

INSPECTION REPORT

BEACONSFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

Beaconsfield

LEA area: Buckinghamshire

Unique reference number: 110528

Head teacher: Penny Castagnoli

Reporting inspector: Grace Marriott
3674

Dates of inspection: 10th – 14th February 2003

Inspection number: 249619

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

© Crown copyright 2003

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: Grammar (selective)

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11-18

Gender of pupils: Girls

School address: Wattleton Road
Beaconsfield
Buckinghamshire

Postcode: HP9 1RR

Telephone number: 01494 673043

Fax number: 01494 670715

Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Tim Gamon

Date of previous inspection: March 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Team members | | | Subject responsibilities | Aspect responsibilities |
|--------------|----------------------|----------------------|---|--|
| 3674 | Grace Marriott | Registered inspector | Educational inclusion | The school's results and pupils' achievements. How well are pupils taught? |
| 9454 | Deborah Pepper | Lay inspector | | Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development. How well does the school work in partnership with parents? |
| 22423 | Jon Lovgreen | Team inspector | English, 6 th form drama | |
| 18178 | Ian Matthews | Team inspector | Mathematics | |
| 3242 | Michael Newman | Team inspector | Science, Psychology | |
| 10817 | George Rayner | Team inspector | Information and communication technology 6 th form history | How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils? |
| 2501 | Raye Allison-Smith | Team inspector | Art and design | |
| 22491 | Lorraine Small | Team inspector | Design and technology | |
| 25073 | Stuart Jordan | Team inspector | Geography | |
| 1508 | Graham Jackson | Team inspector | History, 6 th form Religious education | |
| 15075 | Bryan Stephens | Team inspector | Modern foreign languages | |
| 15208 | Anthony Briggs | Team inspector | Music | How well is the school led and managed? |
| 30800 | Betty Colley | Team inspector | Physical education, Sociology | |
| 10761 | Pat Willan | Team inspector | Religious education | |
| 19352 | Kiran Campbell-Platt | Team inspector | Special educational needs | |
| 23487 | Pat Kitley | Team inspector | 6 th form English, English as an additional language, Citizenship | How well does the school care for its pupils? |
| 32231 | Adrian Lyons | Team inspector | Business studies | |

The inspection contractor was:

e-Qualitas, 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 | 10 |
| PART B: COMMENTARY | |
| HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS? | 12 |
| The school's results and pupils' achievements | |
| Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development | |
| HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT? | 17 |
| HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS? | 18 |
| HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS? | 21 |
| HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS? | 23 |
| HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED? | 24 |
| WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER? | 27 |
| PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS | 28 |
| PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4 | 33 |
| PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM | 59 |

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Beaconsfield High School is a girls' grammar school, with technology college status, in Buckinghamshire. It has 1031 pupils on roll including 237 in the sixth form. The number on roll has increased since the last inspection mainly because of the change in the age of transfer from 12 to 11 but also because of an increase in the size of the Sixth Form. Pupils and students come from a wide area of Buckinghamshire and some nearby towns and most are from advantaged backgrounds. Most are of white UK origin, with a few in each year group from ethnic minorities. No pupils or students are at an early stage of learning English. Pupils' attainment on entry is well above the national average. A few pupils and students have special educational needs, mostly specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) and visual impairment. The school is currently in the middle of a major building programme.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Beaconsfield High is a very good school. Academic standards are very high and the teaching is very good. The head teacher, staff and governors are all highly committed to providing the best possible education in a lively and stimulating atmosphere. The leadership and management are strong and the school gives very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The school has a very strong learning culture, staff and students show intellectual curiosity and rigour
- Very good teaching which is lively, stimulating, shows excellent subject knowledge and provides a high level of challenge
- Standards are very high, particularly at GCSE and A level
- Attitudes and behaviour are outstanding at all levels
- The range of opportunities is very good and prepares the pupils very well for the next stage in education and adult life

What could be improved

- The tracking of pupils' attainment and setting targets is satisfactory but could be better, particularly in Years 7 to 9

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in March 1997. Since then improvement has been very good. Standards have risen, particularly at A level. All the issues identified in the last report have been dealt with except for ensuring that religious education is taught to pupils in Year 13. Teaching and learning have been systematically monitored and improved. The school now fully meet requirements for information and communication technology (ICT). The quality of middle management has improved through systematic training and support. The school has made significant progress in improving the accommodation and in assessing and reporting on pupils' attainment. The school is not complacent about its success and has a strong commitment to continuous improvement.

