing textiles in Years 9 to 11 but has added to the comparative neglect of resistant materials. This situation will be resolved when the newly appointed textiles teacher begins work.

165. In a very well taught food and nutrition lesson pupils were challenged constantly by the teacher's skilled questioning. They were required to extend and clarify their answers, justify their decisions, link the work to previous topics and explain technical vocabulary.

Consequently, the lesson strengthened pupils' understanding of previous work and built on it with new knowledge. In food technology, good individual help from the teacher and the practical nature of the work enabled Year 9 pupils with special needs to achieve a successful outcome to a pizza project.

166. Where teaching is only satisfactory it is because pupils are not given a clear focus for the lesson, or sufficient direct instruction by the teacher. For example, in some Year 11 resistant materials lessons, the overall objective of completing the practical project by the given deadline was not supported by clear short-term strategies for achieving this. Consequently pupils' efforts were not always directed purposefully.

167. Pupils' written and graphic work is marked regularly and, in the main, with constructive advice on how to improve. Sometimes, however, mediocre work is over-praised giving the impression that there is no need for further improvement. Pupils are interested in technology, listen well to teachers and work with a sense of purpose. The good support provided by two part-time technicians enables teachers to concentrate efforts in the classroom.

168. The leadership and management of the department are good. The present head of department has been in post for nearly a year and, together with the newly appointed second in department who has responsibility for food studies, has made improvements to the provision for technology. A wider choice of options for Year 10 pupils has led to renewed interest in the subject and the potential for better results. Schemes of work have been revised to support the reintroduction of subjects such as textiles, graphics and systems and control.

169. The department is emerging from a period of considerable disruption caused by staff changes. This has affected the continuity of work for some pupils and held back the development of resistant materials technology. A good start has been made on developing teachers' skills and working practices to adapt to these changes.

170. The refurbishment of food technology areas has provided first class facilities for pupils. Large areas provide sufficient space for workshop-based subjects, but the organisation and use of these areas does not create a sufficiently stimulating and welcoming atmosphere in which to learn. Areas are dusty and untidy, some machinery is redundant or broken and general resources are limited. Good use is made of the computer-aided design and manufacturing equipment in resistant materials but lack of similar facilities restricts opportunities for pupils in textiles. Pupils have good access to professional quality graphics software and steps are in hand to increase the number of computers in the department. This is beginning to improve pupils' quality of work.

171. Since the last inspection there have been improvements to the DT curriculum, better opportunities for computer-aided design and manufacture and a halt to the decline in resistant materials standards. Improvement has been satisfactory.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is good.

Strengths:

- There is good achievement at age 14 and 16.
- Teaching is good across Years 9 to 11.
- Pupils have good attitudes to the subject.
- The curriculum is of good quality and is enhanced by good fieldwork opportunities.

Areas for improvement:

- Schemes of work, including the use of ICT.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning.
- Standards at age 14 and 16.

172. Pupils' attainment in geography on entry to the school in Year 9 is just about in line with that for pupils of a similar age nationally. The department has good relationships with partner middle schools and builds well on pupils' prior attainment. As they move through Year 9, pupils make good progress and achieve well in class and in homework tasks. Their attainment at age 14, judged by National Curriculum teacher assessments, is in line with that of pupils of a similar age who are reaching Level 5 or above.

173. In the recent past, the department has suffered from the lack of a stable teaching team and this is reflected in some gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills as well as in fluctuations in standards. In Year 9, most pupils develop a good knowledge and understanding of geographical processes and become increasingly interested in discovering, for example, where earthquakes and volcanoes occur. Their work shows a keen understanding of the topics they have covered. Overall, their achievement is good. Pupils' progress, in the subject and in further developing literacy and numeracy skills, is good. They also have good opportunities to develop their ICT skills, especially in the presentation of their research findings using text and visual images. The good progress and achievement is the result of the quality of specialist teaching they receive as well as the degree of challenge provided within it. Most of the pupils respond positively to well designed tasks and frequently draw on their previous learning when exploring key concepts in class. They quickly learn and use accurately the subject's technical terminology. Their skills in geographical enquiry develop as they move through Year 9, especially in the devising and testing of simple hypotheses. Most pupils are becoming increasingly skilled in research methods and in applying concepts to different aspects of their learning.

174. By the age of 16 standards are above average. In the most recent GCSE examinations the proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C and A* and A grades is above the national average. These results show a significant improvement on previous years when standards were either below or well below average. In each year, although the difference between their performances is no greater than that found nationally, girls generally do better than boys.

175. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 generally apply themselves well to their work and have good levels of knowledge, understanding and skills. Their standards of literacy and numeracy improve as they move through their GCSE course and opportunities to use ICT, especially in coursework assignments, show high levels of skills. In their work, pupils also show high levels of understanding of the content of tasks they undertake. They also have a clear understanding of geographical enquiry methods. The quality of coursework, based on fieldwork and local enquiries, are of a good standard and their presentation is good. Overall, pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good.

176. In Year 10 pupils explored confidently the result of a volcanic eruption on the island community of Montserrat, considered the response made by the authorities and considered the impact on people and their families. Others developed considerable understanding of the management of natural resources by exploring the water cycle and its impact on rivers and the environment. In both cases, pupils developed a range of technical terminology, exhibited high levels of understanding of the processes involved and were able to relate their learning to recent national and international catastrophes. Year 11 pupils considered industry in Japan as part of their preparation to look at the impact of environmental hazards on trade. Another group were studying population distribution in Brazil and the implications for land usage, economic and industrial development in the region. Both groups of pupils showed considerable understanding of the physical environment and the importance of good human management of natural resources and responses to hazards. Levels of understanding of the interpretation of maps and of climate were, on many occasions, extremely good.

177. Pupils have good attitudes to their work, enjoy productive relationships with their teachers and work well with peers in pairs or small groups. Most pupils concentrate well and, although some lower-attaining pupils find the work demanding, all pupils contribute to and benefit from a keen involvement in their learning.

178. The quality of teaching is consistently good across Years 9 to 11. All teaching seen was good and enabled pupils to make good progress. Teachers' very good lesson planning was sensitive to the learning needs of pupils, and especially the gaps existing in their knowledge and understanding. In all lessons, teachers had high expectations and pupils were encouraged to be involved in the learning. Question and answer was often well used to revise and consolidate learning from the previous lesson prior to exploring the current topic. Some pupils asked questions, occasionally to consolidate knowledge or clarify their understanding but on other occasions to offer an assertion or hypothesis that provoked good discussion and provided insights into the topic. The pace of lessons was maintained by constant challenge through well-focused teaching and carefully designed tasks. Pupils were well managed, encouraged to work hard and there was no time for poor behaviour. However, in spite of very good planning and management of time, in no lesson was there an opportunity to summarise or check what pupils knew, understand and could do as a result of their learning. Homework was well prepared and regularly set. The marking is regular, detailed and helps pupils understand the level they have reached, as well as what they need to do to improve their work.

179. The department is well managed by a newly appointed head of subject, who has formally been in post for only a few weeks, and was previously the acting head of geography. He and his team have focused well on providing good specialist teaching and learning in order to raise standards, re-establishing a stable teaching team and providing good support for pupils at their various stages of learning. The curriculum, enriched by good fieldwork opportunities, meets statutory requirements and schemes of work are in the process of being revised in line with new requirements.

180. Development planning priorities are appropriate in highlighting key issues to help the subject further improve its effectiveness. The current review process is useful, but has served only to reinforce the priorities identified by the department. The teaching team are well supported by good professional development opportunities. However, the monitoring of teaching has not been systematically undertaken because of the prolonged absence of the previous head of subject. Since the last inspection standards, teaching and learning have all improved, as has the provision of learning resources. Improvement has been satisfactory.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11.
- Attitudes and behaviour in lessons.
- Support for individual pupils.

Areas for improvement:

- Raising attainment at GCSE.
- Extension of ICT opportunities into Years 10 and 11.
- Reviewing assessment procedures.

181. The attainment of pupils at the end of Year 9, as measured by National Curriculum teacher assessments, has been significantly above national expectations over the past three years, with less difference between the performance of boys and girls than is the case nationally. At GCSE Level, results have improved considerably over the past three years, albeit from a low baseline. In 2001 the attainment of girls, in terms of grades A* to C, was almost in line with national averages, but the performance of boys was still some 10 percentage points below their counterparts nationally.

182. In Year 9, pupils make sound progress in work scrutinised and lessons seen to attain standards in line with national expectations. They are not currently reaching the above average standards achieved in the past, due to weaker teaching. They derive information well from a range of sources on selected nineteenth and twentieth century topics and are alert to the problem of bias, but are less likely to consider the provenance of sources in assessing reliability and usefulness. Most pupils read confidently and competently, and the efforts made by the department to support literacy are beginning to pay off, although there are still too many errors in basic spelling, which sometimes pass uncorrected by teachers. Pupils with SEN make good progress in those lessons where specialist and experienced in-class support makes a valuable contribution.

