

INSPECTION REPORT

**NORTHGATE HIGH SCHOOL
and DEREHAM SIXTH FORM COLLEGE**

Dereham, Norwich

LEA area: Norfolk

Unique reference number: 121151

Headteacher: Mr J Smith

Reporting inspector: W Keast
1522

Dates of inspection: 3 - 7 December 2001

Inspection number: 243013

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

© Crown copyright 2002

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Northgate Dereham Norfolk
Postcode:	NR19 2EU
Telephone number:	01362 697033
Fax number:	01362 698484
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs D Price
Date of previous inspection:	12 June 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1522	W Keast	Registered inspector	Computing	
9537	C Marsden	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development. How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
22426	J Lovgreen	Team inspector	Theatre studies	
2501	R Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art	
1292	V Foster	Team inspector	Mathematics	
3525	RPJ McGregor	Team inspector	Physics	How well are pupils taught?
31139	J Judson	Team inspector	English	
27719	P Metcalf	Team inspector	Further mathematics	
30433	C Corp	Team inspector	Chemistry	How well does the school care for its pupils?
2496	A O'Sullivan	Team inspector	French	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
30800	B Colley	Team inspector	Sports studies	
22042	J Challands	Team inspector	Geography	
30893	M Currie	Team inspector	History	
2495	B Munden	Team inspector	Design and technology	
10761	P Willan	Team inspector	Sociology	
2396	M Davidson	Team inspector	Biology	
1352	J Carnaghan	Team inspector		The school's results and achievements. How well is the school led and managed?

The inspection contractor was: e-Qualitas Ltd
Langshaw
Pastens Road
Limpsfield Chart
Oxted
Surrey
RH8 0RE

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor.
Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Complaints Manager
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
 ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	
 PART B: COMMENTARY	
 WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	14
 WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	19
 WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	19
 PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	20
 PART D: THE SIXTH FORM	25
 RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS	25
 STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	26
 TEACHING AND LEARNING	26
 CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS	28
 THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS	29
 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM	30
 PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	32

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Northgate High School is a mixed comprehensive school for pupils aged 11 to 18. With 945 pupils on roll, the school is similar in size to many secondary schools. A very small number of pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. There are seven pupils for whom English is an additional language and two of these are at an early stage of learning the language. The proportion of pupils on the special educational needs register (16.6 per cent) and the proportion with a statement of need (3.1 per cent) are both broadly average. The main needs of pupils for whom the school involves external support relate to learning and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of pupils eligible for a free school meal (10.7 per cent) is broadly average. Where judgements are made in this report comparing results to those in similar schools, this refers to schools where between nine and thirteen per cent of pupils are eligible for free school meals. Twenty four pupils joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission last year and thirty five left. This comparatively large number is linked with the change in the regiment stationed at a nearby barracks. The school generally accepts more pupils than its agreed admission limit. The area around the school is socially and economically mixed and average overall. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is broadly average.

Neatherd school with Northgate school share and jointly manage Dereham sixth form college. Many of the pupils, after successfully completing their GCSE work, go on to take AS, A2, AVCE and GNVQ courses at the college. Staff from both schools teach the courses, using the specialist facilities available at this separate site.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This a very effective school. Numbers are rising. Current standards in all stages are above average. The headteacher and other senior staff, including the director of the sixth form, provide excellent leadership and the school is very well managed. The quality of the education provided by the school, particularly the teaching, is very good. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good as is the atmosphere within the school. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve well as a result of their very good attitudes to learning
- Has a very effective strategy for teaching and developing pupils' literacy skills
- Provides very good teaching and learning
- Provides pupils with very good opportunities to develop as individuals and with a broad range of subject choices
- Provides very good pastoral support for all pupils and prepares them well for the future
- Excellent leadership and management of the headteacher, governors and key staff have resulted in very good improvement since the previous inspection

What could be improved

There are no major weaknesses in the main school for pupils aged eleven to sixteen. The school will wish to continue to tackle the issues which have already been identified by the school and are mentioned in the text of the report. In the sixth form, subject management needs to improve and this is referred to in the sixth form report.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in June 1997. The improvement since then has been very good. The reported strengths have been maintained. All the previous key issues have been tackled and most have been resolved. The school day has been lengthened and its structure changed. Religious education and music now have appropriate time in every year. The use of information and communication technology is now well established in Years 7 to 9 and is being developed in Years 10 and 11. The opportunities for pupils' spiritual and cultural development are now very good. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils but a

thought for the day is now in effective operation. Separate access has not been provided for pedestrians and vehicles but the exit of pupils is well supervised and the school has done all it can to make it safe. The accommodation has been improved by new building and refurbishment both on the main site and at the sixth form college. Subject management remains an issue in the sixth form.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	C	B	C	C	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	C	B	n/a		

Results in English and science, in the national tests at the end of Year 9, have varied quite markedly from year to year. In 2001, results in English and mathematics were in line with the national average while those in science were above. In comparison with similar schools, English was below, mathematics was in line with, and science was above the respective average. Averaged over the three years to 2000, boys and girls have performed equally well, and above the national average. When compared with their attainment on entry, this represents good achievement. The school trend is broadly in line with the national trend. In the GCSE examinations in 2001, the proportion of pupils achieving 5 or more grades A*-C were above national and similar schools averages. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in English and mathematics was above, and in science was well above, the national average and the similar schools average. Significant strengths in the 2001 results were in English language and literature, science, mathematics and information technology. A significant weakness was in art where there has been a staffing difficulty. The school did not quite meet its targets in 2001 although analysis shows that those pupils, 152 of the 173 in the year group, who followed the full two year course at the school, did. Results at GCSE show a trend above the national trend. Girls have consistently performed better than boys but, on average, by a smaller margin than nationally. Comparisons using the average total point score, as in the table above, are adversely affected when the total number of subjects that pupils study is less than in other schools with which they are compared. On a subject basis, pupils gained above average results in many subjects and achieved well. Overall results at A-level in 2001 were very similar to the previous year when students' average point score was above average. There were particular strengths in English language, where the schools' performance was in the highest 5 per cent nationally, biology, chemistry, the joint English language/literature course, French and history. Results were weaker in art, classical studies, Spanish and design and technology but, with the number of candidates never exceeding seven, the statistical significance is doubtful.

The standards being demonstrated by pupils currently in Years 9, 11 and 13 are above what is generally expected of pupils of these ages. In relation to their attainment on entry to the school pupils are achieving well overall. In some lessons observed achievement was very good.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils enjoy school and work hard in their lessons. They confidently take part in class discussions and listen attentively to each other's contributions.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils behave very well both in lessons and around the school. They are courteous and move sensibly around the school. Their very good behaviour

	contributes to their good achievement.
--	--

Aspect	Comment
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils respect their teachers and get on very well with them. They cooperate very well with each other. Pupils are mature and take their responsibilities very seriously.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Attendance and unauthorised absence are in line with the national average. Attendance in Year 11 is lower than in the rest of the school.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching in English, in Years 7 to 11, is very good and teaching in mathematics and science is good. Teaching seen in the sixth form was good in the majority of subjects inspected. The particular strength within the teaching in the sixth form is the very good knowledge that teachers have both of their subject and of the requirements of the examinations. Throughout the school, lessons were well planned and used a varied range of teaching methods. Most lessons moved at a brisk pace and teachers had high expectations of what their pupils could achieve. Relationships within the classroom were very good, giving pupils the confidence to ask questions or offer thoughts and ideas. Pupils enjoyed their lessons and wanted to learn. They concentrated well, worked hard and their learning was very good. In the main school, pupils with special educational needs were keen to learn and they were supported well by teachers and classroom assistants. Occasionally the behaviour of some pupils in a teaching group challenged their teacher and, where behavioural management strategies were not effective, progress was restricted.

The skills of literacy are particularly well taught in the main school and their effective development is an integral part of the majority of lessons. Numeracy skills are taught well in mathematics and were seen being used and practised in other subjects. The good teaching of key skills is a feature of the sixth form.

The school meets the needs of its pupils well. Teachers are fully aware of the pupils' individual education plans and plan their teaching accordingly. Alternative means of accrediting pupils' attainment is provided in several subjects. The very small number of pupils who are at an early stage of learning English are well supported.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	There has been very good improvement in the main school curriculum. It is well balanced, fulfils all statutory requirements, and provides a very good range of options at GCSE. There is some alternative provision for lower-attaining pupils. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities extends opportunities for pupils. In the sixth form, the option choice is very wide and appropriate. There are fewer extra-curricular opportunities. The sixth form curriculum does not meet the statutory requirements for religious education.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Individual education plans are well written, specific and are being implemented. Record keeping is thorough and the provision is effective. The very few students in sixth form are well supported.

Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Most of the pupils have a quite adequate grasp of English. The very small minority who do not are well supported in class and are following an effective literacy development strategy.
Aspect	Comment
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This is very good and stronger in the main school than in the sixth form. Spiritual input in many subjects supplements assemblies and tutorial work. Pupils respond particularly well to the very positive moral and social emphasis which permeates the school. Subjects such as music, drama, modern languages, and links with other countries, make a strong contribution to pupils' cultural awareness. Few sixth form pupils take advantage of the excellent opportunity to consider spiritual and moral issues provided through the worship programme.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. The school has good procedures for dealing with child protection issues that are well known to staff. The pastoral system is very effective and pupils value the support they get from teachers. The health and safety issue identified in the last report about the mixing of pupils and traffic at the school gate has not been resolved. However teachers supervise pupils very well at the end of the day and ensure that they leave the site safely.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership by the headteacher is excellent. The leadership team has been highly effective in raising standards since the last inspection and in tackling the points for action highlighted in the last report. As a result the curriculum has been greatly enriched and now provides a wider range of experiences that are better suited to pupils' differing needs. The school has a very good ethos.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors give very good support to parents, the school and the pupils. The very good direction they have provided has been key to how the school has improved. There is a shared commitment to improvement and a desire to see the school improve further. Overall, governors fulfil their statutory roles very well and are keen to become more effective in thinking and planning strategically. The sixth form management committee has yet to clarify subject management responsibilities in the sixth form, although the current structure works effectively in most cases.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The monitoring of teaching and pupils' achievement is satisfactory, with some strengths as well as weaknesses. Good use has been made of teacher assessments and related information on pupil performance to raise attainment in GCSE examinations. It has been less systematically used to review achievement at the end of Year 9. There are some inconsistencies in evaluation in the sixth form.
The strategic use of resources	Strategic management is good. The current school improvement plan provides a good framework to steer developments, and is much clearer about how targets will be achieved than previous models. The governors and the senior management team have used resources wisely to enhance the accommodation and improve, for example, the library and study facilities. Specialist accommodation for the sixth form is very good, with the exception of design and technology and photography. The principles of best value are applied well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their children are expected to work hard • their children make good progress • the school helps their children become mature and responsible • the school is well led and managed • they are happy to bring any concerns they have to the school • their children like school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • information about their children's progress • the school working more closely with parents • homework in the 11-16 school

The inspection team agrees with the parents positive views and that information about progress is limited. However, the school has improved the reporting procedures for this year and parents should receive more precise information about attainment. The school needs to ensure that there are also clear statements about the progress pupils have made. The school works closely with parents through the heads of year. The school informs parents both when pupils are doing especially well and when there are concerns. Parents did not say what their concerns were about homework. The evidence from the inspection is that it was appropriate, regularly set and collected and marked.

The parents of sixth form students painted a positive picture of the college, the details of which are given in the sixth form report. Although generally not as positive as the main school, parents commented on great strengths in behaviour, expectations and the quality of relationships. Homework was not considered to be a weakness, but in addition to the lack of information about progress, a minority of parents said they were not sufficiently involved and few found the extra-curricular provision acceptable. Here too improved information is already being provided but there are no college-based sports teams for sixth formers.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

NORTHGATE HIGH SCHOOL and DEREHAM SIXTH FORM COLLEGE

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Two Dereham 11-18 schools, Neatherd and Northgate, jointly run Dereham Sixth Form College and provide most of the students. The college is based on a separate site and has specialist facilities for most subjects. The management committee, comprising equal numbers of governors from each school and with both high school heads and the director of the sixth form in attendance, has overall management oversight of the college. It is managed on a day-to-day basis by the director who works to both high school headteachers. Both schools pass on all their post 16 funding to the college, ensuring that it functions as a relatively autonomous unit. Ten teaching staff work only at the college, and they provide the tutorial support available as well as teaching across a range of subjects. Most staff travel in from the two high schools. The students are nominally on the records of one of the two high schools, but all spend almost all of their time in the college. Currently there are 285 sixth formers, 157 girls and 128 boys, with 170 in Year 12 and 115 in Year 13. This represents a stay-on rate from the two high schools of about 55 per cent. About 16 per cent of students have joined the college from other schools. The sixth form size has been between 250 and 300 students for some years. No sixth formers have English as an additional language. Very few students have special educational needs. Students can join the sixth form if they can gain from following one or more of the courses available. The range of courses available consists of 29 at AS level, 26 at A2 for Year 13 students, and three Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) two-year courses. Other local colleges provide a broader range of GNVQ and similar vocational courses and a number of students move to these at age sixteen from both schools. All students follow a key skills programme of taught ICT, communications and application of number. The other three key skills of working with others, study skills and problem solving are not accredited, but taught within lessons and tutorial time. Most students starting at the college have GCSE B grades or higher in the subjects most closely associated with their selected sixth form

courses, although the college minimum entry requirement is four or more A* to C passes at GCSE. Few leave mid-course; about ninety per cent of students who started courses in the past three years have completed them. About half the students leaving at the end of their courses go on to higher education, about a quarter into employment, and about a quarter take a gap year.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

Dereham Sixth Form College is successful, very well managed and cost effective. Students achieve well, attaining above average standards. Teaching is good, resulting in effective learning, and students have very positive attitudes to their studies. A very good range of AS and A2 courses is available. Induction into the sixth is good. The 1:1 tutorial system is very good, providing students with very good support as well as clear targets for improvement. Student - teacher relationships are very good. Since it was last inspected, the college has maintained and developed its strengths and responded very well to all issues from the report, apart from that of clarifying subject management.