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 total point scores¹ in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations. Similar schools means other grammar schools.

| Performance in: | compared with | | | |
|--------------------|---------------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|
| | all schools | | | similar schools |
| | Year 2000 | Year 2001 | Year 2002 | Year 2002 |
| GCSE examinations | A* | A* | A* | D |
| A-levels/AS-levels | A | A | A | |

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

Pupils join the school with better standards in English than in mathematics and science. In the national tests taken in 2002 at the end of Year 9, Beaconsfield was in the top five percent of all schools. Results were better than those of similar schools in English, but below in mathematics and well below in science. GCSE examination results were also in the top five percent. Beaconsfield is doing significantly better than other grammar schools in terms of the point score for the pupils' best eight results. The overall average point score is lower because the school policy for girls to take nine subjects to give them time to maintain other interests, means that they take one subject fewer than most grammar school pupils. The average point score has risen from 56.2 in 1998 to 60.6 in 2002. The target for GCSE results in 2002 was met. High standards are established in Years 7 to 9 and sustained in Years 10 and 11. Standards are at least well above average in all subjects and are particularly high in English, mathematics, art, geography, history and ICT. Standards in science and mathematics are improving. Pupils have very good literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils' achievement, when compared with their starting point, is never less than good and very good overall. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress because the support they receive enables them to participate fully in lessons. Those who have English as an additional language make progress and achieve standards which are in line with those of other pupils.

Sixth form:

The school has worked hard to raise standards at A level. The increase in both the pass rate and the proportion of higher grades in 2002 show the effectiveness of this. National comparisons for 2002 are not yet available, but results are better than in 2001 in most subjects and significantly better in French and religious studies. The A level results for 2001 were well above average overall and were very high in English literature and physical education. Only French was below average. The overall point score has risen steadily since 1998 and the proportion of A and B grades has gone up from 41% to 66%. In 2002 over 80% of students achieved an A or B grade in sociology, psychology, religious studies, further mathematics, drama, and music. Only art and business studies had fewer than 50%. Current standards are high overall and particularly so in mathematics, geography, history, religious education, business and economics, psychology and design and technology.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

| Aspect | Comment |
|-------------------------|--|
| Attitudes to the school | The pupils have excellent attitudes to school, they show a high degree of interest in their work and school activities |
| Behaviour, in and out | Behaviour is excellent |

¹ At both GCSE and A level each grade counts as a number of points. The average point score is calculated by dividing the total points for all grades by the number of pupils on roll in the relevant year group.

| | |
|--|--|
| of classrooms | |
| Personal development and relationships | Relationships are excellent, girls have many opportunities for personal development and are keen to benefit from all the school offers |
| Attendance | Levels of attendance are very high |

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

In nine out of every ten lessons the teaching was good or better; in six out of every ten lessons it was very good or excellent. There was no unsatisfactory teaching in any subject or year group. Intellectual rigour was evident in almost all lessons. Teachers expect pupils to think for themselves and they question and challenge to help the pupils develop the skills to do this. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, as in all subjects, the teachers have a high level of subject knowledge and expertise which pupils recognise, respect and draw on to develop their own knowledge and skills. Literacy skills are developed well through the teaching of specialist subject vocabulary and the wide range of written and oral work. Numeracy skills are developed as appropriate, in subjects such as science and geography.