183. Pupils undertake a good quantity of written work, often in the form of essays or other pieces of extended writing on topics such as living conditions in Victorian cities or the Peterloo massacre. In a lesson on trench warfare, Year 9 pupils were able to suggest a good range of emotions likely to have been felt by a soldier on the front line, and graphically described the conditions which they had to face.

184. The attainment of pupils at the age of 16 in work seen is at the expected level and pupils make satisfactory progress to reach those standards. Pupils develop further the strengths in the understanding of subject specific terminology already seen lower down the school; they use confidently words such as *appeasement* and *totalitarianism*. They identify and analyse sources well, and are developing an awareness of the importance of having regard to their provenance, in answering document questions.

185. Both boys and girls express their views articulately in oral work and support them with appropriate evidence. Strengths are evident in presentation and in extended writing, which is sometimes undertaken from a perspective other than their own, as for example, a Russian peasant describing life in the early twentieth century. In some areas, there is scope for furthering their knowledge; for example there was little understanding of the role of

Prussian militarism in the distaste felt by the senior officers of the Wehrmacht for Hitler, nor of the extent to which the Night of the Long Knives represented the resolution of the split between the right and left wings of the Nazi party. Opportunities to acquire and improve skills in ICT are rather restricted in history, and this is an area for development.

186. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 9 to 11. It is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Year 9. All the teaching seen in Years 10 and 11 was good: in Year 9 teaching ranged in quality from good to unsatisfactory. Where teaching is good pupils learn well because teachers have high and consistent expectations, share learning objectives with their classes, issue clear instructions and explain readily. They use question and answer well to explore, extend and consolidate pupils' learning. In the two lessons seen where teaching was less than good, a temporary, non-specialist teacher lacked the subject knowledge and classroom management techniques needed to ensure productive learning.

187. At GCSE Level, teaching is uniformly good and staff offer valuable guidance on examination skills, including essay writing and answering source-based questions. Courtesy and mutual respect are the hallmarks of classroom relationships in history, and they make an important contribution to the quality of learning. Teachers have a good understanding of how pupils learn, and so go to some lengths to generate a climate in which pupils have the confidence to admit that they are unable to answer, and to explain why, thereby enabling the teacher to address significant obstacles to learning.

188. Teachers monitor and support individual pupils well, although in lessons seen the heavy reliance on photocopied, monochromatic resources overlooks the fact that pupils learn in a variety of ways. Although teachers mark much of pupils' work quite closely, there is scope for improving the current assessment procedures in order to ensure clarity and transparency for pupils. This would have the benefit of enabling pupils to see more clearly what was required in order to move up to the next level.

189. Leadership in, and management of, the subject are satisfactory and promote sound educational standards. The head of department has a clear focus on raising attainment, but significant pastoral responsibilities and considerable disruption in the area of staffing, have militated against improvement in areas such as updating documentation, or implementing development planning. Improvement since the last inspection is therefore satisfactory. Detailed analysis of pupils' performance in external examinations is undertaken. Working relationships are close: support for newly qualified and temporary staff has been good and there was genuine consultation before deciding on the new GCSE course.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is good.

Strengths:

- Commitment to succeed and high expectations.
- Very good planning and well-structured schemes of work.
- Good teaching.
- Very good relationships between teachers and pupils.
- Very good management of the department.

Areas for improvement:

- Assessment of pupils' performance in Years 9,10 and 11.
- More training for teachers in the use of ICT.
- Improving the access to ICT facilities for all subjects.

190. The standards of pupils on entry to the school are average. Standards of attainment of pupils aged 14 are in line with national expectations. At age 16, standards are above national averages. Pupils in Year 10 who follow the GCSE course, introduced in September 2001, are achieving standards which are above national expectations. The improvement in standards and achievement are a result of good teaching and the high expectations of teachers. Pupils' standards improve as they use ICT to support their learning in a range of subjects. Good use of word-processing is seen in English where it is used to present poetry. All the pupils seen are able to manipulate text, use spreadsheets, import graphics and access the Internet to help their learning. Pupils use ICT as a learning tool and use it in a discriminating and focused way.

191. Overall achievement is good in Years 9, 10 and 11. There is no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls. Pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively and they enjoy supporting each other. Progress made by pupils with SEN is good. The progress made by pupils, who develop their ICT skills by using them in subjects across the curriculum, is also good in Years 10 and 11. This is the result of subject teachers using ICT facilities carefully to help pupils learn their own subjects. In Year 10 the progress made by pupils in the specialist GCSE course is very good.

192. The quality of teaching seen is always at least good and in half of the lessons seen was very good. At GCSE Level, lessons are planned meticulously with the learning objectives made clear to pupils. Support is given to all pupils so that a good pace is maintained. A good example of support was seen where a pupil who had missed work through illness was given extra tuition in a Year 10 lesson. The coursework that has been completed is imaginative and covers a range of topics; an analysis of the school tuckshop, assessing the viability of a video rental shop, or a cash flow analysis of a local business.

193. Teachers ensure that basic vocabulary and terms are understood and marking is thorough and detailed so that pupils know what they need to do to improve. The relationship between teachers and pupils is very good and pupils feel trusted and respected, resulting in a common sense of purpose in lessons. Tasks set are challenging and therefore interest is maintained. In a Year 10 lesson where pupils were studying the Data Protection Act, a discussion took place on the ethics of the Act as well as the content. The teaching emphasises the need for individuals to take responsibility for their learning and pupils are independent learners by the end of Year 11 and use ICT facilities in a mature and responsible way.

194. The quality of leadership and management in ICT is very good. The co-ordination of ICT across subjects in Years 9, 10 and 11 to ensure that statutory requirements are met is detailed and precise. Although the progress of pupils is accurately recorded the achievement of pupils could be raised by developing more rigorous assessment systems so that pupils know exactly what they have to do to improve. The monitoring of the work of the department is good. Planning for the specialist GCSE course is detailed and pupils are well informed about the learning objectives of their lessons.

195. A key factor in the progress made by pupils in ICT is the excellent strategic use of the limited facilities, which allow access to computers and the Internet in a number of locations around the school. The ratio of computers to pupils is below average. To improve the quality of ICT delivery in the school these facilities need to be improved. The full time technician is a strength of the department and her swift response to solving problems and

maintenance of the hardware significantly helps the efficient use of ICT in the school. The small computer annex to the library is well managed by the librarian but demand is now so great that this needs to be integrated in a more accessible way with other aspects of the library.

196. There has been a good improvement since the last inspection. The statutory requirements are in place and the way departments deliver aspects of the subject is more rigorously monitored. There has been some effective training of teachers initiated by the ICT co-ordinator as well as New Opportunities Fund (NOF) training, and the effect of this is seen in the increasing confidence of teachers to use ICT as a learning aid in a range of subjects. The ability of teachers to assess attainment levels has improved since the last inspection. To improve the attainment and achievement of pupils in ICT, more detailed assessment of individuals' progress needs to be developed; this will require further training for teachers. To ensure that pupils are able to make the most of their skills, the access to computers needs to be improved.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES (MFL)

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

Strengths:

- Good teaching including that by teachers from France and Germany.
- Very good contacts with French and German culture both in the UK and abroad.
- Three languages offered to pupils in Years 10 and 11.

Areas for improvement:

- Use of ICT to enhance learning.
- More extensive provision of course books.

French

197. Standards of work seen during the inspection are average overall. They are good in Years 10 and 11 where the accumulated impact of good teaching is now being felt. Achievement in Year 9 is satisfactory; it is good in Years 10 and 11.

198. French is pupils' first modern foreign language, taught initially in their middle schools. The modern languages department at Ashlyns now has good contacts with their colleagues in these schools. Ashlyns staff are able to assess pupils' speaking skills while they are still in middle school, so that they can be placed in appropriate groups on arrival.

199. Standards on entry are broadly average and remain so through Year 9, representing satisfactory achievement. In written work higher-attaining pupils are able to use a range of tenses, and middle and lower attainers also tackle a good range of tenses. In one lesson seen, pupils in Year 9 achieved above average standards in speaking and listening in response to good teaching. Standards in the other skills were not as strong, but were still in line with the average. National Curriculum teacher assessments in 2001 indicated that the proportion of Year 9 pupils reaching the national expectations was in line with that for all pupils of a similar age. Although teaching is good, timetabling constraints do not allow pupils to make more rapid progress and reach higher standards, and in the weeks with only one lesson, pupils risk forgetting what they have learned. Despite this, many pupils have above average speaking skills.

200. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades at GCSE has risen markedly through the three years the present head of department has been in post, to a point where they were well above the national average in 2001. Attainment of girls was very high. Boys do not perform as well as girls, as is the case nationally. However, their GCSE results are above the national average for all pupils and well above that for boys. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to G was in line with the national average. A small number of individual pupils with a French- or German-speaking background have successfully taken AS Level at the same time as, or even earlier than, GCSE.