Strengths

- good standards in many subjects
- good teaching, with particular strengths in staff subject expertise, which results in good learning
- excellent student behaviour; most students have positive attitudes to their work and are keen to do well
- very good care and guidance provided for students
- a broad and balanced curriculum with some very good planning
- very good day-by-day leadership and management by the director of the college

What could be improved

- lack of clarity between the roles of subject co-ordinator and heads of department leading to inconsistencies in:
 - the manner in which subject leaders manage their areas, particularly the monitoring of teaching and learning
 - assessment and recording practices
 - the planned use made of information and communication technology in subject teaching

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good Results are above average. Staff subject knowledge and expertise lead to effective teaching and learning.
Further mathematics	Good Current standards well above average. Teachers' very good subject knowledge results in good teaching and learning.
Biology	Good Good teaching helps students to learn well. Students work hard and most reach, or exceed, the standards expected of them.

Chemistry	Good with some very good aspects. The teaching in chemistry is good and this results in good achievement by the students both at AS and A level. The teachers are enthusiastic and well qualified. Students and teachers have good relationships and work together well.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Physics	Good. Teaching is good. Staff are enthusiastic physicists, have good subject knowledge and explain work clearly to students. High and middle attainers in physics achieve well. All students listen attentively. A small number of lower attaining students find the work involved in AS level physics too difficult and do not achieve well.
Design and technology	Good. Current standards are above average and students are achieving well as a result of good teaching. Regular and rigorous marking is particularly effective in enabling students to improve their work.
Computing	Good. Good teaching and high quality resources lead to students achieving well. They make comparatively better progress in the subject than other students, nationally, with similar GCSE attainment.
Sports studies	Good. Examination results are above average because teaching is good and students have very good attitudes towards their work. Targets and marking are well focused on achievement.
Art	Satisfactory. Results in 2001 were well below the average. Standards are higher in the current Year 13 and average. Achievement is satisfactory relative to students' starting points – some have not taken a GCSE art course. Teaching and learning are good and one-to-one reviews are effective in helping students see where improvements are needed.
Theatre studies	Satisfactory. Results have been very variable in recent years. Satisfactory teaching results in students having a sound grasp of drama theory and a good appreciation of the writer's craft. They are less skilled in interpreting scripted drama and exploring alternative presentations.
Geography	Very good. Results were above average this year with most students achieving standards expected or better than expected. Students are achieving well as a result of their very good attitudes and very good teaching. Monitoring of performance throughout the course is very effective.
History	Good with some very good aspects. A-level results are well above average. Teaching and learning are good overall. Students' skills in understanding, interpreting events in history are good but their ability to analyse and evaluate sources is less developed.
Sociology	Good. Results in 2001 were well above average. Students make good progress over the two years of the course and achieve well.
English - language and literature	Good. Results were well above average in 2001 with above average value added from GCSE in many cases. Schemes of work are thorough and well planned. Teaching and learning are good overall.
French	Good with some very good aspects. A-level results are well above average. Teaching is good with particular strengths in curriculum planning and assessment. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject and learn well.

Lessons were sampled in photography, electronics, classical studies, philosophy of religion, Spanish, government and politics, business studies, psychology, law, English literature, AVCE information technology and health and social care. All the teaching was satisfactory or better, with several lessons good or very good, resulting in effective learning. It was particularly good in electronics, Spanish and health and social care where students made very good progress, achieving very well in the lessons seen.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good quality support and guidance is maintained throughout Years 12 and 13. Students are inducted well into the sixth form. A well-structured tutorial system and regular, very good 1:1 interviews between tutors and students are very helpful. Assessment data is used to provide targets for students to help raise achievement. Most students believe they are well informed about career options and opportunities beyond school.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The staff who are responsible for the sixth form are very well led and an effective team. The director works tirelessly to bring together teachers at all levels from the two high schools and to ensure that all students have equal opportunities. His task is a complex and difficult one, welding together staff who are mainly 'part-time' in the sixth form from two different schools, working with and for two headteachers. The committee of governors responsible for the college, including the two headteachers, is very effective and provides very good support. The director has high expectations of the students and monitors both their academic work and their participation and contribution to the life of the college. Inconsistencies in working practices and in the quality of teaching remain, however, and management of subjects, often taught by staff of both schools, is too variable. The director is working to find ways to improve upon the current arrangements.

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"> • they were well informed about the college and its courses • they enjoy the subjects they are studying • they are taught well and given good support by their teachers • good advice and help is given about their choices when they leave college • the college takes notice of their views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the provision of extra curricular activities • the information given to them on their progress

The inspectors spoke to many students, both formally and informally, who were very positive about the college, even though a number had completed a questionnaire about the college with some negative responses. Students made it clear that help was always available and it was their responsibility to ask for it. The inspection team supports the positive views of the students and agrees, to some extent, with their suggestions for improvement. There is some inconsistency in the quality of information students receive from individual teachers about how well they are doing. Students have good opportunities for visits associated with their courses, including work experience abroad for those who want it. No sports clubs – including sports fixtures - are available, however, and, even though the majority of students hold part-time jobs time out of school hours, several believed they would benefit from them.

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

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils achieve well as a result of their very good attitudes to learning

- 1 A-level results in 2001 were, overall, very similar to those in 2000 which were above the national average. There are not yet any national comparators available for this year. Although the sixth form has entry requirements, at four or more GCSE grades A*-C these are low enough to allow the majority of pupils to move into the sixth form if they wish to. Analysis has shown that, in recent years the results gained by these pupils in relation to their attainment on entry represents more than average value being added. That is, pupils have achieved well. In 2001 the value that had been added was average. The detail of sixth form standards are dealt with later in this report.
- 2 Results in GCSE have been rising more rapidly than the national trend and in 2000 they were above the national averages for all schools and for schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. This improvement resulted in a National Curriculum award in 2000. In 2001, the results dipped although the trend remains upwards. In this year, the proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more grades A*-C was above the national average and above that for similar schools. The proportions of pupils gaining grade A*-C in English and mathematics were also above the corresponding averages. The proportion gaining grades A*-C in science was well above these averages. When compared with schools whose pupils had gained similar results at the end of Year 9 in 1999, the school is below the average in all indicators in English and mathematics. Using the average total point score, this particular cohort of pupils did not do as well in GCSE, on average, as pupils with a similar starting point nationally. Comparisons using the average total point score are adversely affected when the total number of subjects that pupils study is less than in other schools with which they are compared. On a subject basis, pupils gained above average results in many subjects and achieved well. The number of subjects examined will be increased in 2002 because all pupils are studying a short course in religious education and more pupils are studying a short course in physical education. The school did not reach its targets in 2001. However, a number of pupils left the school before reaching the examination and others joined the school late in the course. Analysis shows that the 152 pupils, in the year group of 173 pupils, who followed the full two year course at the school did achieve the target set. Achievement has been good in recent years but dropped in 2001.
- 3 Results in the tests at the end of Year 9 have remained steady although there have been quite wide fluctuations in English. Overall, they have been above the national average. In relation to the average attainment with which pupils enter the school, this is good achievement.
- 4 From scrutiny of work and through observation in lessons, the standards of work of pupils currently in Years 9, 11 and 13 are above those expected of pupils of these ages and achievement is good.
- 5 Pupils have very good attitudes to school. They enjoy school and work hard in their lessons. They confidently take part in class discussions and listen attentively to each other's contributions. In a social

education lesson, one girl very confidently took on the role of teacher to illustrate the difficulty teachers have in identifying bullying unless pupils are prepared to tell them.

- 6 Pupils behave very well both in lessons and around the school. They are courteous and move sensibly around the school. In the dining-room they queue up quietly to get their lunch and then talk together socially while eating. In lessons, pupils respond quickly to teachers' instructions and their very good behaviour contributes to their good achievement.
- 7 Pupils respect their teachers and get on very well with them. They also cooperate very well with each other. In a sociology lesson, pupils worked very well together in pairs to compare the GCSE results of Neatherd and Northgate as well as the differences in girls' and boys' attainment. They were fascinated with what they found out. Pupils are mature and take their responsibilities very seriously. In particular, the prefects are very conscientious and take a pride in their position.

Has a very effective strategy for teaching and developing pupils' literacy skills

- 8 The school has seen raising pupils' standards of literacy as a key factor in raising standards of achievement, and in improving communication to minimise misunderstanding and misbehaviour. The strategies which have been developed during the past four years have succeeded in addressing both these aims. The school has worked hard to understand the use of The Literacy Hour in junior schools, and to integrate the skills and approaches taught there into its own curriculum. Thus in many lessons pupils are introduced to, and expected to use correctly and learn, key words and concepts. This is not tokenism or point-scoring, but rather a systematic teaching of the language by which pupils can demonstrate and develop their understanding in a subject. For example, a Year 7 science class used specialist terms like 'gamete' and 'zygote' in a revision session and a lower ability Year 8 mathematics set used and understood terms like 'convergence'.
- 9 Very good use is made of any data received from junior schools, and screening tests for reading are carried out. Extra support sessions include pre-school sessions. Teachers have attended training, including visits by some to junior schools to see literacy work. Good attention has been paid to how readable texts and worksheets are, and many teachers use supportive but flexible writing frames to guide pupils in the purpose and structure of their written work. They have also prepared and issued subject specific word glossaries to give pupils more confidence and awareness.
- 10 The library has been improved. The number of books per pupil is now above that found nationally, and retrieval of information is stimulated both by reference sections and by the availability of computers. Teachers are sensitive to the need to display work and information, including worksheets and boardwork, in ways which are visually clear and attractive to pupils. Subjects like French make good use of oral warm-up activities to increase both understanding and concentration; drama likewise uses physical warm-ups as an opportunity to reinforce correct terminology and the need for good listening skills. There has been very good integration of the literacy strategy into English lessons, which is of benefit to pupils in all years.

Provides very good teaching and learning

- 11 Overall, the teaching is very good. It is a little better in Years 7 to 11 than in the sixth form. In Years 7 to 11 the teaching in English is very good and the teaching in mathematics and science is good. The teaching has many strengths. These, together with pupils' very good attitudes, result in very good learning taking place. A particular strength in the sixth form teaching is the very good knowledge teachers have, both of the subject and of examination requirements. The teaching and learning in these years is reported more fully in a later section.

- 12 In the main school, a noticeable feature about many lessons is the enthusiasm that the teachers have for their subject and their pleasure in teaching their pupils. Lessons are well planned to make full use of the time available, leading to a brisk and purposeful start to lessons and a good pace being maintained throughout. This was achieved, for example, by using a number of short, timed tasks and resulted in pupils gaining new experiences and understanding at a fast rate. In classes containing pupils on the special educational needs register, teachers know and tackle the specific needs identified on their individual education plans. Classroom assistants are involved very well in the teaching process. This support and carefully focused work helps pupils build on previous knowledge as they learn new material. High expectations of what pupils can achieve leads to them being challenged both by the pace and the depth of work. Question and answer are used very well to identify and extend pupils' understanding by asking them to explain and expand upon their initial response. Particularly good lessons included several different styles of teaching and learning within the hour. Scrutiny of pupils' books shows that, over time, pupils experience this range of teaching styles.
- 13 Pupils respond enthusiastically to much of the teaching they receive. This enthusiasm for learning was a notable feature in the groups which had a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs. Pupils come to lessons promptly and are ready to learn. They are well motivated and work hard. They are engaged by the tasks they are given to do and respond very positively to the often topical resources which are provided for them to work on. For example, the war in Afghanistan featured in a Year 11 religious education lesson and the Ofsted inspection process in a Year 10 sociology lesson. Pupils show independence in their learning. For example, a Year 7 top set in information and communication technology got on very well as they worked, individually, with an interactive programme. Pupils in a low ability Year 8 English group showed their independence in a lesson on direct speech as they used a range of resources to access and check meaning and spelling. There were, however, isolated instances when the composition of a teaching group challenged the teacher and, where they did not have strong techniques for managing behaviour, progress was restricted.
- 14 Basic skills are very well taught. The development of literacy skills features in all lesson planning and is a generally accepted feature of teaching. Opportunities are taken for pupils to read aloud, to develop speaking and listening skills through pair and group discussion. There is a common emphasis upon the correct spelling and use of specialist vocabulary. For example, in a Year 11 science group, pupils used a quick exercise to recall scientific vocabulary. They chose the word but were expected to be able to define it. The continual exhortation was 'Don't use a word if you don't know what it means!' A Year 10 food technology lesson contributed well to pupils' numeracy skills through estimation and used the information on the packaging to support pupils reading and writing. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson, pupils used their information and communication technology skills to support their learning and developed them further in the plotting of graphs. Quiet reading in a Year 8 tutor group not only provided a calm and purposeful start to the day but also valued the process of reading.
- 15 The best teaching seen included many of these recorded strengths in the lesson. For example, in a Year 11 English lesson, in which pupils were revising for GCSE mock examinations, emphasis was on an analysis of the effective use of language. Pupils arrived enthusiastic and ready to work. The teacher picked up on this and started immediately with a wide-ranging introduction which got them involved. A very good question and answer sequence helped pupils make the link between literary principles and the text they were using - a controversial article entitled *Men can't stand successful women*. The use of this article contributed to pupils' social and moral development. Most pupils recognised the effect achieved through the use of parentheses and the semicolon. The teacher's high expectations moved pupils quickly on to the more complex skills of analysing and evaluating linguistic effects. The teaching strategies of class and paired discussion were used very well to tease out pupils' ideas. As a result, pupils were really interested and they worked hard. This lesson was not only very

effective revision but served to deepen pupils' understanding of examination approaches and techniques.