Teachers are very good at creating a secure environment where pupils learn by taking risks and making mistakes. In a high proportion of lessons group and paired work was skilfully managed and very successful. Pupils listened very well to each other and developed their own ideas further through discussion. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported, participate fully in lessons and are able to make very good progress.

The satisfactory teaching showed some of the strengths of the good teaching but in general the learning objectives were not as clear and the level of challenge was not as high. Very occasionally learning was better than teaching because pupils were well motivated and willing to work. On a few occasions it was clear that pupils were not prepared to tolerate what they regarded as less than effective teaching. The evidence from pupils' work shows that there is some variation from subject to subject, particularly in Years 7 to 9, in the use of information from assessment to set targets. Similarly pupils' work is regularly marked and gave them a clear indication of how well or otherwise they have completed the work but the comments did not always give them much guidance on how to improve it.

Sixth form:

In the sixth form almost all the teaching was good or better and two thirds of it was very good or excellent. All the strengths identified in the main school are present and none of the relative weaknesses. The teaching enables students to develop very secure knowledge and understanding of the subjects they study and very good learning skills.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|---|
| The quality and range of the curriculum | The curriculum is good overall. The provision for extra-curricular activities is very good overall, with particularly good provision for sport and music. |
| Provision for pupils with special educational needs | Pupils receive very good support which enables them to make good progress and take part fully in school life |
| Provision for pupils with English as an additional language | These needs are well-catered for in mainstream lessons. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English |

| | |
|---|---|
| Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | Very good overall and excellent in terms of moral and social development. |
| How well the school cares for its pupils | The school has very good systems for ensuring the welfare of its pupils. Staff provide very good academic and personal support. |

The school works well with parents to support pupils' learning. The curriculum is very suitable for the aspirations of the pupils and gives them an appropriate choice at GCSE and A level. The school has made a good start to introducing citizenship. Assessment procedures are generally good, particularly in Years 10 and 11, but marking and target setting is not always rigorous enough. The school is not fully meeting requirements for a daily act of collective worship in all year groups.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|--|
| Leadership and management by the head teacher and other key staff | The leadership and management of the head teacher and key staff are very good. They have a sharp awareness of the school's strengths and areas in need of improvement. The strong and shared commitment to success is aided by the good communication between the leadership team and staff. |
| How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities | The governing body is very effective and shares the strong commitment to continuous improvement. Governors are fully aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They use their expertise very well in shaping the direction of the school. |
| The school's evaluation of its performance | The school has very good systems for evaluating its performance. Planning is well focused and clearly linked to excellent development priorities and results in very effective action. |
| The strategic use of resources | The financial management and planning are very good. The governing body exercises very effective financial control. Designated grants are used properly for their specific purposes. Resources are effectively used to implement the school development plan. |

The school is fully staffed with appropriately qualified teachers. The staffing turnover has generally been well managed to minimise its impact on standards. The accommodation is adequate and is currently being substantially improved. Resources are generally good, though some subjects have limited access to ICT. The school applies the principles of best value very effectively.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

| What pleases parents most | What parents would like to see improved |
|--|---|
| <p>The majority of parents were pleased that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their daughters like school and make good progress • the school has high expectations • the teaching is good • behaviour is good • the school helps their children to become mature and responsible | <p>A minority of parents would like to see improvement in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the information about their daughter's progress • the way in which the school works with parents • homework – though parents were divided on whether there was too much or too little |

The inspection evidence supports the parents' positive views of the school. Parents recognised that the school is providing a good all round education with high academic standards. The team felt that the school tried hard to keep parents informed and involved but that in a few cases criticisms could be justified because the school systems had not been able to deal successfully with individual circumstances. The inspection evidence shows that the homework set is generally appropriate but the homework diary could be used more effectively as a means of communication. The parents' main concern both at the meeting, and in the letters, was about the impact of staff turnover on their daughter's education. The inspection team felt that the changes were not, overall, having a detrimental effect on standards.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is larger than in most schools. The vast majority of Year 11 pupils stay on at school to take A levels and a number of pupils from other schools also join the Sixth Form. The school offers a good range of A level courses and a wide enrichment programme. Students are expected to have achieved 49 points at GCSE, though the school is prepared to be flexible when appropriate. Almost all students go on to higher education, mostly to their first choice of university.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The school has a very good sixth form. Standards have improved and are high, students achieve very well and sixth form teaching is very good overall, and much of it is excellent. Students have many opportunities to make a contribution to the life of the school. They show a high degree of maturity and responsibility in the support they give to younger pupils and in the events they organise. The sixth form is very well managed and is cost effective.