201. A few pupils, including some with SEN, drop French to make room in their timetable for additional English lessons, but National Curriculum requirements are still met because they start to learn German instead. This is thought to be more accessible in the early stages for some pupils.

202. The quality of teaching is good in Years 9,10 and 11. Teachers' good language skills and good management of pupils generate a positive response. A change of syllabus in Year 10 has provided the opportunity for teachers to re-focus on a secure knowledge of basic grammar and the way language works. This has been achieved at the same time as creating a good learning atmosphere, using the French language in the classroom. Pupils' achievement reflects this change: achievement is good in Years 10 and 11, and good standards are achieved. Most pupils have greater fluency than is usually seen. A good breadth of vocabulary and accuracy of grammar support good standards in listening, reading and writing, as well as in speaking. Achievement by boys, which lagged behind that of girls in the recent past, is being nurtured by requiring pupils to sit in boy-girl pairs where practicable. Amid lively exchanges in French, pupils with SEN make appropriate progress, although a few are discouraged by the high standards of others and do not achieve as well as they might do. A fully supportive environment for all these pupils is needed. Year 11 pupils have the benefit of the accumulated experience and accumulated marks gained within their modular GCSE course, which is now being phased out. A high standard of spoken French is again characteristic.

203. Teaching in all except two of the modern languages lessons seen was good or very good, and very good teaching was seen from several different teachers. Teaching is of equally good quality in all the year groups. Independent work is planned into the lesson and timed, leading pupils to look up for themselves what they do not know. Pupils therefore learn to work with a good degree of independence. Teachers' ability to speak their languages and to manage their pupils are strengths. The teachers' command of the language enables pupils to acquire the oral fluency, which is such a feature of their learning. Where teachers have relevant personal experience of France on which they can draw, the quality of lessons is further enhanced. At present the use of ICT to support learning is limited, as is the provision of course books. Procedures for assessment are good, with clear targets to support pupils' progress.

204. Following the previous inspection, staffing problems caused standards to decline but the department has now recovered to a stronger position than before. Teaching has improved, leading to rising standards and increased popularity of the subject. The good improvement is due, in large measure, to the impact of the incoming head of department, whose leadership and management of the department are very good. He has been successful in motivating both staff and pupils, creating a vibrant department with a strong shared commitment where good language learning is possible. Pupils' experience of French is enhanced by numerous opportunities to experience French culture, including two exchange links.

German

205. German is taught as a new language to all pupils in Year 9. Two hours per week every week represent a serious effort and standards reached are in line with those of pupils studying a second foreign language in other schools. Higher-attaining pupils were, at the time of the inspection, approaching overall average standards which represents good achievement. Pupils benefit from the good use of the language by two teachers who are native speakers of German.

206. Pupils seen were articulate in German about likes and dislikes as regards school subjects and were logging each other's opinions in the form of pie charts. Standards in speaking and listening in Year 9 are in line with expectations, which represents good achievement. The standard of reading and writing, as seen in work scrutiny and in class, is in line with national average, which again represents good achievement.

207. Five boys from Year 10 who had just taken part in the German exchange used their experience to help others to understand how to use the Euro. These links contribute to a good climate for learning, which is preparing young people to be at ease in a German-speaking community. The take up of German in Year 10 is good. At present 16 pupils in Year 10 and 12 in Year 11 are doing both French and German, and 24 have chosen the option for next year. The pattern of syllabuses matches that in French and is having a similar impact on improving learning.

208. GCSE results at grades A* to C in 2001 were a considerable improvement on those of 2000, though still below the national average. At A* to G they were slightly above the national average. German is below average in relation to other subjects in the school. However, in order to interpret these results it needs to be borne in mind that pupils have three years teaching of German to GCSE, rather than the four or five years seen in many other schools. Standards of speaking and listening observed in class were above average for higher attaining pupils, and below average for lower attainers. Standards of writing are average, with a good focus on grammatical accuracy. For all pupils, across all skills, achievement is good.

209. Modern languages are organised as an integrated subject department, and several teachers teach both languages. The quality of teaching in German is similar to that in French, and an impact on standards is being made by strong departmental leadership. The popularity of German is rising.

Italian

210. Italian, taught by the head of department outside normal hours, has been introduced only in the current year, and offered to Years 10 and above. The expectation is that pupils committed to the course will reach GCSE in the one year. A number have found this to be too demanding but, at the time of the inspection, sixteen pupils were making progress comparable to that of first language learners at the end of Year 9 after three years' study. This represents very good achievement. Teaching and learning are very good.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is good.

Strengths:

- The subject knowledge and expertise of the head of department.
- The practical-based curriculum offering a wide range of experiences.
- The positive attitudes of pupils.
- The range of available music resources.
- The high quality extra-curricular activities.

Areas for improvement:

- The need for a qualified experienced assistant.
- The occasional lack of extension opportunities for higher attaining pupils in Year 9.
- The need for more rigorous assessment and target setting to support progress and assist future planning.

211. On entry to the school in Year 9, attainment in music is broadly average, though there are a number of more able or more musically experienced pupils in evidence. This is supported by subject performance data submitted by middle schools, though inspection evidence suggests that the assessments may not all be reliable and that some moderation and standardisation are required. During Year 9, pupils make good progress due to the frequently challenging work, the open-ended nature of most tasks and particularly the positive attitudes displayed in class. They listen carefully to music from a wide range of styles and cultures, and are able to demonstrate their understanding of different aspects of the music. This they do through class discussion, through the creation of pastiche pieces that show the characteristics of a style, and by taking part in fluent and evocative group and class performances. All pupils are given ample opportunities during Year 9 to develop their performing abilities at their own individual levels, using tuned and untuned percussion, electronic keyboards and their own instruments as appropriate. Particularly impressive is their ability to perform with a strong sense of rhythm and ensemble not always found in schools. The progress made stands them in good stead for the demands of the GCSE course, should they wish to follow it. By the end of the year, a large number of pupils are working at or beyond the national expectation and the overall achievement in Year 9 is good.

212. The Year 9 scheme of work is carefully devised to develop skills in listening, composing, performing and appraising, through regular practical activities in a broad range of musical styles. Most activities allow pupils to develop their individual musical potential fully. In some units of work, however, tasks are more restricted in their outcome (for example, learning to play a quite straightforward classical melody on the keyboard) and pupils with greater ability or experience can achieve this outcome quickly, with no further goals identified for them to aim for. Many of these pupils then either support others or wait patiently until the class has completed the task. Lesson planning should identify clearly the direction in which these pupils can extend their work, and provide them with appropriate support materials or ideas. Closer monitoring of the scheme of work's impact on individual students' learning would help to highlight any such issues as this as they arise.

213. The quality of teaching seen in Year 9 was satisfactory overall, with satisfactory teaching in two-thirds of lessons and good teaching in the remaining one third.

214. Since 1999 GCSE music results have improved considerably and in 2001 the proportion gaining grades A* to C was well above the national average. This reflects not only the increasingly good attainment at the end of Year 9 and but also the positive attitudes of

most of the Year 10 and 11 students. They are able to settle to tasks quickly and focus for a prolonged period on improving their work (though this can be more difficult for them on occasions when there is a shortage of room space due to parallel timetabling of classes). They are supported and guided in their work by the considerable knowledge and expertise of the head of department in most of their lessons. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good overall, with some very good teaching, and achievement by the end of Year 11 is very good.

215. The overall quality of music teaching is good, though there is currently an imbalance within the department due to the relative inexperience of the part-time teacher taking some of the classes. Expectations of pupils' work and behaviour are generally high, and lessons are well controlled and managed. One particular action that would help move teaching forward, in Year 9 and beyond, would be the development of a simple system for recording the informal and ongoing assessments and setting of targets for individual pupils that takes place in lessons. This would help both teachers and pupils to recall and review the progress made in previous lessons, and to identify what next steps would help pupils achieve their potential.

216. Leadership and management in music are good. The head of department has a clear sense of direction for the department and in less than two years has demonstrated his commitment and ability in moving things forward. Music resources are of good quality and well managed; there is particularly effective use of new technology to engage, motivate and help pupils progress in Years 10 and 11, and plans to extend this into Year 9 in the very near future. Good use is made of the music accommodation available, which is just adequate for the needs of the department. The department organises or participates in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including choirs, wind band, blues band and stage musicals. The school's recent production of 'West Side Story' was an extremely challenging enterprise, and yet the dedication and industry of a large number of pupils and staff ensured that the quality of performance was very high.

217. Since the last inspection, improvement in music has been very good. Standards have risen considerably, subject data and information is now available from middle schools, and is used to inform planning in Year 9. The Year 9 curriculum is now far more appropriate to the pupils' needs - more practical, less theoretical, broader in cultural style and more challenging. Recordings of pupils' work are now made and stored for purposes of assessment, appraisal and feedback. Behaviour is much improved, through the high expectations of staff and through the relevance and challenge of curriculum.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION (PE)

Overall, the quality of provision in PE is good.