Provides pupils with very good opportunities to develop as individuals and with a broad range of subject choices

- 16 The previous inspection report highlighted a number of weaknesses and anomalies in the curriculum for pupils aged 11 to 16, resulting in three Key Issues. These have all been tackled successfully, resulting in a much better balanced and more appropriate curriculum for the great majority of pupils. The 11 to 16 curriculum is now very good and fully meets statutory requirements. The sixth form offers a broad and diverse curriculum of 29 AS-level subjects, three advanced vocational courses and 26 A-level subjects. In addition, all students follow a key skills course in both years of the sixth form and many convert their experience into qualifications in general studies or critical thinking. Within this otherwise very good curriculum is insufficient planned use of information and communication technology to support the teaching. Religious education is not taught sufficiently to comply with the Local Agreed Syllabus; a statutory requirement.
- 17 Teaching time within the school day has been extended, and the length of lessons reduced to help maintain pupils' concentration. The school day is now smooth and efficient, with almost all teachers and pupils making effective use of the increased time. Information and communication technology is now better provided for both as a subject, and as a skill to be used in other subjects. In Years 10 and 11, half the pupils are studying a short course GCSE. Religious education now has its own lesson in every year and all pupils follow a short course GCSE. Time for additional foreign language teaching to higher-attaining pupils in Years 8 and 9 has been made available without affecting history or geography as was the case in the past. The basis on which pupils are allocated a second modern foreign language remains too rigid; whether it will pay dividends in terms of an increased uptake of two languages at GCSE is yet to be judged. The present uptake is very low.
- 18 A good range of GCSE options is made available, including drama, media studies, sociology, child development and three foreign languages. The structure of the option blocks allows pupils to specialise, for instance by taking two languages, two creative subjects, or both geography and history. A small number of pupils take the ASDAN award and there are limited opportunities for alternative accreditation to GCSE in the guise of certificate of achievement courses for some pupils in mathematics and French. The school is rightly reviewing such provision to see if some extension would suit the needs of a wider group of pupils.
- 19 A highly organised personal, social and health education programme shows a very good awareness of the needs of pupils as learners and as citizens. Rights are balanced with responsibilities; the individual's hopes with the community's needs. Careers education and guidance is well catered for. Pupils benefit from a very good range of extra-curricular activities including many in music and sport, and five strong international links.

Provides very good pastoral support for all its pupils and prepares them well for the future

- 20 The school has good procedures for dealing with child protection issues that are well known to staff. The pastoral deputy head teacher is the teacher responsible. She also heads the very effective pastoral system. Heads of year closely monitor pupils' behaviour and attendance as well as their academic progress. Heads of year monitor the termly screening results and follow up any concerns with pupils. Pupils value the support they get from teachers.

- 21 The health and safety issue identified in the last report, about the mixing of pupils and traffic at the school gate, has not been resolved. However, teachers supervise pupils very well at the end of the day and ensure that they leave the site safely.
- 22 The school has a clear policy that bullying is not tolerated and social education lessons effectively convey this to pupils and give them strategies to deal with bullies. Pupils feel that they are in a safe and supportive environment. They are certain that any instances of bullying brought to the school's attention will be resolved rapidly.
- 23 Pupils feel that the careers and further education advice they get is helpful and they know where to go if they need further advice.
- 24 Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment are good and there has been good improvement in assessment practice since the last inspection. Assessment information is well used to guide curriculum planning and to assign pupils to sets. A range of data is held on each pupil starting with their results in the end of Year 6 tests and other nationally standardised tests. This data is well used to set individual targets for tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations. The current move from a paper based system to a central computer database should make the handling of data more manageable and help the school to measure added value and monitor pupils' progress more readily.
- 25 Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress are good. Screening takes place twice a year. Tutors work effectively with pupils to set targets for improvement. Pupils play an active role in this process through their completion of self-review sheets. Tutors closely monitor the progress of individual pupils. In Year 11, pupils close to the C/D boundary are provided with a mentoring programme and their attainment in the subsequent GCSE examinations is carefully analysed to provide an evaluation.

Excellent leadership and management of the headteacher, governors and key staff have resulted in very good improvement since the previous inspection

- 26 Leadership by the headteacher is excellent and the director of the sixth form college provides very good day-by-day leadership and management. The leadership team has been highly effective in raising standards since the last inspection and in tackling the points for action highlighted in the last report. As a result, the curriculum has been greatly enriched and now provides a wider range of experiences that are better suited to pupils differing needs. The school has a very good ethos. The headteacher, senior team and middle managers are very good role models as classroom teachers. They have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and achievements. Lessons are carefully planned to ensure that pupils make good progress, are enthusiastic about learning and become responsible citizens.
- 27 The Governing Body gives very good support to parents, the school and the pupils. The very good direction that governors have provided has been the key to how the school has improved. There is a shared commitment to improvement and a desire to see the school improve further. Governors are fulfilling their monitoring role very professionally. Some visit the school regularly to meet with subject leaders. In this way they familiarise themselves with the progress and developments in departments, speak with authority about how well resources have been used and contribute fully to discussions on future spending. Governors fulfil their statutory roles very well and are keen to become more effective in thinking and planning strategically. The sixth form management committee, comprising governors from each high school, has yet to clarify subject management responsibilities in the sixth form, although the current structure works effectively in most cases.

- 28 The school is keen to evaluate more closely what is working well and leads to very good progress and what can be improved. The monitoring of teaching and pupils' achievement is satisfactory, with some strengths as well as weaknesses. The progress of pupils with special education needs is well-managed. Individual education plans provide pupils, parents and teachers with a clear picture of pupils' learning and behavioural needs. Good use has been made of teacher assessments and related information on pupil performance to raise attainment in GCSE examinations. It has been less systematically used to review achievement at the end of Year 9. In some departments, teachers use examination assessment criteria and explanations of National Curriculum levels in their lessons to give pupils a better sense of their own achievement. This practice is inconsistent and underused as a means of involving pupils in the monitoring of their own progress.
- 29 Senior managers observe teaching as part of the performance management cycle and in this way fulfil the legal requirement. Some heads of department monitor teaching but, for the most part, this aspect of their leadership role is relatively underdeveloped. Few formal opportunities exist for teachers to learn from one another, reflect on their classroom practice and refine their skills. The school is at an early stage of developing its use of assessment data to monitor pupils' progress. It now has the systems in place to improve the way information is recorded, targets are set and to evaluate how effectively the needs of particular groups of students are being met. Senior staff and governors recognise the importance of this work and progress is being made on a number of fronts.
- 30 Strategic management is good. The current school improvement plan provides a good framework to steer developments, and is much clearer about how targets will be achieved than previous models. However raising standards is implicit rather than explicit in several sections. Governors recognise that by stating this more clearly they will be better placed to evaluate the impact of their spending and decide whether the money that was spent gave good value. The governors and the senior management team have used resources wisely to enhance the accommodation and improve, for example, the library and study facilities. The longer-term plans for the school to achieve specialist status are at an early stage of development.
- 31 Very effective procedures are in place for day-to-day financial management. Governors, the headteacher and the staff with day-to-day responsibility for the budget monitor spending very carefully. The school keeps a careful watch on how it achieves in examinations compared with other local schools and against national standards.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- 32 There are no major weaknesses but a need to continue to tackle the issues which have already been identified by the school and which are mentioned in the text of the report.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- 33 To further improve the quality of education and raise standards the school should:

Sixth form

- (1) tackle the lack of clarity between the roles of subject co-ordinator and heads of department leading to inconsistencies in:
- the manner in which subject leaders manage their areas, particularly the monitoring of teaching and learning
 - assessment and recording practices

- the planned use made of information and communication technology in subject teaching

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 - 11	33
	Sixth form	56
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		53

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	3	14	9	7	0	0	0
Percentage	9	42	27	21	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	0	13	27	16	0	0	0
Percentage	0	23	48	29	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7-11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	801	144
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	86	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	28	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	155	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	7

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	24
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	35

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.1
National comparative data	7.7

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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	81	72	153

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	52	61	66
	Girls	49	51	51
	Total	101	112	117
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	66 (81)	73 (73)	76 (68)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (40)	40 (39)	41 (27)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	51	50	49
	Girls	52	49	47
	Total	103	99	96
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	67 (58)	65 (70)	62 (73)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	18 (9)	42 (35)	28 (31)
	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	90	83	173

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	42	85	89
	Girls	52	75	78
	Total	94	160	167
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	54 (60)	92 (94)	97 (99)
	National	49.8 (47.4)	86.6 (90.6)	94.5 (95.6)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	38.6 (41.0)
	National	39.1 (38.4)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	n/a
	National		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-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	51	63	114

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	16.3 (18.7)	18.9 (17.1)	17.7 (17.8)	?? (3.0)	?? (2.8)	?? (3.0)
National	n/a (17.7)	n/a (18.6)	n/a (18.2)	n/a (2.6)	n/a (2.9)	n/a (2.7)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	n/a
	National		n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	938
Any other minority ethnic group	1

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	35	0
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: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	53.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.4

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	167

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.4
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23.9
Key Stage 4	19.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/1
----------------	--------

	£
Total income	2777330
Total expenditure	2707400
Expenditure per pupil	2877
Balance brought forward from previous year	65698
Balance carried forward to next year	135628

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	9.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	15.4

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1
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)	0
--	---

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	945
Number of questionnaires returned	268

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	49	7	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	44	48	3	1	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	29	59	7	2	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	18	60	18	2	3
The teaching is good.	38	51	4	0	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	46	18	5	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	45	4	0	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	37	0	1	3
The school works closely with parents.	22	53	15	3	7
The school is well led and managed.	38	52	3	1	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	42	51	4	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	51	36	7	1	6

Other issues raised by parents

The small number present at the parents' meeting were very positive about the school and the high quality of education that it provided.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

- 34 The school's A-level results in 2000 were above the national average for maintained schools and broadly in line with the average for all providers of sixth form education. Male students' results were above average on both these measures whereas the female students' results were broadly average. There was considerable variation between subjects. In 2001, results were very high in English language and well above average in biology, chemistry, the joint English language and literature course, French and history. They were above average in business studies, electronics, geography, mathematics and sports science. In computing, English literature and German they were at the national average. They were below average in physics, and well below average in art and design, classical studies, Spanish and design and technology. It should be recognised that the number of candidates in many of these subjects is small and therefore some comparisons are of doubtful significance. The students' average point score in 2001 was very close to that in 2000 but there are not yet any national comparators for the overall 2001 results. Comparative standards have fluctuated over the years 1998 to 2000, between average and above average. These standards are all the more noteworthy when the schools open admissions policy of four or more GCSE grades at A*-C is taken into account.
- 35 The value added, in the sixth form, to students' attainment at GCSE two years earlier, has been above national averages in three of the last four years; in 2001 it was marginally above average. Generally, this indicates that, in the last four years, students achieved well in their time in the sixth form. There is, again, considerable fluctuation between subjects. This is partly attributable to the very small numbers of students who take some of them. The most successful subjects in adding significant value were health and social care and English language and the least successful subject was design and technology.
- 36 As in all sixth forms, students sat examinations, in 2001, for the new AS-level courses at the end of Year 12. Thirty seven per cent of entries gained an A or B grade. With many more students following these one year courses, ten per cent of entries did not gain a grade A to E. There are no national comparators yet available for these examinations.
- 37 The standards being demonstrated by students currently in Years 12 and 13 are generally better than the expected levels for the courses being followed. They are in line with those in the previous year. Standards are well above average in history and further mathematics. They are at average levels in physics, art and design and theatre studies, and above average in all other subjects inspected. In relation to their attainment on entry to the course, students are achieving well in most subjects.
- 38 The very few students with special educational needs are supported well in their learning, and their achievement is good. At this age, students' linguistic and numerical skills are well developed. In the course of their education they have learnt to make good use of information and communication technology to support their work and help their presentation. The college has placed considerable emphasis on the development of key skills and teaching is directed towards accreditation. Insufficient information was gathered during the inspection, in this second year of the key skills programme, to make a judgement on the standard students are reaching in their key skills lessons. However, results for information and communication technology achieved by the Year 12 students in 2001 point towards sound achievement. Two-thirds of the students reached level 2, with one third at level 3, reflecting the range of competencies in this skill when students started at the college.