Strengths

- Students show high levels of responsibility, initiative, maturity, and independence
- Students make a major contribution to the life of the school
- The strengths in the main school are also to be found in the sixth form

What could be improved

- There were no major issues for improvement

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. Thirteen subjects were inspected in depth and the others were sampled. The work in these subjects was of a similar quality to the subjects reported on fully.

| Curriculum area | Overall judgement about provision, with comment |
|---|--|
| Mathematics | Very good. Results are very high. Staff have strong subject knowledge and students are highly motivated by very good teaching. |
| Biology | Good. Standards are well above average and achievement is good, although with scope for further improvement at the higher grades. Teaching and learning are good overall. |
| Design and technology Product Design | Very good. The standard of work is very high demonstrating individual creativity and a good range of advanced making skills in a wide range of materials. Teachers ensured that students acquired a very high level of understanding. |
| Business studies | Very good. No students have yet taken the A2 examination. The 2002 AS results were very good and students' achievement is very good. The teaching is very good. |
| Psychology | Very good. Standards are very high and achievement is very good. Teaching and learning are very good overall and excellent in social and health psychology. |
| Art | Good. Standards are above average, most students achieve well, and some are |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| | on track for the highest grades. The teaching and learning seen were very good. |
| Drama | Very good. Standards of work in Years 12 and 13 are well above national average. Teaching and students' achievement are consistently very good. |
| Curriculum area | Overall judgement about provision, with comment |
| Geography | Very good. Results have been well above average. Standards are very high, teaching is very good and students achieve very well. |
| History | Good. Year 13 students are reaching very high standards. Source skills are very high and conclusions are strongly represented in very well-written essays. |
| Religious Education | Very good. Standards are very high in the philosophy of religion and the understanding of ethics. The teaching is excellent. |
| Sociology | Very good. Students maintain above average results because of their very good attitudes, very good teaching and the excellent leadership of the department. |
| English | Very good. Standards are well above the national average. Very good teaching, teachers' subject knowledge, combined with students' enthusiasm and high levels of application, mean that learning is very good. |
| French | Very good. The 2002 results were much improved on 2001 and nearly four fifths of students gained the highest grades. Current students are achieving well. The teaching is very good and teachers have excellent linguistic skills. |

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

| Aspect | Comment |
|--|---|
| How well students are guided and supported | Students are very well supported at an individual level and for both academic and personal development. Subject teachers have very good strategies for assessing students' work and providing academic support and guidance. Guidance on careers and future options is good. Students receive individual advice on applications for further and higher education and employment. |
| Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form | The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good overall with a clear vision that is well supported by the leadership group and sixth form tutors. The school is committed to providing a wide range of courses that effectively meet the needs of its students. The good development plan has appropriate targets with success criteria. Governors are well aware of and strongly support all developments in the sixth form. |

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

| What students like about the sixth form | What they feel could be improved |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teaching is very good • They achieve high standards • They have many opportunities to take responsibility and show initiative • The time that staff are willing to give up to help them with their work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would like more information about how well they are doing • Some students felt that they had not had enough guidance on their choice of A level subjects or university courses |