Strengths:

- Teachers' subject knowledge and expertise.
- Quality of teaching with activities and tasks well matched to pupils' abilities.
- A wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities.
- Pupils understanding of their strengths and weaknesses and how to progress.
- Good staff/pupil relationships.

Areas for improvement:

- Accommodation.
- Improving the coherence of the management of the subject
- Increased subject time for non-examination pupils.
- Monitoring of pupils' non-participation in PE.

218. Attainment on entry to Year 9, as measured by records from partner schools and the PE department's own assessment procedures, is below average. Areas of weakness are identified quickly and a specific programme is put in place to improve pupils' level of fitness and skills. This, together with effective teaching, enables pupils to make good progress throughout the year. At age 14 pupils' attainment is at the nationally expected level for pupils of the same age. Attainment at age 16 is above national expectations for those pupils taking examinations, and satisfactory for those who are not. Last year the GCSE results in PE exceeded the national average with 70 per cent of pupils achieving A* to C grades, and all achieving grades A* to G. Overall standards in PE have improved since the last inspection. All pupils have the benefit of being taught by specialist teachers and they experience a good range of sporting activities during their time in the school.

219. In Year 9, pupils make good progress. In team games such as hockey, football and netball, they begin learning the skills and tactics required to play games with confidence and enjoyment, and demonstrate good use of space, footwork and control. Pupils increasingly take responsibility for their own performance by evaluating their learning and adapting their skills to new situations. In swimming, most pupils are water confident and improve in stroke technique, speed and stamina.

220. In Years 10 and 11 pupils continue to improve their skills in a number of games and activities. Tactics and strategies are understood well and demonstrated in matches, both in lessons and in sporting fixtures against other schools. This makes a positive contribution to pupils' social and moral development as they observe the rules of fair play, support one another and mix with others. In gymnastics pupils make good progress and were observed during the inspection working together in small groups designing and linking together a sequence of balances. They displayed a high degree of confidence in and reliance on each other. Timetabling constraints for those pupils not following examination courses limits the amount of coaching in some activities and reduces their access to a wider range of sporting experiences.

221. Pupils of all abilities are, if they wish, entered for examinations and they are well supported by experienced and caring staff. Many more boys than girls take the examinations. The department is putting appropriate measures in place to encourage girls to choose PE as one of their GCSE options. Scrutiny of pupils' written work shows a good understanding of the contribution that fitness and health make to physical activities. The quality and presentation of work varies, with the majority of pupils displaying a commitment to the organisation and satisfactory completion of written tasks.

222. The majority of pupils enjoy PE and their attitude to the subject is good. Pupils concentrate well and co-operate with staff and each other. On occasions, they take responsibility for aspects of their own learning by organising themselves into groups and teams and fetching and returning equipment as required. They warm up independently and understand the importance of preparing themselves for exercise. Pupils perform well in team and individual sporting competitions against other schools. There are many occasions when a significant number of pupils do not, for apparently legitimate reasons, participate in the planned lesson, and although they are given pre-determined, lesson related tasks to complete whilst the lesson is in progress, the pattern and frequency of individual pupils' non-participation in PE activities is not satisfactorily monitored.

223. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall in Years 9 to 11. Over half of the teaching was good or better, and some of it was very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. The range of teachers' individual expertise in the department provides pupils with well-informed and specialised teaching. Planning is good and takes into account the abilities

and prior experience of pupils, providing challenging tasks at various levels. Relationships are very good, giving pupils the confidence to ask questions and to try out new activities. Lesson objectives are clear, and appropriate activities are selected to enable pupils to make progress. Enthusiastic teaching and active demonstration of skills, for example passing the ball in netball, is reflected in the improvement of pupils' techniques and their enjoyment of the game. Pupils' individual expertise in badminton varies from good to unsatisfactory, with a significant number of pupils requiring coaching in basic skills. Good assessment of pupils' achievements allows weaknesses to be identified and recorded. This assists in improving pupils' performance and in selecting relevant revision topics in examination work. Teachers pay due attention to health and safety issues, encouraging pupils to think about their own and others' well being. Behaviour is generally good and teachers deal firmly and fairly with any indiscretions.

224. The curriculum and schemes of work are good with appropriate references made to links with other subjects. ICT is used well by pupils in the GCSE groups. They are confident in accessing the Internet to find information and examples to improve and supplement their work. Teachers in the department work well with the heads of department, who provide effective leadership and management, ensuring that improvements to the subject are identified, targeted and addressed. However both heads of department have other leadership responsibilities within the school. This, combined with there being two subject leaders, makes it difficult to provide the coherent and dynamic leadership required to improve further departmental performance.

225. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. The gymnasium and changing rooms are in poor decorative condition. A proposed new sports hall will benefit the department greatly. Not only will a wider range of activities be available to pupils, but the purpose built facilities will improve the status of the subject.

226. In order to facilitate further improvements to the department and to raise standards overall, the issue regarding responsibility for leadership and management needs to be addressed urgently. Facilities to provide a more pleasant environment and an enhanced range of activities require speedy development. More timetable allocation for non-examination groups in Year 11 would allow an increase in coaching and practice, thereby raising pupils' achievement and progress.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE)

Overall, the quality of provision in RE is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- The quality of teaching is good.
- Pupils have very positive attitudes and relationships are very good.
- The subject is managed with commendable enthusiasm and purpose.
- Excellent use is made of display and artefacts.
- Strong links have been forged with partner middle schools.
- The subject makes a very strong contribution to the personal development of pupils, particularly in the area of multicultural education.

Areas for improvement:

- Subject provision in Years 10 and 11 does not meet statutory requirements.
- Pupils need more opportunities to reflect on their progress at the end of lessons.
- Higher attaining pupils need more resources to develop independent learning skills, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is underdeveloped as a resource.

227. There have been no GCSE examination entries for this subject in recent years. In lessons seen and work analysed during the current inspection, standards are in line with those expected by the locally Agreed Syllabus by the time pupils reach the age of 14, and, for higher-attaining pupils, standards are above expectations.

228. The previous inspection report noted that provision for RE at this stage fell far short of the time recommended. This situation has now been rectified and, as a result, pupils in Year 9 acquire a good understanding of Christianity and other major world religions, despite the fact that many enter the school with a limited knowledge of the latter. They discuss their findings with confidence and maturity and also develop writing skills in depth. In this context, some very good extended writing on Sikhism was seen in Year 9 exercise books.

229. In Years 10 and 11, the subject is part of the PSHE programme and no religious elements were being taught during the week of the inspection. Judgement on standards is based, therefore, on an analysis of pupils' work and the overall standard is in line with the national average by the age of 16. Pupils show the capacity to examine moral issues, such as human rights and racism, and Year 10 pupils have produced some very powerful poems on the evils of racism. However, the time allocated for the subject at this stage falls far short of that recommended by the locally Agreed Syllabus and this has a negative effect on the development of subject skills, such as a deeper knowledge and understanding of spiritual issues. The school at present fails to provide pupils with their full entitlement to RE in Years 10 and 11, but the department has clear plans to rectify this urgent issue.

230. Provision for RE in the Sixth Form takes place through dedicated units in general studies and through a series of visits and conferences to investigate different belief systems. As a result, the school now meets statutory requirements at Post 16.

231. The quality of teaching is good. Lessons are planned thoroughly so that pupils know precisely what they are expected to do. However, they have insufficient time to reflect on their progress at the end of some lessons. Classroom management is very strong and teachers take care to ensure that all pupils are involved in the learning process. This was seen to very good effect in a Year 9 lesson during which pupils began work in small groups

on a project examining rites of passage in different religions. They were given very clear advice on how to approach their projects and, as a result, began their work with commitment and enthusiasm. A variety of techniques is used to motivate pupils, including group work, class discussion, short written tasks and the use of artefacts.

232. Higher-attaining pupils show maturity and confidence in their oral work, but lack sufficient opportunities to develop their independent learning skills in depth, especially in Years 10 and 11. Lower-attaining pupils, and those with SEN, are supported well with extra materials to suit their learning needs, and, as a result, they make good progress. Pupils show a keen interest in their studies and attitudes to work are very good. Relationships in the classroom are very positive and all pupils are eager to take part in debate and discussion. This was demonstrated well in a Year 9 lesson during which pupils examined Biblical texts such as the story of the Good Samaritan, and then discussed its contemporary relevance with maturity and sensitivity. Above all, pupils show respect for their teachers and for each other's opinions and this lends an air of purpose and enjoyment to lessons.

233. There are no subject specialist teachers for religious education, as was the case during the previous inspection and the head of department has other major responsibilities in the school. However, the subject is managed well with commendable enthusiasm and purpose, and good support is given to other colleagues who teach in the department. Improvements have been made in the use of assessment and there are now thorough monitoring procedures, which give pupils a clear idea about their progress. In Year 9, the very good resources promote learning and the range and use of artefacts are excellent. In Years 10 and 11, however, subject resources need improvement. The development of literacy skills is emphasised and the department makes a very strong contribution to the personal development of pupils, particularly in the area of multi-faith education. Very strong and productive links have been forged with partner middle schools to ensure continuity. There is, however, little use of ICT within the subject curriculum.