- 39 As well as the fifteen focus subjects, lessons were sampled in twelve other courses running in the sixth form. The standards being demonstrated were at least in line with those expected by the course for the age of the students. Standards were above the expected level in health and social care and well above in the Spanish lesson observed. In business studies, students show good skills in practical elements like researching and drawing graphs to show the nature of consumable goods. By Year 13 they can give confident and articulate presentations on their research but are prone to over-simplistic generalisations in their analysis; standards are broadly in line with expectations. Students studying health and social care have good understanding of the technical language required at this level and are able to test out theories, practically. One student worked in a local primary school, testing theoretical models of child development. In studying law, students demonstrate good understanding of the court system, identifying problems and suggesting why reform may be required.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

- 40 Students have very good attitudes to their work and this makes a significant contribution to their good achievement. In lessons, most confidently discuss issues with each other. In some lessons, however, a few students are passive and do not take an active part in class discussions. Students take great pride in their work. Their written work is accurate and well presented. Students' folders are well organised making them useful for revision.
- 41 Students are well motivated and work hard. The good relationships that teachers have with students effectively encourage them to work hard and try to produce their best work. Students get on with each other very well. They value each other's opinions and respond to the whole group in discussions.
- 42 The behaviour of students is exemplary both in lessons and around the college. Students are courteous to each other and to visitors. Attendance during the week of the inspection was low due to an outbreak of influenza. The school monitors individual attendance closely.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 43 The overall quality of teaching observed was good, resulting in effective learning for the students and good achievement. The quality was a little better in Years 13 than Year 12, with about one in every three lessons very good in Year 13 and one in six in Year 12. About three-quarters of lessons were good or better in Year 13, and about two-thirds in Year 12. All lessons observed in the college were satisfactory or better.
- 44 The best teaching was of geography, where the quality was consistently very good, resulting in interested students who worked hard and achieved very well in the lessons seen. Good teaching was observed in design and technology, history, computing, further mathematics, mathematics, French, physics, chemistry, biology, sociology and sports studies. The teaching strengths seen in lessons were also apparent in the work the students had completed over previous months. The quality of teaching seen in art, English language and literature, and theatre studies was generally effective, but with a combination of strengths and some weaknesses.
- 45 The greatest strengths in teaching were: teachers' subject knowledge; good planning for lessons, linked to syllabus and examination requirements; creating good working relationships with students; good quality assessment; high expectations of what the students could achieve; and the use of a varied range of teaching methods. Where a combination of these characteristics was shown, teaching was very effective and students learnt quickly and well, enjoying the tasks.

- 46 In a Year 13 computing lesson the teacher introduced a new programming language to the students using very interesting activities. The teacher's very good subject knowledge, the clarity of the explanation, and the enjoyable tasks resulted in rapid and successful progress. A teacher's enthusiasm for the subject was equally apparent in a Year 13 Spanish lesson where the entire lesson was carried out in the language. The lively interactive approach, which involved all students equally, and very careful planning, ensured that their achievements were very good. A Year 12 geography lesson and a Year 13 mathematics lesson were both carefully planned to build on the students' earlier learning. Teachers assessed their understanding before moving on to new work and provided feedback to individuals on their successes, ensuring that all made very good progress. A sociology teacher's very good subject expertise resulted in probing questions for a Year 13 class discussing a research questionnaire. The pace of the lesson was gauged carefully and students with the potential to achieve across the full range of A-level grades were challenged by the work and made very good progress. In each of these very good lessons, and others of a similar quality, the relationships between teachers and students were very good indeed enabling the best use to be made of the available time.
- 47 Few weaknesses in teaching were apparent, but where they existed they restricted sixth formers' achievements. In one or two lessons, teachers did not make sufficiently clear to the students what was expected of them. For example, too brief an explanation in a design and technology lesson resulted in a slow pace of work because students were not always sure what to do next. The same situation was seen in a theatre studies lesson, which resulted in social chatter, and in one or two English language and literature lessons, the pace flagged at times. Teachers' expectations of the students were too low in a few lessons and they did not involve the students sufficiently in what was being taught. In a mathematics lesson, the teacher talked for too long and gave the students too few opportunities to question or consolidate what was being taught. The same situation arose in a sociology lesson where the teacher talked and the students merely listened. The comments on marked work in art lacked clear guidance on how to improve. In each of these lessons the overall quality of teaching was satisfactory and students' learning was always sound or better. The students' positive attitudes to their education and the respect in which they hold the teaching staff, as well as teaching strengths, were key elements in these and every lesson seen.
- 48 A strong emphasis on teaching the three main core skills of communication, application of number and information and communication technology, is enabling students to improve in each area. This takes place in subject lessons as well as through specific key skills sessions. For example, in a Year 12 physics lesson, students presented research findings to their colleagues on the positive and negative consequences of generating power in different ways. The opportunity to practice their oral skills was appreciated by the students who did well. They learnt how to improve their individual performance through hearing their peers in action. In modern languages lessons, students discussed their views openly and honestly as they used the target language. In all subjects, good quality presentation of written work was emphasised and accurate use of language. In a health and social care Year 13 lesson, an emphasis on using accurate technical language resulted in good understanding of the theory behind selecting tests to estimate students' cognitive ability. Application of number and communications lessons are both taught once every two weeks. No communications lessons were observed. The application of number lesson seen was satisfactory. Students worked on individual profiles, using work from their other courses. Good individual support was provided, particularly for students using statistics. Most students were aware of the importance of these key skills in their future careers.
- 49 Specific information and communication technology lessons are appreciated by the students in Year 12 and, in addition, many opportunities are found to use computers in a range of subject lessons. This was not universally the case, however, and greater use needs to be made of computers in some, particularly in teaching English, chemistry, design and technology and art.

- 50 The wider key skills of working with others, study skills and problem solving are all dealt with well in the best lessons, but where teaching is satisfactory there is often insufficient focus on these important learning skills.
- 51 The very small number of students with special educational needs were taught as effectively as their peers; targets within the students' individual education plans were known by staff. No students in the sixth form had been identified as being at an early stage in acquiring skills in English. High and middle attaining students generally do well, because teachers know their subjects well. They can respond to demanding questions and enjoy doing so. Occasionally, lower attaining students fared less well and work was not matched to their knowledge and abilities. In some cases the fault did not lie with the quality of teaching, however, because complex ideas could not be simplified further, but in the selection of the course by the student.
- 52 At the time of the last inspections of the two schools, the quality of teaching in the sixth form was judged to be good. Teachers had high expectations of Year 13 students, setting targets for examination success. The current quality is just as good. About nine in every ten students responding to the questionnaire about their school said that they thought the teaching was good, and that they were helped in learning how to study independently.

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

- 53 The college offers a broad and diverse curriculum of 29 AS-level subjects, three advanced vocational courses and 26 A-level subjects. In addition, all students follow a key skills course in both years of the sixth form and many convert their experience into qualifications in general studies or critical thinking. The curriculum is well matched to students' aspirations and fully reflects the college's aims and values. In the local context, the college has established itself as a successful provider of predominantly academic courses. It saw Curriculum 2000 as an opportunity to broaden its curriculum. New courses such as law have been introduced in response to student demand.
- 54 The curriculum is well planned in English language and literature, chemistry, physics, design and technology, sociology, sports studies, theatre studies, geography and information and communication technology. It is very well planned in modern languages. In other subjects, it is satisfactory, except for religious education, which is not taught sufficiently to comply with the Local Agreed Syllabus - a statutory requirement. The other weakness in an otherwise very good curriculum is insufficient planned use of information and communication to support learning in some subjects. It is well used in modern languages and sports studies. The small number of students with special educational needs is well provided for.
- 55 The college has made study of the key skills of communication, application of number and information and communication technology compulsory for all students. It further shows the importance placed on this programme by allocating weekly lessons, taught by teachers who are full time at the college, who also have responsibility for the tutorial programme. Teaching of each of the three key skills is supported by useful outline plans of what is to be covered in lessons. In addition, teachers of a good number of A2 subjects intend to incorporate elements of the key skills programme into their work. In this way, teaching and use of the key skills is being disseminated across the curriculum, thereby helping students to apply these skills in their A2 examination work. Another benefit of the key skills programme is that it provides for those students who wish to do so, the opportunity to enter for AS General Studies or Critical Thinking in Year 13. Most students have chosen to sit one or other of these examinations.

- 56 The composition of students' individual programmes of work is effectively monitored through the college's tutorial system. They have a high level of commitment of time to courses, and dropout rate is low. Equality of access to courses is generally good. There are a few instances of students embarking on courses for which they are not suitably qualified.
- 57 The college's curriculum enrichment programme covers a broad range of activities from Young Enterprise and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (including an ambitious project to run a trek in Brazil in 2003) to exchanges with France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands. A number of field trips and opportunities for work experience are offered in the period after the AS-level examinations and students are becoming increasingly involved in mentoring and other activities such as music and sport in the two high schools. The programme is of good quality overall, but does not offer students sufficient opportunities to play competitive team sports. The inspection team agreed with the views of students and parents on this issue.
- 58 The college has established a number of beneficial links with local commerce, industry and government. These provide a good platform for students to gain experience working in the community. Good links have been established with a local agricultural college and a university, which provide very good careers guidance relating to higher education.
- 59 The provision for social and moral development is good. Students enjoy positive and supportive relations across the school and involve themselves willingly in a variety of fund raising activities. They discuss issues such as gender, racism, apartheid and the holocaust with maturity and sensitivity. The school actively promotes the cultural traditions of its own area and trips abroad provide a European dimension to the work although there is less emphasis on the ethnic and cultural diversity of British society. Provision across the curriculum for spiritual development is underdeveloped. The college does provide an excellent opportunity for considering spiritual and moral issues, through the worship programme, although a very small number of students takes advantage of this.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

- 60 Assessment and monitoring of academic performance is good. Students' prior attainment is used as a benchmark for measuring progress throughout the course. Realistic but challenging targets are regularly set for many subjects, and most subject staff carefully monitor progress through their marking and recording procedures, ensuring that students know what they must do to improve. This is still developing in art, English, physics and sports studies but is well established in many other subjects including modern languages and geography. These procedures are well supported by a very well structured tutorial system and regular 1:1 interviews between student and tutor, where assessment data collected from all subjects is used to clarify targets, and strategies to help raise individual student achievement are discussed. In most subjects, students are aware of their achievements, and their potential grades based on their previous attainments at GCSE. They are able to discuss with staff what they need to do to reach their potential and are set specific subject targets.

Advice, support and guidance

- 61 The students enjoy a very good relationship between themselves, their tutors and teachers. They appreciate the support and guidance given, both in lessons and during the fortnightly tutor periods. The students are given impartial advice on careers and further education choices while in Year 11. This process enabled the students to make informed decisions about the choice of courses in Year 12. All

students meet with their tutors on a one-to-one basis at approximately five-week intervals. During these meetings, the tutor is able to discuss achievements and progress in lessons, based on the data obtained from subject teachers and the student's self-evaluation. Students feel this process is worthwhile as it enables them to raise worries if they have them, and ensures that they maintain their efforts. The students also felt that these discussions emphasised the care the college take of their well being.

- 62 Students in Year 12 are given guidance on Year 13 choices and are supported to make decisions about further AS-levels or progression to A-level courses. Those students in Year 12 or 13, who are considering employment, are helped in a constructive manner by the careers staff and the local careers service. There is a well-planned, structured course for Year 13 students who wish to progress to university. The college is very supportive at all stages of the students' application for degree courses. The students were very complimentary about the help they receive at this important stage in their college careers.
- 63 The health and safety aspects of the college are good. The Norfolk health and safety policy has been implemented as a working document. A six-monthly safety audit is performed by a sub-committee of responsible governor and health and safety personnel from within college. The last audit was in June 2001. The detailed audit of all aspects is acted upon and reviewed effectively.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

- 64 The director and small team of staff who only teach in the sixth form college make an effective and well-coordinated team. The director works very closely with the headteachers of the two schools. He displays outstanding discretion and skill in managing the large number of staff from both schools who teach in the college. His ability to appreciate the different philosophies of the two schools and to bring them together to provide a common purpose and philosophy, is another key feature of the very good leadership provided. This strength ensures that the joint sixth form provides a good deal for the students of Dereham. The sixth form management committee, which has representation from each of the school's governing bodies, provides useful support to the college. Staff generally work very well in collaboration, overcoming many of the potential geographical and other barriers. The director and his core team are closely involved in all aspects of day to day life in the college and they are always available to meet staff and students; they lead by example and as managers and classroom teachers they are very good role models.
- 65 Teaching and learning are monitored on a rolling programme by the director and his deputy. They also listen to concerns expressed by staff and students and take action. However, there are inconsistencies in monitoring between subjects. Each area is nominally the responsibility of the two heads of department from the high schools. In practice, the day-to-day co-ordination of subjects in the sixth form has discrepancies. For example, in French, teaching and learning are effectively monitored, whereas little monitoring is undertaken in art and design, physics or English language and literature. These variations reflect some inconsistent practice in the overall management of subjects, because co-ordinators have imprecise job descriptions and are uncertain as to the extent of their roles. Another factor is that a number of staff with responsibility for subjects have a heavy workload, with little additional time or financial reward to encourage them. Limitations in the management of some subjects result in a lack of strategic planning – for example a relatively large number of students take photography, yet they do not have enough specialist accommodation and no technicians.

- 66 The heads of each department from the two high schools meet the director each term to review their work and to keep each informed of developments. This is one element of a new management structure which is being put into place to try to remove some of the deficiencies already outlined. Students' academic work and their participation and contribution to the life of the school are carefully monitored. This results in an emphasis on achieving the highest possible academic standards. However, some of the information on standards held centrally, such as figures for the retention of students on courses and how they relate to GCSE results, is not used effectively by all departments to set targets for their students.
- 67 The sixth form development plan provides an effective method of ensuring the college continues to move forwards, particularly in raising standards. Its priorities are developed by listening to feedback from teachers and students, analysing information on standards and acting on local authority and national initiatives. While the outcomes desired are clearly expressed, with appropriate methods to suggest how they might be attained, a number of the success criteria lack precision and could prove difficult to measure. For example, the schools' efforts to improve marking have not been entirely successful, as there are still inconsistencies in departmental practices.
- 68 The management of the college is flexible and creative in dealing with difficult issues. For example, they 'buy in' staff from the two high schools for only as long as required. Income for the sixth form originates from the two schools, but the college has considerable autonomy in deciding how to spend this money. There is a carefully worked out formula for determining how the college pays for staff and resources bought from the two schools. All the post-sixteen funding allocated to Neatherd and Northgate schools, with both schools' split site funding, forms the college budget. The college benefits from prudent planning of expenditure, which is essentially led by the requirements of the curriculum that is taught and priorities set by a committee of governors, the director of the sixth form and senior staff from each school. These mechanisms have enabled the college to provide good resources, overall. The school closely monitors its achievements, by comparing its work with other schools with a similar in-take, and analysing the achievements of individual students. Analysis of the income and expenditure and the curriculum the school offers are all carefully calculated to ensure the sixth form operates within its budget and that best value principals are employed. The procedures for day-to-day financial management are effective and there are good checks and balances. The college has not been subject to an audit of its financial procedures since the last inspection.