Students were much more positive in discussion than they were in response to the questionnaire. The inspection team shared the sixth formers' positive views of the school and the evidence from the inspection is that students' work is generally well marked. The school has recently improved its systems for advising students about subject choice and university courses and the more positive response of the current Year 12 students reflected this.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils join the school with standards that are well above average overall, but better in English than in mathematics and science. The results of the national tests taken in 2002 at the end of Year 9 put Beaconsfield into the top five percent of all schools nationally. They were better than the results of other selective schools in English, but not as good in mathematics and well below in science.
2. GCSE examination results were also in the top five percent of all schools. The proportion of pupils achieving 5 A* to C grades is in line with similar schools, and when the point score for the best eight results is compared with other schools, Beaconsfield is doing better than other grammar schools. The overall point score is lower because girls normally take nine subjects whereas many grammar schools will enter pupils for ten or more subjects. This is a matter of school policy to try to ensure that girls have time to maintain their other interests and activities. The average point score has gone up from 56.2 in 1998 to 60.6 in 2002. The school's target for GCSE results was achieved.
3. High standards are established in Years 7 to 9 and sustained in Years 10 and 11. Standards are well above average in all subjects and are particularly high in English, mathematics, art, geography, history and ICT. Pupils' achievement is never less than good and is very good overall. In English, by the end of Year 9 the higher-attaining pupils make mature use of complex sentences and paragraphing in essays and average attainers are using technical terms well and have good techniques for analysing literature. In mathematics, Year 9 classes had just started work on plotting quadratic graphs and on simultaneous equations. As a result of well-planned teaching and stimulating practical examples, the pupils quickly understood the work and made rapid progress to reach the higher levels. Numeracy skills are good overall and particularly well-used in science geography and PE. In science, Year 9 work shows a greater than usual depth of knowledge in areas such as genetics, balancing of chemical equations and electric circuits although there are still elements of inconsistency with some classes where standards are high but, with more challenge, could be very high.
4. In Years 10 and 11, in English, pupils express themselves very well developing ideas well, showing a mature ability to balance general points with detail and surface meaning with the inferences which lie behind it. Reading for information is a strong feature of design and technology and in history there is specific teaching of skimming and note-taking skills. In mathematics, standards are very high, particularly in the top group which has taken GCSE early. Pupils were successfully working on Newton's Laws and were able to derive the equations through the use of basic differentiation techniques. Some good examples of the application of numeracy skills were seen in other departments. In general, pupils have very good literacy skills and their work in art, history, geography, religious education and design technology show particularly good use of these skills. Many pupils read aloud very well, and quickly pick up quite complex meaning and inferences when faced with a new text.
5. In other subjects similarly high standards are achieved in Years 7 to 11. In ICT, the great majority can select software to carry out specified tasks and use this with high competence and relevance. They are aware of problems that can arise and adept at providing solutions for these, showing a high awareness of the needs of the intended audience. In design and technology all pupils use ICT

very well to research and present information and have very good opportunities to use computer aided design and computer aided manufacturing processes. In geography in Year 8 pupils showed a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between physical and human processes as they explained the patterns in farming in the British Isles. In modern languages, speaking skills in Spanish lessons were particularly high. Higher attainers could talk at length with fluency and accuracy on prepared topics. Speaking skills in French and German are good, but with occasional inaccuracies in pronunciation. Pupils' reading comprehension skills are high in all three languages, writing skills are also well developed, but particularly high in Spanish. In art the work of Year 10 pupils in particular, is of a very high order. Some of the drawing is outstanding and the ability to abstract sections of their work and thoughtfully re-order and amalgamate the images is indicative of standards well beyond the scope of GCSE. In history, pupils make very good use of analytical skills. For example in the lessons based around President Hoover's response to the aftermath of the Wall Street Crash, pupils clearly demonstrated their ability to evaluate hypotheses critically by carefully investigating background evidence and showed their awareness of the danger of over generalisation. In a class discussion in religious education, the pupils demonstrated high level thinking skills showing which moved discussion on to reach a high standard of informed explanation of their opinions. In music all pupils studying the GCSE course have a superb knowledge of harmony and musical structure which they skilfully incorporate into their well developed compositions. The more musically talented can create imaginative extended pieces as was seen in a composition for double choir and string ensemble incorporating words from a poem by Hopkins.

6. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress because of the quality of teaching and the support they receive which enables them to participate fully in lessons. Pupils with statements and those on the special needs register make very good progress in line with other pupils across the school. Learning is supported by the good communication between the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) learning support assistants, the specialist teacher for specific learning difficulties (dyslexia), subject teachers and pastoral staff.
7. The school has a number of pupils with English as an additional language, but there are none at an early stage of English language acquisition since all girls have to achieve a high score on a verbal reasoning test to gain entry to the school. During the inspection girls with English as an additional language were observed to be achieving in line with other pupils. On a few occasions in recent years one or two pupils with English as an additional language have required support in certain areas. In these cases appropriate support was provided and the progress of the girls was carefully monitored.

Sixth form

8. The A level results for 2001 were well above average overall. National comparisons show that in 2001 results were very high in English literature and physical education and well above average in biology, communication studies, history, geography, mathematics and Spanish. Results in economics, food technology and religious studies were average and only French was below average. The school has put particular effort in raising standards at A level and the effectiveness of this can be seen in the increase in the pass rate in 2002 and in the proportion of higher grades.
9. National comparisons for 2002 are not yet available but results improved over the previous year in most subjects and most significantly in French and religious studies. The overall point score has risen steadily since 1998 and the proportion of students achieving A and B grades has gone up from 41% to 66%. In 2002 in sociology, psychology, religious studies, further mathematics, drama, music 80% or more of students achieved an A or B grade. Only art and business studies had fewer than 50% A and B grades. Students sustain their good achievement from GCSE and the

current standards in the sixth form are high. Standards are particularly good in mathematics, geography, history, religious education, business and economics, psychology and design and technology.

10. In English, by Year 13, students' writing is fluent, uses mature vocabulary and is well supported with perceptive references to text. Year 13 students taking French have very good listening skills, but their speaking skills are less well developed. They have a very good knowledge of general and specialist vocabulary relating to the A level topics and a good command of grammatical structures. In mathematics, work in files and in lessons, was far above nationally expected standards. Students showed fluency with algebra and were confident in the use of calculus. Those taking an advanced statistics module could successfully identify types of probability distributions. Numeracy in the sixth form is very good and many examples of the proficient use of mathematics were observed in several subjects. In geography statistical work was being carried out as part of field work, and in the analysis of flood hydrographics. Science was using some good inferential statistics and some good ICT packages to plot graphs. Attainment in science is well above average, but lacks the proportion of work at the A and B grades evident in other subjects.
11. Business and economics students have carried out a range of interesting coursework investigations. In an investigation *What dictates the corporate social responsibility policies of a business?* students displayed a high level of intellectual argument. Similarly in psychology, there is a very high degree of originality in the investigative coursework and the research on self-esteem, with its reference to the literature, to statistics and discussion of the issues, is of publishable quality. Sociology students have a very good understanding of theorists and different perspectives and relate these to a variety of topics, making knowledgeable hypotheses for discussion. They have a thorough understanding of different perspectives and use their knowledge of underlying principles of studies skilfully.
12. In the creative and visual arts, standards are above average in art and well above average in drama. In art students make thoughtful connections and are curious and questioning about the factors that influence their work. In the lessons seen teachers closely questioned and challenged students to think deeply. Whilst some students were able to speak with conviction and authority others were unable to express themselves with the same confidence and fluency. Their written work, on the other hand, was generally better structured and well argued, showing above average standards of research and investigation. In both Years 12 and 13 students' practical work reflects some unevenness of provision in previous years. In drama, students show both in their written work and their presentations a mature understanding of the culture of the theatre and how it has been influenced. Standards in practical skills are outstanding. This was evident in an evening of devised interpretation pieces performed to an audience. Disturbing themes were presented with stunning power, imagination, and creativity.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Pupils' excellent attitudes towards their work and wider life of the school contribute significantly to the very high standards they achieve in their academic studies and personal development. The girls' attitudes remain a strength of the school, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. They clearly enjoy school and their levels of attendance are very high compared with national figures. Punctuality is very good.
14. From their entry to the school, girls display real intellectual curiosity and are enthusiastic in each lesson to learn more. They show excellent concentration and participate actively in lessons, asking thoughtful questions. They set high standards for their own learning and strive to meet them,