234. Overall, the subject has made good progress since the previous inspection, particularly in terms of provision for Year 9 pupils and in the development of resources and artefacts to support learning. The provision for the subject in Years 10 and 11, however, still fails to meet statutory requirements and this issue is now being addressed with urgency.

BUSINESS STUDIES

235. Two lessons were sampled in business studies in Years 10 and 11.

236. Standards were average overall but a higher proportion of students' work was at the higher grades of A* to C than is usual, representing good achievement. Year 10 students could explain the advantages and disadvantages of store loyalty cards as a means of sales promotion, and made good use of ICT to draw graphs of employment trends. Year 11 students' projects, posters and brochures on 'fair trade' tea were of above-average quality. Lessons encouraged students to develop good skills of independent research, providing a good basis for advanced level work. Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons were very good.

237. In the two lessons sampled teaching and learning were good, with several very good features: in the Year 11 lesson on government involvement, students were encouraged to work in small groups to produce posters on winners and losers from government aid. They developed very good team-work skills. Students' workbooks and projects were marked very constructively, so that they had clear targets for improvement. Homework was regularly set to incorporate research in local businesses.

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

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

239. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE AS Level courses

Subject	Number entered	per cent gaining grades A-E		per cent gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	3	67	62	0	15	1.00	1.51

GCE A Level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	per cent gaining grades A-E		per cent gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	14	93	87	43	43	6.00	5.80
Biology	7	100	88	29	34	5.71	5.25
Chemistry	6	100	90	33	43	6.00	5.90
Physics	4	75	88	25	40	4.50	5.67
Design Technology	11	73	91	9	30	3.27	5.38
Business	3	N/A	N/A-	N/A	N/A	8.00	10.45
Economics	11	91	89	45	36	5.64	5.52
PE Studies	7	100	92	14	25	4.29	5.09
Art and Design	16	94	96	88	46	8.75	6.57
Music	1	100	93	0	35	4.00	5.74
Drama	9	100	99	22	38	6.67	6.59
Geography	14	100	92	21	38	5.29	5.74
History	4	100	88	25	35	4.50	5.45
English Literature	1	100	95	0	37	2.00	5.91
English Language	14	86	92	14	30	4.29	5.28
French	6	67	89	17	38	4.00	5.59

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

240. The focus of the inspection was on mathematics and physics, but lessons in biology and chemistry were also sampled. The quality of teaching in both biology and chemistry was at least good and sometimes very good or excellent, and in both subjects students were

seen applying a high level of intellectual effort. The quality of work seen in lessons was at least good and in an excellent Year 12 chemistry lesson on the properties of alkanes, the teacher's enthusiasm and excellent subject knowledge inspired students to produce work of really high quality. Year 13 students, who were challenged at a high level on the applications of the concept of chirality, made very good gains in both understanding and knowledge of an important chemical idea, as well as gaining familiarity with its importance to us all. Much of the work seen in biology related to investigative tasks. As in chemistry, students' very good application led to really good learning of ideas and techniques of wide applicability across the subject and science more generally, as well as improving their biological knowledge.

Mathematics

The quality of provision in mathematics is very good.

Strengths:

- GCE A Level mathematics results are above average and better than most other subjects.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge and understanding of mathematics and teach very effectively.
- Students have very positive attitudes to the subject and appreciate the individual help provided.

Areas for improvement:

- The use of ICT to support students learning.
- The co-ordination of the key skill of application of number across the curriculum.

241. When they start their Sixth Form mathematics course students' standards are broadly comparable with the national average. In order for students to achieve a reasonable standard in GCE AS-Level the department has taken the conscious and apt decision to delay the completion of the course until the early part of Year 13. This has created a better balance to the two-year GCE A-Level course and should avoid any potential discontent caused by students achieving poor results because they have taken GCE AS-Level modules prematurely.

242. GCE A-Level mathematics results in 2001 were above average although with fewer candidates than in earlier years. Nearly half of the entry achieved grades A or B, better than most other subjects. Results over time are fairly consistent with minor peaks and troughs. A healthy number of girls choose mathematics and achieve results comparable to those of boys. GCE A-Level mathematics continues to be a popular subject with the number of students studying the subject beginning to rise again with the present Year 12.

243. Inspection evidence shows that by the end of Year 13 students' attainment is above average. They can find the n th term and sum of arithmetic and geometric progressions, understand and use the binomial theorem and complete a decimal search for iteration. They have a firm grasp of standard methods of differentiation, such as the product rule. In some cases, students make errors in manipulating logarithms and in finding areas under curves by integration. In statistics, students determine the variance of a distribution, calculate rank correlation and produce regression lines. In mechanics, they answer questions involving equations of motion and apply the underlying mathematics to impulse and momentum in practical examples. Further mathematics students are highly competent in using staircase and cobweb diagrams to support the calculus required to find accurate roots of various equations by numerical methods.

244. Students' attitudes to the subject are very positive. They work diligently on tasks, contribute articulately to discussions and take significant responsibility for planning and organising their work. They are enthusiastic and interested in the subject as a result of the teachers' own enthusiasm. Rapport amongst students in the classes is very good. Students appreciate the care that teachers take to mark their work and to provide prompt feedback on it, either individually or in a whole class setting. They are able to track their progress through the course effectively by the system of half term tests.

245. Teaching and learning are very good, so that students make rapid headway through the course and achieve well. Any problems students encounter are swiftly and competently answered because teachers have excellent command of the subject and are enthusiastic about it. They are particularly good at stimulating and maintaining students' interest in mathematics by careful preparation and competent delivery. For example, a very successful Year 12 statistics session was very much enhanced by the use of raw data from two tests previously taken by the students. Students started by analysing the data before realising its origin; once they did their interest and motivation was boosted significantly. Teachers draw very effectively on their own GCE examining experience to hone students' future A-Level performance. Lessons move at a rapid pace and are very challenging for students who respond actively in the discussions that are generated. Although on most occasions teachers try to involve all students in discussion, there are times when higher-attaining students dominate, leaving others in their wake.

246. Leadership is strong. There is a strong commitment in the department to very high standards and teachers give freely of their time to helping students realise their potential. Although the department has experienced serious staffing difficulties these have hardly affected Sixth Form provision, so that standards have been maintained in all respects bar two: the use of ICT is under-developed; students apply numeracy capably but the key skill lacks co-ordination across the curriculum. Students were seen applying number in several Sixth Form subjects: in geography students analyse and interpret data, calculate the gross national product per unit of population and apply various statistical tests effectively. In business studies, students have good graphical skills: they determine rates of return on project investments and analyse economic trends competently. In science, students determine the critical angle to operate an endoscope and calculate the refraction index.

Physics

Overall, the quality of provision in physics is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Teachers' good subject knowledge leads to very good exposition and explanations in most lessons.
- Pupils are challenged appropriately and expected to demonstrate a high level of intellectual and creative effort.
- Question and answer sessions are used skilfully to build students' understanding of physical concepts.

Areas for improvement:

- The use of learning objectives defined in terms of skills to focus students' minds on the purpose of the lesson.
- The use of frequent and rigorous assessment to monitor students' progress and provide feedback to them and to teachers.
- The implementation of the management re-structuring as it relates to the effective leadership of physics.

247. The school sets entry requirements for Sixth Form courses in physics and the attainment of students on entry is above average, with some having gained the highest grades in GCSE. Numbers of students taking the subject have been small in the recent past, and results in GCE Advanced and AS Level examinations have varied considerably. Comparisons with national data are unreliable as a result. However, few students have gained the highest grades and the quality of the work they produce in lessons is sometimes below expectation.

248. Of the four lessons seen, teaching was excellent in one, very good in another and good in the third. In the remaining lesson, teaching was poor. In those lessons where teaching was at least good, two of which were about the medical applications of physics, learning matched the quality of teaching. Students were fully engaged with the subject, and were keen to grow in their understanding of the ideas underlying what they were studying. For example, in a lesson on the operation and use of an endoscope in medicine, students carefully undertook an experiment on critical angle so that they were able better to understand the medical application of the instrument as well as improving practical skills. In another lesson on medical physics, the teacher made very good use of resources such as X-ray photographs in explaining how radiotherapy can be used to treat cancers. In both these lessons, the balance between the application and the underlying physical concepts was very good and the lesson never lapsed into general knowledge. In an excellent Year 12 lesson on the collection and evaluation of quantitative experimental data, a simple task was used to give students a very good insight into the nature of different types of error, and the techniques available for controlling them.