Resources

- 69 The teaching staff is made up of teachers who travel from either of the two partner schools and teachers who are based exclusively in the sixth form college. There are many benefits to students of teachers combining their skills and expertise to teach jointly aspects of the same courses. Teamwork is good and together teachers share high levels of expertise and knowledge of the subjects and courses taught. However, the potential effectiveness of this arrangement is limited by weaknesses in the delegation of management responsibilities. Teaching areas are shared well between several teachers. Technicians and technical assistants provide very good day-to-day support although none is available in art and design. The college is very well administered by a team of clerical staff and site managers.
- 70 The quality and range of learning resources for the courses offered are good in most subjects and they are used well. The use of information technology resources in teaching is variable. For example, in sport studies, health and social care and in key skills lessons they are used very effectively. By contrast, in several other subjects too little use is made of computers. This is an area where senior managers recognise further development is needed, firstly to ensure the training is well matched to meet the needs of individual teachers and then to ensure information and communication technology is systematically planned for and used more widely within subjects and courses. The computer facilities

available, however, are used very effectively by individual students for their own research and coursework, as they apply the skills they have learnt.

- 71 The governors have a very good understanding of the allocation of resources to the sixth form college and any accommodation issues. The building is kept clean and is generally in good repair throughout. Senior managers have been successful in finding ways around any accommodation difficulties that have arisen. For example, by sharing the workshops and facilities for practical work with the partner schools, the college is able to offer design and technology courses. Students attend lessons in both centres. Whilst the arrangement is not ideal it is made to work - with the goodwill and co-operation of the staff and students.
- 72 Photography is a popular subject, and large numbers of students enrol for the new AS-courses. However the quality and pace of learning and work output in lessons is limited by the facilities. The dark room facilities and accommodation are inadequate for the number of students in the classes.

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

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	4	25	62	0	15	1.3	1.5
Computer studies	4	50	73	0	13	0.8	1.7
Art and design	1	100	74	0	23	1.0	2.3
History	1	100	n/a	0	n/a	3.0	n/a

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	27	89	87	41	43	5.9	5.8
Biology	23	100	88	30	34	6.0	5.3
Chemistry	9	100	91	67	43	7.3	6.0
Physics	13	92	88	8	40	4.6	5.7
Other science	7	100	90	29	30	5.7	5.2
Design and technology	7	71	90	0	30	3.4	5.3
Business studies	14	100	93	50	33	6.3	5.6
Computer studies	11	100	95	18	23	4.7	4.6
Sports/PE studies	10	100	92	0	25	5.6	5.1
Art and design	6	100	96	0	46	4.0	6.5
Classical studies	4	100	96	0	49	4.5	6.5
Geography	23	100	92	48	38	6.3	5.7
History	16	100	89	63	36	7.1	5.5
Sociology	10	100	86	50	35	6.2	5.3
Other social studies	17	100	87	41	34	6.2	5.3
English language	8	100	90	63	29	7.8	5.2
English literature	6	100	95	33	37	6.0	5.9
English/language	24	96	92	50	31	6.3	5.3
Communication studies	23	100	94	30	31	6.1	5.6
French	8	100	90	50	38	7.0	5.6

German	3	100	92	33	40	5.3	5.8
Spanish	2	100	89	0	39	2.0	5.7

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

- 73 The focus subjects were mathematics, AS further mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics, but electronics systems was also sampled. Over the past three years the small number of students taking A-level electronics systems have all passed. The grade range from A to E has been achieved and results have been well above average. Achievement has been satisfactory considering the students' GCSE results. In the lesson observed the quality of teaching was very good. Students of a wide range of ability were helped effectively. Students learnt from their mistakes as a result of knowledgeable questioning by the teacher.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- standards in A-level examinations are above the national average
- the subject knowledge and expertise of the teachers leads to effective teaching and learning
- students have positive attitudes to the subject
- procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good

Areas for improvement

- subject monitoring could be developed to ensure greater consistency of practice
- the use of information and communication technology to enhance students' learning in mathematics is underdeveloped
- targets for improvement could be more specific

- 74 Results in A-level mathematics have fluctuated in recent years. In 2001, they were above the national average, having been below the national average in the previous year. The proportion of students gaining A or B grades was similar to that nationally. The relative performance of male and female students varied from year to year. In 2001, two-thirds of the students who entered for AS-level mathematics at the end of Year 12 gained grades A-E.
- 75 Standards in the work seen during the inspection, both in lessons and in the student work sample, indicate that standards are above nationally expected levels. Students have a facility in algebra which supports their work in all modules. They confidently simplify fractions in algebra, factorise expressions and solve equations. They do well in their work on functions where they have a good understanding of composite and inverse functions and are able to represent them graphically. They also demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of sequences and series, and of exponential and logarithmic functions and their derivatives. They have a good understanding of many topics in statistics such as normal distribution. They do not always readily relate standard procedures from one area of mathematics to another. For example, they integrate and sketch integrating quadratic functions in pure mathematics but do not readily do so in the context of statistics. Students' skills are weaker in the area of trigonometry where they experience some difficulty in using standard trigonometric identities to simplify expressions or to solve equations. They use correct mathematical notation and symbols and this contributes to the standards they achieve in pure mathematics, statistics and mechanics. They have too few opportunities to develop their information and communication technology skills or to use

them to enhance their learning in mathematics. Students make good progress in their courses overall and achieve well.

- 76 Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good overall. The quality of relationships is a particular strength. Their work is well presented and is an illustration of the pride which they take in their work.
- 77 The quality of teaching is good overall and, as a result, the quality of learning is also good. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and this enables them to give clear explanations. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, students gained a good understanding of how to find the probabilities of particular events for a given probability density function because of the clear explanations of the teacher and the appropriate choice of illustrative examples. Clear explanations in a Year 12 lesson enabled students to learn about position, velocity and acceleration vectors. Lessons are effectively planned and build suitably on students' previous learning experiences. For example, in a Year 13 lesson on partial fractions, the work built on previous work on fractions in algebra and was also structured into increasing more complex types of fraction, thus ensuring continuity of learning experiences. Teachers set and insist on high standards in the presentation of written work and check the organisation of students' folders at regular intervals. Students are well motivated and make intellectual effort. As a result of the pace set by teachers, students work at a good rate and they remain on task for the whole lesson. Where lessons contain a large element of teacher direction, students are willing but passive learners and have limited opportunities to collaborate or to discuss their work or to develop as individual learners.
- 78 Subject management is satisfactory. There are currently three people involved in the management of the subject, one at the college with a co-ordinating role, together with the heads of mathematics from the two schools. Monitoring of the subject, including monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning, is underdeveloped. Systems are thus not fully in place to ensure consistency of practice and to enable the sharing of existing good practice. Assessment procedures are good and are contributing to progress in students' learning. Students complete assignments at the end of each unit of work and these are regularly marked by teachers. Students know how well they are progressing towards their target grades. The targets for action which are set following assignments are not always sufficiently specific to enable students to know what they need to do to improve. The new scheme of work reflects the change of examining board but it does not yet identify many opportunities for the use of computers or graphic calculators. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards achieved by students are now higher than at the time of the previous inspection.

Further mathematics

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

Strengths

- current standards are well above average
- teachers have very good subject knowledge and understanding of examination requirements
- relationships in the sixth form are positive and supportive

Areas for improvement

- better monitoring across the department to identify strengths and areas for improvement
- less teacher direction and a greater emphasis on developing students' thinking skills
- increased use of information and communication technology, especially computers and graphical calculators

- 79 There are no national comparators for the further mathematics AS level examination in 2001 and the number of students is too small to make informed comparisons. The results have remained constant over the past two years and there is no marked difference between the performance of girls and boys. In relation to their prior performance at GCSE, progress in further mathematics is above expectations.
- 80 On the basis of the students' work and the lessons observed, standards at the end of Year 13 are well above national averages. The further mathematics work is developmental and hierarchical covering modules in pure mathematics and mechanics. The pure mathematics work covers partial fractions, complex numbers, differentiation, integration and hyperbolic functions. Mechanics work covers equations of motion, centres of mass, projectiles and conservation of momentum as well as vertical and horizontal collisions. Students are achieving very well in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.
- 81 The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good. Teachers demonstrate very good subject knowledge and clear explanation so that students' learning is developed and consolidated. Teaching includes frequent references to external examination requirements and common errors are anticipated and addressed. Lesson planning is good although lesson objectives are not always shared with the students. In some lessons, teacher direction dominates the work and there is insufficient emphasis on the students' learning so that their thinking skills are not sufficiently encouraged and challenged.
- 82 Attitudes and behaviour in the sixth form are very good. Students show interest and enthusiasm for their work and they enjoy positive and productive relationships with their teachers. Relationships with one another are also positive and supportive. Students complete work to a very high standard and their organisation and presentation skills are very good.
- 83 The curriculum in the sixth form is flexible to allow different combinations of modules. The provision for literacy in the sixth form is satisfactory and technical vocabulary is used well although background reading is not sufficiently encouraged and the stock of books in the library is insufficient. The provision for information and communications technology is satisfactory but the use of computers and graphical calculators is under-developed.
- 84 The leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form are satisfactory. New schemes of work have recently been introduced although links between modules are not always clear and the timetable lacks cohesion so that later modules are started before earlier modules are completed. At present, there is insufficient monitoring and co-ordination across the department to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Biology

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

Strengths

- above average results at A level in 2001
- the sound or better progress which most students make
- good teaching that contributes to students' positive attitudes

Areas for improvement

- arrangements for keeping a check on the quality of learning and teaching
- matching work to the needs of students so that all progress equally well

- 85 In 2001, results achieved by the Year 13 students in A-level biology were above the national average. All students passed, and almost a third achieved a grade A or B. These results were much as expected in comparison with the GCSE successes of these students in Year 11. A very large number of students, some 63 of them, began studying for the new AS examination in 2001. However, 12 students dropped out of the course early on as they were finding it difficult to cope with its demands. The majority carried on and took the examination and just over a quarter gained one of the top two grades, though a small number failed to pass. The latter result was expected, even though the students were reported to have worked hard. This term, only two students have dropped out of the AS course, other than a few who changed courses within the first two weeks of term. Some students take biology as their only science subject. This makes parts of the course, especially those dealing with biochemistry, particularly challenging. As a result, these students tend not to perform as well as those studying both biology and chemistry.
- 86 Work seen during the inspection shows that students studying the AS course have made a secure start, are progressing satisfactorily and are reaching average standards overall. In work on the heart and lungs, for example, students have a sound knowledge and understanding of the structure and functions of the major parts of these organs and can speak confidently about them. Work in students' folders in other parts of the course, for example on the structure of proteins, similarly shows work that is meeting the expectations of the AS course. Year 13 students are on track to reach results that are similar to those achieved in 2001, that is above average. Progress is good, as students build on the foundations of their AS level work. In a revision lesson on ecology, for example, most students displayed a good grasp of the carbon and nitrogen cycles and of the factors affecting populations of animals. In both years, boys and girls are generally doing equally well, though girls are sometimes more painstaking than boys in building thorough notes for revision purposes. The dropout rate shows that students with more modest GCSE results tend not to cope well with advanced work in biology. Work in students' files also indicates that the more able students tend to achieve relatively better than those of average ability due to their more thorough personal work. However, in lessons seen, the more able students were not always given enough to do and, occasionally, did not progress as well as they could have. No students from minority ethnic groups were present in the classes visited. Overall students' achievements are good considering their abilities.
- 87 Teaching observed during the inspection was good. As a result, students generally learnt well and made good progress. All biology teaching is by subject specialists. Consequently, explanations of new work are clear so that students can understand them. Lessons are planned well for the new ground to be covered, building step by step on previous lessons. In this way, students can see how the course is unfolding. However, enough was not always done to match the work to the different stages of students' learning so that, occasionally, the most able students did not make enough progress and less able students were not sufficiently drawn into the discussions. Lessons are taught in a relaxed but purposeful way, where students listen carefully to their teachers and each other. All the time for the lesson is spent on learning, with no distractions. Plenty of questions are asked to check students' knowledge and understanding. But questions were not always challenging enough or didn't draw questions from students in turn. Students were rather passive, though very attentive and co-operative, in the lessons visited. Teachers select suitable methods and learning activities for their lessons so that students sustain a good effort during lessons and make good use of the opportunities for learning. Marking of students' work is good, though not consistently so. This lack of consistency also shows in the checks that are kept of students' folders.
- 88 Some satisfactory use is made of information and communication technology to support learning in biology. Students word-process some of their scientific reports, including tables to organise presentation of measurements. They use information and communication technology to research topics and to help with statistical work. Due in part to the lack of availability of computers in the biology

laboratory, students make no use of data logging to track changes, for example of temperature, during investigations. A TV-linked microscope is used well to help students' studies.