249. In the lesson where teaching was poor, the teacher spent a large proportion of the lesson showing students how to answer mechanics questions which they had already attempted in a test. In this lesson, the teacher paid insufficient attention to the underlying techniques for solving problems, preferring to concentrate on the method for arriving at a solution to the particular test questions. Students clearly found it difficult to apply these principles more generally.

250. In lessons where teaching is good, very good or excellent, the impact on students' learning usually results in progress and achievement being at least good, as described in the examples already given. However, in the lesson where teaching was poor, there was insufficient commitment to provide students with a framework within which they could learn and, therefore, progress and achievement were also poor. Overall, therefore, progress is satisfactory.

251. Written work produced by students is, for the most part, carefully marked. Comments are constructive and helpful. But students in physics acknowledge that they have difficulty in assessing their own progress, and teachers need to support them much more effectively if they are to achieve high grades, by frequent and regular tests based on national standards together with constructive feedback.

252. Procedures and line management of the subject have changed recently as a result of the restructuring of the science department, and this has undoubtedly led to some uncertainty for both staff and students. Raising the levels of attainment in physics, to bring them into line with those in other sciences must be a priority for the head of science. Assessment and monitoring of learning already take place in other areas of science and the department needs to consider how the procedures can best be used to support high quality learning in physics. Students themselves have concerns about the subject and these need to be taken into account in the development of the subject over the coming months.

253. On a day-to day basis the department is well run. Laboratories are spacious and have recently been refurbished. The department is adequately resourced and equipment is well maintained by efficient and knowledgeable laboratory staff. Health and safety requirements are meticulously observed.

254. Since the last inspection, the science department has been reorganised and staff now have changed responsibilities. Results have remained broadly constant, taking into account normal variations from year to year. Although organisational changes have been made, these have not yet been reflected in improvement in the examination grades gained by students. Until clear lines of responsibility are established, with a vision for the progress of the subject, leadership and management overall are unsatisfactory.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

255. There was no detailed focus in this area of work during the inspection but two DT courses were sampled: DT product design (resistant materials) and home economics (food and nutrition).

256. In resistant materials the overall provision is satisfactory. In 2001 GCE Advanced Level results were below average and very few students gained the higher A and B grades. GCE AS Level results were poor and only one student chose to continue in Year 13. Students currently in Year 12 are reaching standards that are in line with the average. Given their below average attainment on entry to the course and the deficits in their skill base, achievement is satisfactory. However, individual research lacks depth, design briefs and specifications are relatively unsophisticated and practical and independent working skills are not well developed. Teaching is satisfactory and uses well the good subject knowledge which teachers have. There is need, however, for students to develop greater independence in their work and a higher level of practical skills. Students have positive views about the course and feel that they made a smooth transition from GCSE to the demands of AS Level work.

257. In food and nutrition the overall provision is good. The GCE AS Level results in 2001 were encouraging for this re-introduced subject. Standards in work and lessons seen are above average. Students have good background knowledge of the subject, understand and use the technical vocabulary well, and can apply this to current work, for example, the effects of diet and nutritional content of food on various medical conditions. Students use ICT skills confidently. Teaching is very good and maintains a brisk pace and consistent challenge.

BUSINESS

Business studies

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

Strengths:

- Teachers have good subject expertise of business and industry, and their enthusiastic approach keeps students interested and well motivated.
- Lesson planning is good, with a mix of theory and practical tasks.
- Teachers have very supportive relationships with students and monitor their potential well.
- Teachers' constructive marking helps students make good progress over time.
- Business students are among those working on Young Enterprise projects.

Areas for improvement:

- Students do not use ICT enough for financial spreadsheets.
- There is too little use of visits, speakers and work placements to enrich students' learning.
- Day-to-day targets for improvement are not always given in lessons.

258. Courses currently run in the Sixth Form are GCE AS and Advanced Level business studies, and AVCE business studies. No intermediate courses currently operate.

259. GCE Advanced Level standards were in line with the national average in 2001. Nearly all students passed, and the proportion gaining the top grades of A and B was above average. Students' results were above national but below the school average, and all but one of the candidates was male. Year 13 portfolio projects seen were of a good standard, and students evaluated specific business problems in local companies clearly. The highest-attaining students analysed consumer surveys effectively with computer-produced graphs and well-written evaluations. Nearly all students progress well from their GCSE starting points, where most had already attained a good GCSE grade in business studies. In 2001 several students obtained B grades that were above teachers' predictions. Very few students drop out, and several go on to study business at local universities. It is not possible to judge improvement since the last inspection, as the subject was not reported on.

260. Results in the new GCE AS Level examination were disappointing in 2001, with the percentage of grades A and B well below school and national expectations, and achievement being, at the most, satisfactory. Course arrangements this year have been considerably improved in the light of that experience.

261. Current students are achieving well in lessons and the work seen. Most students re-sitting modules have improved their grades. Standards for male and female students are broadly in line with course expectations at this stage. The oral skills of most students are above average in lessons. Students in Year 13 make good progress. Work seen was average, except that ICT was not used enough to set up spreadsheet models of costs and profits in cash-flow charts. However, most students used ICT well to draw clear, well-

labelled graphs, and provided useful SWOT analyses of firms' marketing positions. In a very good Year 13 lesson, students showed very good critical understanding of how companies managed organisational change. Their portfolio projects were well researched from Internet data, and were clearly written, although some spelling errors remained uncorrected. GCE AS and Advanced Level students did not make enough use of visits to industry or work experience to enrich their analyses. A small number found some difficulty with the interpretation and analysis of numerical and statistical data.

262. Results in the advanced GNVQ business course were below average expectations in 2001, although all three students passed the course and one obtained a distinction grade. It is not statistically possible, however, to make valid national comparisons. When account is taken of the students' GCSE grades at the start of the course, their progress is good. The course has been replaced by AVCE, which has more rigorous external tests. The achievement of current AVCE students in Year 12 lessons and work seen is good. In a very good lesson seen, students plotted product life cycles of famous brands on graphs, and quickly applied extension strategies to the brands. Students' course work notes on financial accounts were well organised, and, when questioned, most students defined key concepts such as 'break-even' well. Students who have not taken GCSE in business found it difficult to explain why firms need to launch new products to ease cash flow problems. Year 13 students had conducted their own market research on the town's tourist brochure and had made a very effective presentation, using computer-generated slides, to a delegation of local councillors and officials.

263. The overall quality of teaching and learning was good in lessons observed, and in over half it was very good. Teachers' very good subject knowledge and enthusiasm underpinned class discussions, and lessons had clear aims and good pace. In a GCE AS Level lesson where teaching was very good, the teacher asked well-focused questions to consolidate previous learning and apply concepts to topical case studies. Students' enthusiastic responses helped them to develop good critical understanding of the consequences of poor motivation in different businesses. Teachers provided frequent opportunities for students to engage in animated and constructive discussion to reinforce theory.

264. Lessons had a good mix of activities, combining individual and paired work. GCE AS and Advanced Level business and economics students used computers well for their homework, but not in lessons, because computers were not easily available. Generally, over time, teachers help students develop good key skills, although no group oral presentations to develop team skills were seen in the sampled lessons. Teachers used good topical case studies to develop effectively students' problem solving and decision-making skills. Teachers had very supportive relationships with students and this helped students gain interest and enthusiasm for business. Students worked very well together both individually and in pairs to complete their tasks and generally showed mature attitudes in discussion. In the AVCE lessons seen, students showed a good capacity to work independently. Most included relevant research from web sites and part-time jobs, and Year 13 students gained particularly good database skills.

265. Teachers' thorough assessment procedures are closely linked to examination requirements. Marking is thorough, constructive and regular, and clear targets are given to help students improve, although not always in lessons. This meant, for example, that some students lost an opportunity to sharpen up their draft definitions by using word processing because their drafts were not checked. Students' progress is well monitored over time, with their performance continually measured against predicted grades. Twice-yearly work reviews help students evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses well, and provide them with focused targets for improvement.

266. Leadership and management of business courses are good: the newly appointed co-ordinator has re-written schemes of work to meet fully examination requirements, but they require further development to incorporate closer links with local business. The school plans to discuss additional work placements for AVCE students with the local education and business partnership. A clear sense of direction has been shown by the well-planned introduction of new AVCE, AS and A2 courses during a time when there were several staff changes. The possibly cost-effective combination of AVCE and GCE AS Level teaching in Year 12 is being reviewed. The department is in a good position to help the school introduce more 14-19 vocational courses.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

Strengths:

- Pupils' very good achievement in Intermediate GNVQ.
- The very good quality of teaching.
- Good relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils.

Areas for improvement:

- To extend the range of ICT courses available to pupils to allow progression from GCSE.
- Staff training in the use of ICT.
- Increase access to ICT facilities for subject teaching.
- Develop the use of e-mail to support learning.