- 89 Students are building good files. These contain collections of their own notes, reports of practical investigations including those arising from fieldwork, worked examination papers and photocopied material. Together, these provide a good basis for revision and, in the case of some students, quite outstanding evidence of their very positive attitudes to biology. Teachers have a good system for checking files, with feedback given to students to help them to improve in the organisation and completeness of their work, but this is not used consistently in all cases.
- 90 The arrangements for leadership and management of biology in the sixth form college are rather complex though, as shown by the standards students are reaching, are generally working satisfactorily. The co-ordinator for biology, who is a full-time member of the college staff, is there to help colleagues as need arises, but has no responsibility for keeping a check on the quality of learning and teaching. Teachers have taken care to ensure that they are well prepared to teach the new AS examination and they attend other suitable training. The benefits of this show in the quality of teaching. The teaching scheme, though clear, is not written in sufficient detail to thoroughly support the teaching of staff new to the college or to help plan work for students of different abilities.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- the staff are well qualified and have a good knowledge of the subject
- the attitude of the students is very good and there are good relationships between the staff and students
- the attainment of students is well above the national level
- the teaching is good and most students achieve at or above their identified potential
- students are aware of their achievements and progress due to effective assessment and monitoring

Areas for improvement

- a range of materials is needed to support the wide range of student attainment seen
- insufficient use is made of computers and information and communication technology

- 91 The A-level results in 2001 were well above the national average. Two-thirds of the students gained grades A or B. This high level of attainment has been maintained over the past few years. Most students' grades were at or above their predicted attainment levels and there was no significant difference in the achievement of boys and girls. Forty per cent of students gained A or B grades in the new AS-level in this year. There are no national comparators available yet. Almost all students attained at or above their predicted grade. Seventeen of the twenty-four students who took AS chemistry last year continued to A-level. There was no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls at A-level
- 92 Year 12 students were finding the transition from GCSE relatively easy to cope with. The students were confident to enter into class discussions and were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject. For example, when students described the electron arrangement in covalent compounds and the effect of this on bond angles, they did so in a clear and concise manner. Students in Year 12 and those in Year 13 showed a level of attainment above national expectations. Year 13 students showed a good understanding of physical chemical principles while discussing the concept of lattice energy in ionic structures. They applied their numeracy skills well, together with their extensive chemical

knowledge, in calculating energy changes during ion formation. Students in both years are achieving well in relation to their previous attainment.

- 93 The teaching in chemistry is good. Although the lessons observed were teacher led, the staff maintained the students' interest by demonstrating a clear enthusiasm for the subject, using their good subject knowledge. The teachers involved students in constructive question and answer sessions, which enabled them to demonstrate their understanding. However, the large size of one group meant that some of the students were rather passive and not fully involved. The students' notes and teachers' lesson plans show that a good range of teaching styles are used, including the opportunity of performing many practical investigations.
- 94 The marking of homework and other assessment tasks is detailed with constructive comments and grades. Students appreciate the high quality of assessment and are aware of their potential and their targets. The regular use of review assessment sheets helps students and teachers to evaluate progress and achievement. This process allows the teachers to be aware of individual students' potential and is used to guide students in a very supportive manner. Teachers are willing to offer extra help and support to any student who requests assistance.
- 95 The attitude of students in chemistry is very good. This was evident in the complete and high standard lesson notes of all the students. In class, students were attentive, polite, and confident in contributing to class discussions. All teachers enjoyed a good relationship with the students and this gave rise to a general overall feeling of co-operation. Students appreciated the high quality of teaching within the subject and felt confident of success.
- 96 The management of the department is satisfactory despite the fact that there is no formal structure. The wide range of attainment seen in students in the large groups is a challenge to teachers. There is a need for the department to devise ways of ensuring that all the students have access to suitable material to allow them to progress. Little monitoring of teaching and learning takes place, which is limiting the potential for sharing good practice. Currently, no use is made of information and communication technology in teaching chemistry.

Physics

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

Strengths

- physics teaching is interesting and based on good subject knowledge
- subject planning is good
- students have good attitudes to learning and their behaviour is very good indeed
- students' notes are carefully managed and of good quality, with a good emphasis on problems

Areas for improvement

- lower-attaining students underachieve; they struggle to understand concepts in AS physics and do not pass external examinations
- uncertainty over the management of teaching staff from the two schools results in inconsistent evaluation of teaching and learning

- 97 A-level standards in 2000 were average overall when compared with national results. Attainment was below average in 2001. Over the past three years students have attained grades in the range A to E but, each year, one or more students have not passed. In relation to their GCSE grades, high and middle attaining students have done well but lower attainers, often with a C grade at GCSE or those

who find mathematics difficult, have struggled with the complex concepts required and have not made satisfactory progress. Their achievements have been unsatisfactory. The number of girls taking the subject is low although there are a few in each year.

- 98 The standard of work of current Year 12 AS students is below average, with a likely grade range from A to N, including a few who may not pass overall. The range of capabilities is greater on the AS course than for the A2 programme followed in Year 13. Current standards of Year 13 students are above average. Achievement for high and middle ability students was similarly good in both year groups as a result of effective teaching by knowledgeable physicists. Good, clear explanations of the Doppler effect for Year 12 students, however, left a few struggling with how to calculate frequency and wavelength changes. The changes in sounds heard as a police car speeds towards or away from an observer were appreciated, but the explanations as to why this happened were beyond the understanding of a few. Students' work indicated that a similar situation occurs when other mathematical and abstract ideas are taught.
- 99 The quality of teaching observed was good, resulting in effective learning for all but the lowest attainers. Three lessons were seen, covering just two of the four classes and two of the four physicists. A key strength in teaching is staff subject knowledge, which results in confident, good explanations of physics, and interested if rather quiet students. Each class is taught by two staff ensuring that the expert knowledge of two physicists is available; the students appreciate this. Planning is thorough, resulting in good coverage of syllabus requirements with a strong practical emphasis. Students are set a good number of problems, often using past examination paper questions. Staff are aware of the importance of a good grounding in mathematics if higher grades are to be achieved. The quality of teaching could be further improved through more rigorous questioning of named students, particularly lower attainers, and better marking of work, providing more detailed constructive criticism. Students listen attentively and co-operate. They are considerate to their peers and relationships generally are very good. Students' behaviour is very good indeed. During the lessons observed, some students tended to accept points when they would have benefited from asking for further clarification.
- 100 Students' notes indicate that most are conscientious and reasonably hard working. Work is presented well and organised carefully, enabling students to revise properly. Few examples of the use of information and communication technology were apparent in the students' files, although computer use is now built into the scheme of work. Students mentioned that they made infrequent use of it in physics lessons, but all spoken to were confident in using the Internet, word-processing and spreadsheets, for researching and presenting information. Many of the problems answered are self-marked by the students. Teachers' markbooks are too variable, and some have insufficient records of students' achievements. A more systematic and consistent approach to marking and recording across the department would be helpful to the students. Useful, regular topic tests are set and marked, enabling staff to know students' strengths and weaknesses at the end of each section of work.
- 101 Staff from both high schools teach physics in the sixth form college. They work together and share ideas, but overall management responsibilities are unclear; there are differences of view over 'who is responsible for what'. Resources are bought which are mainly based at the college and these are used well. Arrangements for ensuring that physics is well resourced are good. The laboratories are a good facility, looked after well and used effectively. Inconsistencies are apparent in monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, and in assessment and marking policies because these are based on two different school systems. Data is not yet used effectively, for example to ensure that those students starting the course have a realistic chance of completing it successfully. College managers are fully aware of these management problems, that result from the necessarily complex arrangements involving two schools. They are working to find a solution that will be of benefit to staff and help to improve standards in physics further.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- well-organised procedures to teach the new courses
- close co-operation between the two design and technology teaching teams from the separate schools
- students are achieving well as a result of good teaching and their very positive attitudes
- marking and assessment procedures that inform students and enable them to achieve to their potential

Areas for improvement

- more planned inclusion of the use of computer skills including computer aided design and manufacturing
- develop literacy and learning skills, for example, the ability of students to develop and present information to different audiences

- 102 Students have taken A-level design and technology courses for a number of years. Currently, Year 13 students are in the second year of a new product design course having taken the AS-level examination in this course in 2001. Students join the course with a variety of design and making experience because of the different design and technology subjects taken at GCSE. At the time of the inspection there was little practical work available and judgements about modelling and manufacturing skills relied upon photographic evidence contained in students design folders.
- 103 A-level results in 2001 were well below national average although the numbers following the course are too small for meaningful national comparison. However, students achieved satisfactorily in relation to their attainment when they started the course. In the new AS-level examination, 5 of the 7 candidates gained grades A or B and students achieved well in comparison with their attainment at the beginning of the course.
- 104 Current standards are broadly average and achievement is good considering the students' prior learning. Students' completed course work to date is of a good standard. Where, in a few cases, the standard of current work does not reflect students' predicted grades, it is because it is not well enough organised. All students, however, are making good advances in knowledge, understanding and skills as they progress through the AS and A2 courses. For example, they are good at analysing existing products and, after research and evaluation, are able to develop their own ideas for adapting or improving products. Drawing, writing and presentation skills vary considerably with ability but a significant strength of most students' work is the annotation of sketches. Students develop good knowledge of materials and how products are constructed. They have good understanding of technical processes and this results in effective research into products such as screwdrivers and spanners before designing, making, testing and evaluating their own versions. The understanding of industrial and manufacturing practice is developing satisfactorily, for example through the group work taking place in Year 12 to design and make a document holder using batch production methods. However, although some use is made of computers to present work, the use of computer-aided design and manufacturing is at present under-developed.

- 105 Most students show a very positive attitude to their work and are making good progress at this stage of the course. Students are closely monitored and given regular detailed oral and written feedback about their individual performance. This is very effective in enabling students to develop and improve their work and for their personal development. Behaviour in lessons is good and there are positive working relationships. Casual, informal conversation by a small number of more dominant students does sometimes deflect others from engaging in tasks set.
- 106 Teaching is good. Shared teaching of the A-level courses is planned and carried out very effectively between the teams of teachers from the two contributory schools. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and this is used to plan and teach well-structured courses. Students and resources are managed well. Comprehensive marking to clear criteria, together with extensive written comments, enable students to develop and improve their work. A good range of teaching methods is used. Teaching resources are well prepared and time is used effectively. For example, overhead projection slides were used to reinforce technical words and discussions about form, function and aesthetics. Targeted written and oral questions were used to engage all students in an extremely well-resourced and organised evaluation of potato peelers. The majority of students work hard on their research and evaluation and, because they are given very good individual advice and support, they know how to use their knowledge and skills in an interesting and creative manner.
- 107 Leadership and management of the course are good. Staff work very hard, and co-operatively, to manage the complex arrangements for the teaching of designing and making activities. The team teaching which takes place is well organised to make use of teachers' expertise and the time and resources available. Courses are well documented with developing, detailed schemes of work that provide structured and well-organised experiences for all students.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

- 108 A-level computing was the focus of the inspection. AVCE Information technology was sampled. This course was begun in September 2000. Results at the end of the first year were disappointing. This was partly due to it being a new course and students coming to terms with different ways of being assessed. This resulted in an unsatisfactory balance in the time allowed for each module. This problem has been remedied and the standards of students currently in Year 12 are at the expected level, and those of students now in Year 13 have improved and are at nationally expected levels.

Computing

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

Strengths

- students achieve well in this subject
- teaching is good which leads to good learning
- resources are very good resources, including staffing, accommodation and learning resources, for the subject

Areas for improvement

- increase the opportunities for students to develop as independent learners
- make greater use of available information to set clear subject targets and ensure that feedback from on-going assessment links to progress towards these targets

- 109 Results in 2001 were in line with the national average. The previous year they had been well above. The number of students studying the subject is small and the results at the end of the course are very

dependent upon the prior attainment of each cohort of students. Analysis shows that, when compared to their attainment on entry to the course, these results represent good achievement for both groups of students. A larger number of students studied the new AS course and gained good results although there are no national comparisons available at the moment. From observation and scrutiny of students' files, the standards of work of both the current Year 12 and Year 13 students are above the expected level for the course and these students' achievements are also good.