267. The standards in the Intermediate GNVQ course are very good. In 2001, results were good with one third of candidates gaining merits. The standards of work observed in the present Year 12 were very good and pupils are achieving well in terms of their prior attainment. Pupils seen working on the unit to teach understanding of hardware and software could explain their work articulately and in detail, showing that they had a good knowledge of the subject and were enthusiastic about their studies. Accurate information was given about all aspects of input devices and students evaluated the quality of their work as a matter of course.

268. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. The GNVQ course is planned in detail; students are well informed about the learning objectives of their lessons; supporting materials are appropriate to students' attainment; and extension work is available at all times. Although students are highly motivated and have impressive independent learning skills, the teachers constantly question and challenge them to ensure that a good pace is maintained in lessons. The amount of work students completed in their own time was good and reflected the positive work ethic of both teachers and students. The students were also able to discuss the use of ICT in the work place.

269. Overall, the quality of leadership and management is very good. The ICT co-ordinator is well qualified and a NOF trainer. The schemes of work and teaching materials are prepared with meticulous detail. All the work produced by students is marked in detail with clear indications of what students need to do to improve. A lesson observed with a Year 12 group, introducing an assignment in which students had to analyse data relating to the finances of a company, displayed all the strategies needed to promote high standards; students were given a clear exposition of the task; time was taken to discuss planning; and they were guided into thinking in a critical way about the task, and to evaluate each stage of the creation of a spreadsheet.

270. In Years 12 and 13, students use ICT in a range of subjects. All students are able to use word processing software and access the Internet as a research tool. A majority are also able to create their own spreadsheets. An example of good practice was seen in business studies where students were evaluating the quality of websites created by a range of companies, and this led to discussion of the ethical use of advertising techniques on the web. Year 13 students were also observed researching higher-education courses through the Internet. The PE department also uses a range of software to support its courses. All students seen using ICT facilities were working sensibly and using programs that were appropriate to the task. There are areas for further development in ICT in Years 12 and 13 that would enhance students' learning opportunities, especially in the areas of e-mail and conferencing. These could be used, for example, to broaden the experience of pupils studying business studies and MFL.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

271. This area of work was not the subject of special focus. However, work in PE was sampled. Sixth Form students' attainment and progress are satisfactory overall. The majority of students have access to recreational physical activities, both in school and at venues in the locality, although the time and staffing allocated to the subject is limited. The additional time provided for students studying the subject at A Level enables them to make better progress. Only a small number of candidates are entered in the examination and the results are just below the national average.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

272. The detailed focus in this area of work during the inspection was on art and design, but lessons in music and drama were also sampled.

273. Provision of music in the Sixth Form is good overall. Examination results have been static over recent years, standing just below national average. Students embarking on GCE Advanced Level Music have found the leap from GCSE to GCE Advanced Level much wider than they had anticipated. Currently attainment in the Sixth Form is average and achievement satisfactory, but there is some indication that standards will rise over the next few years. In the two lessons observed, teaching was good. As in the main school, students' understanding needs to be checked more often.

274. Drama was sampled during the inspection. Results in the most recent A-Level examination were in line with national averages and represented good achievement. All students achieved a pass grade, but fewer than average reached the higher grades A and B. One lesson was observed and a sample of written work was analysed. Attainment seen was above average, both in the practical presentations prepared for the examination moderator and in the quality of written work in students' folders. Teaching is very good and the course is extremely well organised.

Art and design

Overall, the quality of provision for art and design is very good.

Strengths:

- The impact of very good teaching on encouraging students' independent learning.
- Teachers' guidance and support for students through assessment.
- Leadership and management provide a clear direction for teachers and students.

Areas for improvement:

- Accommodation.
- Opportunities for rigour in the development of observational drawing skills.
- Opportunities for students to work with artists.

275. Standards at the end of Sixth Form are well above national average expectations and have risen steadily over the past three years. In 1999, nearly half of the students entered gained A and B grades at GCE Advanced Level; in 2000, nearly two-thirds of students gained A and B grades and in 2001, nearly nine-tenths of students gained A and B grades. The standards of work observed during the inspection were also well above the national average.

276. Achievement in the Sixth Form is very good. Students become confident in applying conceptual thinking to practical work, understand how to analyse artists' techniques and apply them selectively to their own work. Students are able to make independent decisions about how to pursue themes and starting points. They engage in successful experimentation with materials, especially when using collage materials and textiles and produce exciting results. Sketchbooks are visually compelling and rich in ideas and reflection. However, there need to be more opportunities for developing accurate, large-scale observational drawings and for bringing students into contact with the professional art world by working with artists.

277. Teaching is very good, providing students with frameworks within which they are challenged to take responsibility for developing their skills and knowledge. Detailed planning for assignments creates a clear structure within which students can pursue an individual direction. Regular individual tutorials provide students with clearly explained, negotiated targets. The system for teachers' written feedback in students' sketchbooks provides very clear guidance on how work can be developed. Feedback is specific and constructive.

278. Relationships are very good and enable productive learning to take place. Students develop mature and mutually respectful dialogue with teachers, providing a good opportunity for each party to ensure that the need for further developmental work is clearly appreciated. The use of detailed notes affixed to sketchbooks ensured that students would remember the outcome to discussions.

279. Leadership and management of the subject at Sixth Form level are excellent and ensure that students are provided with a consistently positive and productive experience in the art department. Accommodation for Sixth Form art students is unsatisfactory. There is no dedicated Sixth Form work area and access to the art rooms in study periods is determined by their use by other classes. The classroom furnishing and lack of space to leave ongoing work inhibits the sort of studio practice that sixth-form students should be developing.

HUMANITIES

280. The focus of the inspection was on geography and history.

Geography

Overall, the quality of provision for geography is good.

Strengths:

- Standards in GCE Advanced Level are above average.
- The quality of teaching and learning is consistently good.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to the subject.
- The curriculum is of good quality and is enhanced by good fieldwork opportunities.

Areas for improvement:

- Schemes of work – including the use of ICT.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning.

281. Students enter geography courses in the Sixth Form with standards that are above average. They work hard to make the transition from GCSE to GCE AS Level work and are successful in developing knowledge, understanding and skills that meet course expectations by the end of the first term of their course.

282. In the recent past, the department has suffered from the lack of a stable teaching team and this is reflected in some gaps in pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills as well as in fluctuations in standards. Standards by the end of the A-Level course are above average for those gaining grades in the A to E range. The proportion gaining the higher A to B grades, however, is below average. Similarly, the average points score was generally below average. However, the number of students entered means that results need to be interpreted with caution.

283. The above-average standards are confirmed in the work seen during the inspection. Year 12 students show good levels of understanding of the areas of possible conflict in the management of, for example, National Parks. This was especially apparent when students were looking at a range of issues, including rural diversification schemes and the implications of using public rather than private transport. They also show a keen understanding of Burgess' model of urbanisation, can offer a clear analysis of his work and are able to present arguments, supported by evidence, about the extent to which current planning of urban areas are either an extension or a rejection of his basic premises. In both of these areas of their work, students' depth of understanding of the complexity of rural and urban planning was impressive. It also demonstrated the extent to which they were aware of the range of difficulties that need to be appreciated before arriving at any critical conclusions.

284. In Year 13, students grappled with two case studies, one on the impact of a natural hazard in a less economically developed country and the other in a more economically developed country. Some students found this demanding because of significant knowledge gaps, but the good teaching and the range of resources used enabled these difficulties to be overcome and understanding secured. Their progress was marked and their critical appraisal of the responses by authorities in both countries contributed to their understanding of critical factors involved in dealing with hazard management. Overall, progress and achievement were good.

285. Standards of literacy are well above average and higher-order writing skills are being developed, especially in Year 13. Most students have developed an appropriate style and

register for their writing, although some need to improve the spelling of basic vocabulary. Standards of numeracy are good. Students interpret statistical information with accuracy and have a good understanding of the geographical implications of the data. They can apply various tests of validity to a range of data and present information in a variety of forms. Their ICT skills are well developed and used regularly in presenting work and longer assignments.

286. Students have very good attitudes to learning. They are highly committed to the subject, are well organised and motivated, appreciate the opportunity to contribute to, as well as benefit from, the well-planned teaching and learning. Many appreciate not only the valuable opportunities for fieldwork, but also the quality of the relationships they enjoy with their teachers and the significant amount of time they are given to help them improve their work.

287. The quality of teaching was good in all lessons. Lessons are very well planned and take account of the range of students in each group. Expectations were clear and students were constantly challenged by the teaching, and by the class and homework tasks they were set. In many cases, lessons stimulated discussions about, for instance, the different response authorities might make in the event of an earthquake or volcanic activity and the extent to which economic factors might determine the level and nature of that response. In one group, students worked well in pairs to enable each to contribute to areas of knowledge and understanding lacking in the other. The well-qualified specialist teachers provided important stimulus throughout the lessons. The carefully designed tasks that the students explored enabled good progress to be made.

288. Homework assignments are regularly set, carefully marked and comments help students to understand what they need to do to improve the standard and quality of their work. Their attainment and progress is carefully monitored and the evaluation of their work and agreed targets in Sixth Form reviews contribute to further progress. Assessment is well used to inform curriculum and lesson planning.

289. The geography department is well managed by the recently appointed head of subject. The geography team of Sixth Form teachers is working hard to ensure that students are well prepared for their examinations and that their knowledge and understanding are secure.

290. The curriculum is well conceived and is complemented by well-planned fieldwork and supported by a good range of learning resources. The library is well used by sixth-form geography students. Departmental planning is of good quality and the identified priorities have enabled the teaching team to focus on the immediate improvements that needed to be made. The sixth-form schemes of work still need to be completed and further opportunities for the use of ICT identified. This hardworking department has achieved much, in a very short time.

History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is good.

Strengths:

- The quality of teaching and learning.
- Support for students.
- Attitudes to the subject.

Areas for improvement:

- Inconsistent results of higher attaining students.
- The use of ICT for research.
- Resources.

291. Until the current year relatively few students chose to study history in the Sixth Form. Every student sitting the examination over the past two years has obtained a pass grade, which is above the national average. The proportion of students gaining grades A and B has fluctuated wildly; in 1999 no students did so, but in 2000, five out of seven did, which is twice the national average. In 2001, one pupil obtained a B grade. In the 2001 AS examination all candidates passed and five obtained grades A and B.

292. Standards in work and lessons seen are above the national average. Students make good progress in building up well-organised files of detailed notes, although errors in spelling persist. They display good study and communication skills in making oral presentations on topics they have researched independently. Students demonstrate convincing strengths in extended writing; the majority write fluently and logically employing a wide range of appropriate and specialist vocabulary, and a mastery of historical detail. They analyse and evaluate contemporary documents well and comment perceptively on objectivity and reliability. In studying questions such as G R Elton's hypothesis that Thomas Cromwell transformed the nature of government and the revisionists' response to it, students acquire a good understanding of different interpretations of history. In a lesson on Anglo-French relations, a student showed a good grasp of Elizabeth's political acumen when he observed that "she liked to play both sides". Students make little use of ICT as a research tool but assignments are quite often word-processed.

293. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and prepare their students well for public examinations. They undertake detailed marking of essays and include a wealth of comment to highlight error, indicate scope for extension or improvement, and challenge conclusions, although they sometimes overlook rather elementary errors in spelling. Students' attitudes to the subject are very positive, which, together with the close monitoring of, and support for individual students, results in good learning. Good classroom relationships mean that students can test uncertain knowledge publicly without fear of rebuff.

294. The subject is well managed and led and students benefit from a valuable blend of experience, subject expertise and enthusiasm. Resources are adequate but there is scope for a wider variety and quantity of texts, particularly if the majority of current GCE AS Level students continue into the second year of study.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

295. The focus of the inspection was on English and French.

English

Overall, the quality of provision in English is good.

Strengths:

- Students achieve well in discussion and group work.
- Teaching is effective: teachers know their subject well and communicate their enthusiasm to the students.
- The subject is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement:

- Improvement in the quality of students' writing.

296. The school offers a course in English literature leading to GCE qualifications at AS and A Level. The course is popular: there are currently fifteen students in Year 13 and thirty-five in Year 12. Girls greatly outnumber boys. The students have a wide range of prior attainment as measured by GCSE results in all the groups.

297. Standards achieved in the most recent GCE AS and Advanced Level examinations were below national averages, but in previous years they have been in line, with an appropriate number of students gaining A and B grades.

298. Observation of lessons during the inspection showed that in discussion students are reaching standards expected for Sixth Form examinations. In lessons for two different groups in Year 13, students compared the novels: *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson and *The Colour Purple* by Alice Walker. Each group found its own approach – in one case an exploration of associations aroused by the two colours, and in the other a more factual account of similarities and differences in plot and characterisation. Students were very familiar with the texts and were therefore able to refer freely and usefully to narrative and to style.

299. Both groups seen in Year 12 were studying modern poetry. Those reading the poetry of Larkin had reached a stage where they were able to discuss characteristics of theme and style. They were knowledgeable and articulate and in their presentations of the poems conveyed great enjoyment of the work. Students in the other group were studying for the first time *Under the Motorway* by U. A. Fanthorpe. They attacked the work with enthusiasm and confidence, with very good insight into meaning and perceptive comment on style.

300. The standard of essay writing is less impressive than students' oral work and, with a small number of exceptions, is generally below the standard required to reach the higher A-Level grades. All students write with conviction, but many of them have still to learn how to express clearly and adequately the sophisticated ideas that arise in class discussion. The levels of accuracy in writing formal correct English are not high enough.

301. Teaching is good overall: some of it is very good and some of it is excellent. The course is well structured and all lessons have pace and purpose and are carefully prepared. Teachers are skilful in their handling of discussion: they allow the students free rein to explore impressions and ideas but they always make certain that final conclusions are well founded

and relevant to the topic. Approaches to the work are varied and imaginative. The lesson on Larkin was highly structured to ensure that students participated fully; individual poems were allocated to pairs of students who were required to analyse and then present them to the rest of the group. In another lesson, the study of a Fanthorpe poem was preceded by a starter activity in which students made a chart of their lifetime reading experience. The teacher and the trainee teacher, who were jointly leading the lesson, very skilfully, through enjoyable interaction, directed the focus on to the experience of, and the reason for, reading and writing poetry.

302. Marking of students' work is very thorough. Teachers annotate essays extensively, mainly commenting on content, and there is always a final comment giving clear advice on areas for improvement. However, students would benefit from more precise attention to individual tone and style in order to produce the kind of writing that the examination requires.

303. Leadership and management of the Sixth Form work are good. The head of department shares the teaching across the full time members of the team, all of whom follow the closely planned course. There is conscious recognition of the need to provide opportunities for personal reflection and for the continuing exploration of spiritual and moral values. Two teachers share the work of each sixth-form English class. This approach draws fully on the specialist interests of the team, gives the students variety of style and viewpoint and provides professional development for the staff.

Modern Foreign Languages (MFL)

304. The focus was on French, but two lessons of German were also observed and students' written work was seen. Standards are as yet below average but set to improve as the GCSE standards rise. Numbers are still small. Teaching is good; both German teachers are native speakers and use their knowledge of the language and culture to create a good atmosphere for learning at an appropriate level. Students learn well and are now using the Internet for research purposes. Their achievement is satisfactory.

French

Overall, the quality of provision in French is satisfactory.

Strengths:

- Good teaching in the French language.
- Students with grade C at GCSE are included.
- New Sixth Form link with a Paris school established.
- Good co-operation with other local secondary schools.

Area for improvement:

- The use of ICT for research and communication purposes.
- Links with Business Studies.

305. The GCE Advanced Level results in 2001 were below average; one candidate out of six achieved a grade B but two failed. Over the previous three years results were above average but the student numbers declined from eleven to three. In 2001, GCE AS Level results were well below average. In future students will take four terms to prepare for GCE AS Level.

306. The standards of work of the current students have still some way to go for all to reach A Level standards. Three candidates with modest GCSE results are doing well to keep up with those whose prior attainment is higher. All students have good listening and speaking skills in response to teaching in the French language from two teachers and a French *assistant*. In one Year 13 lesson observed, students were able to talk confidently in French about AIDS, including the social and moral dimensions. Reading skills are in line with course expectations, but writing is weaker. In terms of their writing skills, students have found the transition from GCSE to AS Level daunting, but teachers have worked out both short and long term strategies to help them.

307. Numbers in Year 12 have increased to 25 students, all but two female. This has meant the provision of two separate teaching groups, allowing French to be taken in combination with a wider range of other subjects than previously. A small language laboratory, which has been recently refurbished, provides good scope for independent learning, contributing further to the development of speaking and listening skills. The library is a further useful resource now including CD ROMs in French.

308. Teaching in four of the five lessons seen was good, and in one it was very good. In the Year 13 lesson about AIDS, where teaching was very good, the task was extremely challenging and required students to construct sentences about contemporary social issues. In a Year 12 lesson where teaching was good, the teacher's planning ensured that all four skills were involved leading to good learning. Teachers are well versed in the course specifications and give appropriate guidance through their assessment of students' written work. There is already some use of ICT and students have appropriate skills, but in this aspect of the work there is scope for further development for research and communication purposes. Strategic planning could be enhanced by links with business studies, which could possibly attract more male students.

309. Students learn well. They are motivated and used to independent work. Many have worked hard to overcome disappointing AS results. They interact well with the teacher and with each other. A number are taking part in the school's new link with a school at Suresnes, west of Paris, and some have already had experience of Berkhamsted's twin town of Beaune. These links are possible because of good co-operation with other local secondary schools. Experience of direct contact with French families contributes to students' learning and personal development.

310. The head of department, two and a half years in post, is giving strong leadership and has already brought about a large increase in student numbers. This has been achieved without a reduction in standards, which are if anything higher in Year 12 than in Year 13. He is succeeding in motivating staff and students.