- 110 Students, generally, have a facility with computers. They have used word-processing, database and spreadsheet packages well to record and respond to tasks set in a commercial context. For example, Year 12 students have learned how to reduce the repetition of stored information by using relational databases in a simple sweet shop scenario. Year 13 students develop this capability further in their work. Students show their understanding of computer systems through their analysis of, for example, input, output and storage devices. They show their understanding of the impact of computers on society through the scenarios which they model and their responses to questions on data protection shows them coming to terms with some ethical issues. The quality of their work shows through in their individual projects and these allow the higher attaining students to reach a good standard. This was illustrated when Year 13 students were learning how to write a web page using machine language, a topic specific to the new course. A student had developed, in the previous year, a high quality page which went far beyond the requirements of the syllabus.
- 111 Teaching is good. Clear explanations from knowledgeable teachers help students understand new ideas quickly. Additional information sheets help students build up a good set of notes for future reference and revision. Regular checking of folders encourages students to maintain them in good order and ensures that previous errors have been corrected. Lessons are well planned and offer students interesting and relevant scenarios and the use of an appropriate range of software packages. Much of the work is teacher driven as students learn to use these packages. Project work requires students to be more independent and they respond well. Strategies to develop students' independence are comparatively under-used. Tests and assessments are regularly set and thoroughly marked. Providing students with the mark scheme helps them to learn how they might, in future, maximise their marks. Guidance is given when work is marked and returned. Teachers record more on students' work in Year 13 than in Year 12. By the time students are in Year 13 they know the examination grade which their GCSE performance suggests and the level which their work currently demonstrates. Knowledge of these predictions earlier in the course would allow the setting of subject specific targets and assessment to be more closely linked to individual progress.
- 112 The subject is well managed, with both staff based at the college working closely together. An appropriate priority has been to develop and refine schemes of work to meet the requirements of the new syllabus. Formal monitoring and evaluation of classroom practice has relied upon the college's performance management procedures. Students like the subject and believe that they are taught well and are well supported. The subject is very well resourced, teachers are enthusiastic and up to date with their fast moving subject and teaching rooms are modern, of a good size and well equipped.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Sports studies

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

Strengths

- attainment is above average; coursework is a particular strength
- use of a variety of teaching methods results in effective learning

- good use is made of information and communication technology
- target setting and marking are focussed on achieving predicted grades

Areas for improvement

- ensuring that lower-attaining students understanding what can and cannot be varied in comparing performance data

- 113 Results in 2001 were above the national average. The attainment of boys and girls changes from year to year, but the numbers taking the course are small. In the new AS-level examination in 2001, nearly one-third of students gained grades A or B. Students taking both AS and A2 courses achieved satisfactorily, considering their attainment on entry to the sixth form.
- 114 Students currently in Years 12 and 13 are producing work which is above national expectations. This is similar to the findings of the last inspection. Students currently in Year 12 take care to arrange their written work so that it is well organised for revision. This methodical approach is particularly helpful to lower attaining students' confidence in accessing essential elements to the course. For example, good links are made between fitness, body function, personality and achievement so students understand the psychological and physiological effects of altitude. Some lower attaining students, in a lesson relating circuit training to improving fitness, did not fully understand in their evaluation the need to keep all things the same if reliable measurements and target setting were to be achieved. Most students achieve well. Students in Year 13 convey their views effectively. For example, when analysing the influence of history on contemporary sport, they identify how international events can be inclusive and benefit international understanding. Conversely, students also understand how such events can be influenced by politics, racism and conflict and the attendant moral issues, for example the undermining of the Olympic ideal by the actions of individual nations. High attaining students produce mature written work; they use correct technical terms and work is accurately structured. They achieve well with good results in set work, even on complex issues such as the physics and principles of movement. Lower attaining students achieve well because they are given guidance in analysing exactly what is required for homework or an examination question.
- 115 Overall the teaching is good. Teachers have high expectations of students. The most effective lessons have good planning and organisation, which leads to good pace and results in effective learning. Most lessons include a variety of teaching methods that reinforce learning as well as adding interest. Teaching is often linked to familiar situations or sports personalities so that students readily relate this to their learning. For example, David Beckham's skills were used in understanding the various effects on the spinning ball. Good use is made of information and communication technology, which is accessed widely in teaching, research, coursework and recording. Marking and assessment is closely related to A-level grading and linked to target setting. This enables teachers to identify underachieving students and, where necessary, mentoring sessions are arranged to redirect and assist students. Learning is not as effective when students' understanding is not checked. For example, when students suggested that changing equipment on a circuit would add interest they were not helped to recognise that changing more than one variable made the comparison of data impossible.
- 116 Students have a very responsible attitude to their work. They have confidence in their teachers' knowledge. Good relationships enable teachers to tease out contributions to discussions from even the most reticent students; the minority of students, who are reluctant speakers, are therefore included. Students are prepared to assist one another, for example, in making improvements to computer work.
- 117 The department is well led and managed. There is a determination, and a commitment, to maintain high standards. This aim is supported by the teachers' careful analysis of examination results. For example, teachers are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of students' previous performance in the various

components of the course and know where improvements might be made. The scheme of work contains the components of the course and ensures complete coverage of the syllabus, as well as suggestions on use of resources and teaching methods. Teachers update their knowledge by networking with other schools and reading evaluations on examination courses. Ongoing department initiatives provide a good basis for sustaining the present level of good attainment and achievement.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

- 118 The focus was on art and theatre studies. Media studies and photography were sampled. There was no opportunity to sample music. 2001 media studies results were well above national average, having been below the previous year. In the one lesson observed, good teaching helped students to analyse the conventions, house style and appeal of magazines. This resulted in a good understanding of how image and message were effectively conveyed. There are no separate comparators for attainment in photography.

Art

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

Strengths

- very positive relationships and personal development fostered
- the combined skills and expertise of staff based in the two schools and the sixth from college
- the quality of work reviews and verbal feedback given to students

Areas for improvement

- management of the subject - through more rigorous monitoring of the impact of teaching on the quality and standard of work produced to ensure students fulfil their potential

- 119 The trend in attainment shows standards to be below average in recent years except in 1999 where they were significantly higher. Male students did particularly well. The point score of students taking A-level art and design and photography examinations in 2000 was below the average and, in 2001, it was well below average. Results in recent years show achievement was unsatisfactory given students' starting points.
- 120 Results in the new AS-level examinations in 2001 show a significant proportion of students attained the higher A and B grades. Some students achieved very well having begun the courses with limited experience of art and design skills, knowledge and understanding. This was particularly the case for students studying photography.
- 121 Standards of work by students currently in Year 13 are higher than in previous years and broadly average. The work seen in lessons shows achievement as being satisfactory overall but with some variation in the achievements of individual students relative to their prior attainment in AS examinations. Not all are maintaining the same rate of progress and therefore on track to meet their targets in the second year of study. There are no significant differences in the achievements of female and male students. The standard of analytical and critical thinking, that comes through both written and practical work, is not high enough, particularly from students whose prior attainment suggests they should be attaining the higher grades in the A-level examination. Although some of the work by students shows good quality drawing and painting this is not always used as the standard for the next piece of work and progressively developed to an even higher level as students move through the course. The quality of painting is below the standard expected at this stage of the course. Art and design students who also have a qualification in photography combine the skills well in some units. A

significant number of students from the partner schools have not been well prepared for advanced level work, in Key Stage 3 and GCSE courses, and teaching does not always take sufficient account of this. Their achievement is barely satisfactory.

- 122 Teaching and learning are sound overall. In half the lessons seen, teaching was good. The strengths of teaching are in the relationships that exist between teachers and students. Visits to galleries, and to national and international centres, foster the students' enthusiasm for learning. Imaginative and thoughtful use is made of the supporting materials, sketches and photographs. Students enjoy the work and many who enrolled for a one-year course decided to take a further year because they enjoyed the subject so much. Teachers give effective, one-to-one reviews of students' work, helping them see where improvements are needed. Teaching staff are experienced and have a good range of specialist skills and this leads to some very effective overlapping of disciplines, for example by using photography as a means of recording ideas and observations. However, the impact of teaching over time is less effective than it could be because teachers make too little use of their assessments of students' achievements to set an appropriate standard for the next stage of their learning. There are both strengths and weaknesses in lesson planning and teachers' expectations of a few students are not high enough. Students are generally taught by more than one teacher and the decisions about who will teach particular skills and knowledge, and what will be assessed, are not made sufficiently clear either in teachers' planning or to students.
- 123 The day-to-day management of the subject is satisfactory and enables the staff from two schools to pool their skills and experiences. Their presence also provides students with continuity as they move from one centre to another. However, roles and responsibilities for managing the subject are blurred and the longer-term strategic plans for improvement are weak. There are no clear plans for developing the use of information and communication technology, improving recruitment and tackling the trend of under-performance. The monitoring of students' achievements and of teaching needs to be more rigorous and regularly undertaken by the subject leader. The department does not have a technician and so technical tasks have to be carried out by teachers. This is not good use of their time and detracts from tackling the under-performance of some students.

Theatre studies

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

Strengths

- tasks are clearly related to examination criteria so that students understand the nature of the task, and how they can demonstrate achievement
- students work well in groups to share, probe and develop ideas
- accommodation is good and well used

Areas for improvement

- examination results are very variable
- in discussion and written work, though scripts are analysed thoroughly, too many students give insufficient attention to how they might be interpreted or directed

- 124 During the period of the inspection, staff absence coupled with a pre-planned school activity resulted in it being possible to observe only one lesson. Broader judgements were also based on a scrutiny of the folders and files of a sample of Year 12 and Year 13 students.
- 125 A-level theatre studies attracts a small but viable group of students each year. Results in 2001, albeit from a small entry, were well below national average. This represented a decline from the previous

year's results, which were above national average. The progress which students made from their GCSE results was less than might have been expected. The subject continued its traditions of a high retention rate and all students who were entered gained a pass grade.

- 126 The standards of work of the current Year 13 students are close to the national average, representing satisfactory achievement. They are good at quickly understanding scripts, including the more subtle issues in them. Confident group work is well used to examine ideas and issues, and students are particularly effective in using each other's strengths and knowledge. Surprisingly, they are much less animated and involved when working as a whole class, where they become too passive. Student files show a good understanding of the history of theatre, and the theory behind the work of various dramatists from Greek theatre to Ibsen, Brecht and Stanislavski. Higher attaining students show very good awareness of the historical and cultural background to theatre, and can relate themes in texts to literature and art. Average attaining students write in a lively, self-aware style and are able to use a reflective style. Too often, however, they revert to sweeping and unsubstantiated statements. Lower attaining students have a sound knowledge of theatre but find it difficult to see in texts, themes and links to other texts or art forms. Information and communication technology skills are well integrated into their written work by all students, downloaded research and website references being particularly effectively used. A common weakness is insufficient bridging between the text and performance, so that analysis remains too close to literary criticism, and the skills of interpreting and directing performance are not used and demonstrated enough.
- 127 Teaching was satisfactory in the one lesson seen. There was good knowledge both of the subject and the background to it so that the significance of the text's Irish setting was brought out for students. Good planning helped students to relate their work both to drama theory and to A-level success criteria. However this focus was not sufficiently broadened by the teacher in a question and answer session where issues such as characters' attitudes and emotions needed further exploration. Student files show that teaching is at least satisfactory over time. Appropriate work is regularly set and well marked. Clear advice is given as to how examination criteria can be more closely met.
- 128 Students have good attitudes to theatre studies as evidenced in the general diligence and smartness of their files, and the positive relationships they have with teachers and each other. The latter are well used in group work, but less so in whole class work where students tend to wait to be asked a specific question. Their concentration when working in groups and their support for each other are important factors in their learning.
- 129 Staffing changes have resulted in a number of very positive changes. The new scheme of work is clear and precise, with a good focus to examination requirements. Descriptors for achievement are being used by both teachers and students to ensure a shared language for, and understanding of, drama skills and the progress being made in them. Links have been forged with four local theatre groups resulting in a significant increase in theatre visits and potential work experience placements. Visits to workshops and visits by professionals, such as a Zimbabwe dance group, have taken place. Teachers have identified what they need to do to improve and have undertaken extra training. Valuable, long-standing traditions, such as A-level students working with younger students, continue in workshops and productions. In this and other ways, the subject continues to make an important contribution to the social and cultural awareness of students, and students generally. Accommodation for teaching the subject remains good and is used effectively. After a period of swift transition the department is in a good position to improve.

HUMANITIES

- 130 Geography, history and sociology formed the focus of the inspection and lessons in classical civilisation, government and politics, law, psychology and the philosophy of religion were sampled. In a lesson in psychology, students demonstrated better than expected standards in their work as they drew on their good range of knowledge when evaluating the reasons why people remember and forget different things. In a government and politics lesson, standards were broadly in line with expectations. Students discussed the nature of prime ministerial power and those of higher attainment were able to identify and analyse a number of contentious policies. In classical civilisation, students demonstrate good research skills and synthesise information from a number of sources to increase their understanding of topics like everyday life in towns in Roman Britain. The standards that students demonstrate in philosophy are broadly as expected. Students demonstrate good research skills, using the Internet, for example, to prepare presentations on the value of telepathy in the understanding of philosophical issues. The lesson observed in law was well planned and most students achieved well, although a few were not sufficiently involved.

Geography

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

Strengths

- student attitudes are very good and they achieve very well
- quality of teaching in all lessons observed was very good
- teachers have very good subject knowledge that enriches the quality and range of students' learning
- the residential fieldwork provision in Year 12 is of good quality
- the assessment procedures and practices with their focus on improving standards of attainment are very effective

Areas for improvement

- planning for the use of information and communication technology in schemes of work
- the role of the heads of department in the 11-16 schools in the management of the department

- 131 Results in 2001 were above the national average and half the candidates gained A or B grades. The majority of students achieved or exceeded their predicted grades. Overall, over the previous three years, results have been better than the national average and the majority of students have achieved as well as or better than predicted on the basis of prior attainment. In the new AS-level examination this year most students achieved their predicted grades on the basis of their prior attainment.
- 132 The work of current students exceeds national standards. In Year 13, most students are achieving standards expected or better than would be expected in relation to predictions based on their GCSE results. In the lessons observed they were achieving this as a result of very effective teaching which made considerable demands on both their previous knowledge, their powers of reasoning and their ability to analyse data. In a physical geography lesson, the structure of the lesson and the range of activities clearly focused their learning and students applied previous knowledge and developed a good understanding of the reasons for the distribution of corries. Similarly in a lesson on human geography, students built on existing knowledge and developed a good understanding of the problems associated with population pressure. Students recall knowledge very well, interpret and analyse data very well and are able to discuss fairly sophisticated geographical concepts using appropriate subject-specific vocabulary. They apply this well both in full class discussions and through written work.
- 133 Students in Year 12 are achieving much as expected from their previous attainment. They show good knowledge and understanding of the reasons for the suburbanisation of a village and analyse a range of

information to identify critical stages in the development of a village. Students are successfully moving on from their GCSE work and developing their data processing and analysis skills.

- 134 Teaching is very good overall and students learn well as a result. Clear objectives, very good planning, a brisk pace, very good relationships with the students and an imaginative range of methods and approaches were a constant feature of all the lessons observed. All teachers show very good subject knowledge through their explanations and through their question and answer sessions with students. The physical geography lesson on the distribution of corries, for example, included an excellent introductory exposition from the class teacher and was followed by a rigorous and well-focused question and answer session involving all of the students. This led to very effective learning. There were also very good opportunities for students to work independently and to then explain their findings to the rest of the group. This was an outstanding feature of a very good, very well-structured and organised lesson in Year 12, where students worked extremely effectively because the class teacher constantly challenged them and provided them with very good stimulus material. Learning was once again very effective. Students learn well. They are co-operative, attentive, work productively and respond well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles they experience. They work well in small groups, support each other and listen well to each other's ideas. Most are confident in offering their ideas and respond well when they are given more responsibility for their own learning.
- 135 The courses are well planned and meet the requirements of the syllabus. Attention is paid to geographical vocabulary to ensure that students understand and use the correct terms. The use of information and communication technology is still developing and is not consistently incorporated into schemes of work or programmes of study.
- 136 In many respects the good teaching and learning in the subject is supported by effective leadership and management, although the role of the heads of department from the two 11-16 schools in the management of the subject is not clear. Day-to-day management and organisation are very good and there is a very clear commitment to improving standards and building on what has already been achieved. This is illustrated by good student review procedures, involving discussion between student and subject staff, followed by student self-evaluation and recording of targets. These targets are focused sharply on specific learning goals, based on analysis of students' performance and their prior attainment. Marking is rigorous and provides clearly identified specific targets for improvement. There are appropriate opportunities for students to produce work for in-depth assessment. Fieldwork in Year 12 is very well organised and provides good opportunities for students to extend their knowledge and understanding and to fulfil the requirements of the syllabus. Department development planning for this year does not identify, in sufficient detail, the priorities for the sixth form or the professional development requirements for members of the department. Regular department meetings focus on important issues and are helpful in ensuring effective communication within the department, although there is little focus in these meetings on teaching and learning in the sixth form or on the sharing of good practice.
- 137 Following the last inspection there has been very good progress in the setting of student targets following assessment.

History

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

Strengths

- standards well above the national average

- good teaching which stimulates and challenges students and extends their historical knowledge and understanding to a high level
- students produce well-structured arguments: they analyse the causes and consequences of events, make good use of historical terminology, and reach balanced conclusions
- students' attitudes are very positive; they enjoy their study of history.

Areas for improvement

- students' skills in analysing and evaluating sources are not as well developed as other aspects of their work

- 138 Students' performance in examinations was well above the national average in 2001 and 2000, and above average in 1999. There is an improving trend in the number of students awarded the higher grades. In 2001, all students who took the examination achieved A to E grades, and about two-thirds attained A or B grades, a success rate which is also above the national average and is the best achieved by the college to date. Over the past four years there has been no significant difference in the attainment of male and female students. Most students starting the course completed it and, in relation to their previous attainment, achieved well.
- 139 In 2001, most of the students who took the new AS-level examination passed and nearly one-third gained grades A or B. Although most students who started the course completed it, achievement was significantly below expectations when compared with students' previous attainment. This reflects the students' less confident approach to the analysis of historical sources and the lack of staff training on the new specification.
- 140 Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of work show that the current standards in both years are above average and achievement is good. Students' written work is of high quality and demonstrates very good knowledge and understanding of the topics studied. Their essay writing is fluent and makes good use of relevant quotations and historical terminology. Notes are concise and well focused. Students analyse complex historical events and make good causal links when explaining events such as the fall of Lloyd George. Students are aware of various historical interpretations and explain why historians interpret the past differently, for example the events surrounding the Holocaust. When researching their personal studies, students work well independently. They are articulate and work co-operatively to produce group work and presentations, for example on international relations in the 1930s. However, students' skills in critically analysing and evaluating sources are not as well developed as other aspects of their work.
- 141 Students learn well and the work in their well-kept folders shows progress in the quality of their thinking and writing. This good learning is a result of the students' positive attitudes and a very good work ethic fostered by their teachers. The quality of teaching is good overall, with some very good features. A notable characteristic of the very good practice within the department is the high quality feedback students receive on their essays. Students are given a clear understanding of what they have done well and what they must do to improve. Students' folders show that they respond to the comments made, for example on the need to support arguments with quotations from texts and the importance of balanced conclusions. Students would similarly benefit from this level of guidance on their source work.
- 142 Other features of the very good teaching are high expectations and confident use of subject knowledge, which enable the teachers to ask challenging questions. In a lesson on the inter-war period, subject expertise was used to extend students' understanding and as a result they were able to acquire an overview of the complex international situation in the 1930s. As a result of the diversity of personal study topics chosen by students, teachers are occasionally unable to provide suitable support and

challenge. The department need to investigate ways of utilising their considerable collective expertise to ensure that all students receive appropriate support.

- 143 The good teaching in the department is also reflected in the wide range of learning activities. These include presentations, group activities, analytical diagrams, timelines, source work, extended writing and independent research. Students make sound use of information and communication technology in the presentation of their work, but need more guidance on how to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet as a tool for historical research.
- 144 The two heads of department from the partner schools provide satisfactory leadership and management of the subject. There have been recent improvements in the quality of some schemes of work, which place more emphasis on learning objectives than subject content. These improved schemes of work are a better model for giving guidance to the members of staff who are new to teaching the AS- and A-level courses. The subject development plan needs to focus more explicitly on what needs to be done to improve further the quality of teaching and student achievement. In particular it should look at ways of sharing the good practice within the department and extend the very good feedback to students' source-based work.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- clear and informed management of the department supports subject teaching staff and promotes students' learning
- good teaching leads to student success in examinations
- good relationships with students

Areas for improvement

- implement planned monitoring procedures to raise the standard of satisfactory teaching and thus the students' achievement

- 145 Results in 2001 were above the national average. Small groups lead to varying results year on year. In 2000, the department's results were very high compared to the national average. In the new AS-level examination in 2001, about two-thirds of candidates gained grades A or B. Students' achievement is generally good in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.
- 146 Standards of work of current students are above national expectations and they achieve well. Year 13 students are aiming to build on their success in last year's AS-level study. In a lesson in which they were preparing for their research study, they showed a confident knowledge of research methodology. For example, they easily classified questions from sample questionnaires into categories and identified key issues for researchers such as purpose, clarity, confidentiality and validity. Their neat, good written work indicated confident, independent learners putting theory into the practice of field research. They had a sound grasp of major theoretical perspectives and significant case studies.
- 147 Students in Year 12 showed that they were making a sound start. With reference to case studies already well known to them, they could discuss key issues in the methodology of social research such as confidentiality and respect for the participants. In their discussion of the ethical issues present in research (to be weighed in the balance of the need for valid results) the higher attaining students were able to demonstrate a sound knowledge of methodological issues and apply them to examples from significant research they had read and analysed.

- 148 Based on all the available evidence, including the samples of work provided, the quality of teaching is good overall. It was very good in a lesson observed when the teacher structured and focused the lesson around a clear objective. By posing new questions as students constructively critiqued research materials, the teacher drew them into new understanding of the dilemmas they might face in their individual research studies. Similarly, in a Year 12 lesson, the teacher drew effectively on recent past learning, posing searching suggestions as they debated. This encouraged these students, relatively new to their studies, to see the contradictions of competing needs in research and they described this dilemma well. They readily made reference to case studies they had worked with in their different modules. The impact of teaching can be seen in the well-informed and organised work in the students' files in Year 13. Teaching was only satisfactory when opportunities were missed to engage the students in their learning. For example, in a lesson where students provided the data for differences in expectations between their and their mothers' generation, the teacher summed up and analysed the results and substantially provided the explanations. The students at this stage were reduced to passive recipients.
- 149 The department is well led and managed with very good knowledge of the subject and examination demands in the department. As a result, the guidance for students is very clear and provides a basis for understanding the demands of the course. Guidance for teachers is equally supportive. The students' files in Year 13 show a consistent approach to planning for syllabus coverage, the value of which is seen in the success of the department in the past two years.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

- 150 The English language and literature course and French were a focus of the inspection. Lessons in English literature, German and Spanish were sampled. The English literature lesson seen was well planned with the teacher showing good subject knowledge; the students had very positive attitudes to their studies. In German and Spanish lessons, the students again had very positive attitudes. They worked well and attained good standards in response to good or very good teaching.

English - language and literature

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

Strengths

- schemes of work are detailed and clearly planned
- relationships between staff and students are good, enabling students to work confidently
- standards of attainment are good overall and students make good progress
- the department is well resourced

Areas for improvement

- there is a need for a coherent system of monitoring to ensure consistency of good practice
- the use of performance data by subject teachers is not securely in place
- the use of information and communication technology needs developing as a tool for learning

- 151 Results in 2001 were well above the national average. All but a small minority of students achieved at least as well, and in many cases better, than their GCSE results predicted. Male and female students did equally well overall.
- 152 The standards of work of current students are at least at nationally expected levels and much is better than this. Students in Year 13 are achieving appropriately in relation to their attainment on entry to the

course. The written work seen was a more positive indicator of their achievement than the work observed in lessons. Files seen were well organised and detailed, showing evidence of progress over time. The amount of assessed work varied from student to student but there was a good range of assignments developing different skills. Students in Year 12 are achieving satisfactorily. They show a thorough knowledge of basic language work and are beginning to approach texts with increased analytical and evaluative skills.

- 153 The assessment of written work seen for Year 12 and Year 13 students was variable. Comments on work were all encouraging and errors were corrected but in some cases there was little advice about how progress could be made. In the best practice seen, assessment was evaluative with clear guidance given about how to improve written work and raise the standard of attainment.
- 154 Teaching observed was satisfactory overall with some good features. Teachers have good subject knowledge and there is clear evidence of sound planning. Teaching is thorough but occasionally lacks some rigour. Lessons had a clear basic structure but the pace sometimes flagged and both small group and whole-class discussions varied from the focused and perceptive, to the more laboured. Relationships between students, and between them and staff, are good. Many students show their confidence in contributing their views and those who participate in class express themselves fluently and sometimes with considerable insight. In the lessons seen, not all participated, however, and while most were involved and attentive there was some digression in group activities. The quality of students' work over time, however, showed that teaching is effective and successful in enabling students to achieve well and attain high standards
- 155 Opportunities are given for different types of learning, in particular explanation by the teacher, class discussion based around clear questioning and small group work. In one lesson, students were examining closely a short scene from a David Hare play 'Murmuring Judges' Their group work led to a useful exchange of ideas in the subsequent plenary session.
- 156 The curriculum is well planned and resourced with schemes of work revised regularly. This course makes a very positive contribution to the development of Key Skills and to the social and cultural education of the students. Too little use is made of information and communication technology, however, as a learning tool within the department.
- 157 Leadership of the curriculum area is complex because of the roles of the two high school heads of department. The subject co-ordinator has produced clear and well-thought-out schemes of work and supports her colleagues well, but her role does not include monitoring, team building and development planning and these areas have been neglected as a consequence. Management although satisfactory, as measured by the outcomes for the students, is not as effective as it could be.

French

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

Strengths

- improved standards, which are now above the national average
- consistently good quality of teaching with very effective use of ICT
- very good curriculum planning and assessment
- students have very positive attitudes and a learning partnership with their teachers

Areas for improvement

- development planning should include a specific focus on raising standards

- the department needs to develop strategies to improve the recruitment of boys

- 158 The numbers of students taking A-level have fluctuated in recent years, but students' average points score in French has risen steadily to a level well above the national average in 2001. There has also been an improvement in the value added to students' attainment compared to their performance at GCSE. Half the students taking A-level French in 2000 and 2001 attained the higher grades A and B. All the students taking the examination in 2000 and 2001 were female. A large number of students, again predominantly female, sat the new AS-level examination in 2001: all but one were successful, though the majority attained grades C – E.
- 159 Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average. Students in Year 12 have successfully made the transition from GCSE to advanced study. In one lesson, they developed their understanding of the future tense through the lyrics of a contemporary song, which were both intellectually challenging and culturally stimulating. In another lesson, they prepared and conducted a debate on smoking which featured coherent and persuasive contributions from across the group. Their written work is of good quality, including substantial development of grammatical knowledge, response to a wide range of contemporary source material as well as more personal written response, including poetry. Year 13 students used a Maupassant short story to enhance their knowledge of narrative tense. Their written work is copious and very well organised, including extensive grammatical consolidation, and work on a wide range of social, moral and environmental topics. In one example, a presentation on the French theatre included material downloaded from the Comédie Française website. Other examples of good use of information and communication technology were seen.
- 160 The quality of teaching is consistently good. Teachers have high levels of personal skill and use a wide range of resources and strategies to engage and motivate students. Lessons are well planned and structured, with clear objectives. Teachers promote good learning by initiating good processes such as: interaction with, and analysis of, text; interpretation of data; discussion and debate. Students are encouraged to use French routinely. Assessment and marking of students' work, monitoring of their performance and review of their progress are particular strengths. Teachers have built a genuine learning partnership with their students based on knowledge of their strengths and needs.
- 161 Students have very positive attitudes to the subject. They apply themselves well, working constructively together and showing levels of interest and commitment which are appropriate to achieving success in advanced language study. It was evident in discussion with students that they enjoy the course.
- 162 The subject is well managed. Members of the teaching team are very clear as to their areas of responsibility for teaching the course. Standards are moderated through regular team meetings. The recent change of examination syllabus was based on an assessment of what would best correspond to students' interests and aptitudes. Curriculum planning in French is very good. The team has worked hard to create a topic resource base of very high quality and rich cultural content. This feeds into teaching and learning and has been a key agent in raising standards, promoting good learning and enhancing students' interest and motivation. Development planning is sound, but does not focus explicitly on raising standards. The very low uptake among boys – only one male student in the current Year 12 and 13 cohort – is a cause for concern. The department needs to devise strategies for improving recruitment of male linguists.
- 163 Since the last inspection, standards have improved and the quality of teaching has been maintained at a good level. The AS-level course has been successfully introduced. This is a strong department which has the capacity to maintain and develop its contribution to the college's success.