rarely settling for second best. In a religious education lesson about love ('agape'), discussion amongst Year 11 pupils resulted in high level of contemplation about the nature of love and sacrifice.

15. Pupils enjoy challenging tasks and their skills in independent and collaborative working are of a high order. In an excellent science lesson, groups of Year 8 pupils planned an experiment to assess how respiration of yeast is affected by temperature. One group decided to bake a loaf of bread, working out how they would measure the variables. Girls are keen to make the most of their school life and participate with enthusiasm in the school's many extra-curricular activities including the orchestras and sports teams.
16. The quality of behaviour is excellent in lessons, around the school and in the wide range of extra-curricular activities. Only on the very few occasions when the teaching was less stimulating, were the girls restless at the lack of challenge. Girls have unaffected good manners and are almost invariably polite to each other and to staff. They are self confident and mature but are neither intellectually or socially arrogant.
17. The quality of pupils' relationships with each other, and with members of staff, is excellent and underpins their excellent personal development. Relations between staff and girls are supportive and warm. Girls support each other very well in lessons creating a safe environment where they can learn without fear of making mistakes. They readily praise each other. The introduction of the house system, largely at the instigation of the girls themselves, has further improved relations between year groups. The 'buddy' system, run on the school's intranet, has enabled sixth form students to provide valuable support to younger girls.
18. Pupils welcome opportunities to take on positions of responsibility and show considerable initiative and maturity in the ways in which they fulfil their roles, for example, as members of the school council. Parents agree that the school helps their daughters to become mature and responsible. Girls contribute in an exemplary way to school and house council meetings offering thoughtful ideas but without being afraid to challenge each other. Year 7 girls, for example, complained that Year 11 girls pushed in front in the tuck shop queue!
19. Pupils show a real capacity to reflect on their own feelings and values, and those of others. In an excellent Year 10 lesson, groups of pupils discussed the implications of locating an asylum seeker centre on the edge of a town. Some groups recognised that they were showing stereotypical views about asylum seekers and the discussion moved on to consider the nature of prejudice and discrimination.

Sixth form

20. Students show excellent attitudes to their studies and to their involvement in the life of the school. The students' questionnaire and discussions during the inspection showed that students enjoy the sixth form and rate it highly. They are very motivated to learn and particularly value the increased opportunities for discussion and independent study in the sixth form. In a Year 12 geography lesson, students engaged in a sophisticated discussion about regeneration strategies adopted by governments to improve urban decay. They develop excellent study skills and work confidently on their own initiative, including during study periods, using books and information technology as resources for learning. These excellent study skills prepare them well for higher education.
21. Students enjoy excellent relations with one another and with staff. They are very supportive of each other in lessons and in extra-curricular activities. An excellent feature of the students' personal development is their commitment to take on responsibilities so that they can make a

difference for younger pupils and the wider community. In this way, they act as very good role models for younger girls and enhance the strong sense of community within the school. In the student questionnaire carried out by prefects, students particularly valued the opportunities they had for responsibility. Sixth formers act as prefects, house captains, sports leaders and ‘buddies’ and run clubs for younger pupils. They are also involved in raising funds for charity and support a local residential home. The management of the school council by the council leader was extremely impressive and house captains run house ‘focus’ sessions, for example, the making of a ‘friendship cake’, very effectively.

22. Prefects take their responsibilities very seriously. They have particular roles, for example, as head girl, charities or student welfare representatives, are supported by a teacher mentor and have clear objectives and an action plan for their term of office. The conduct and quality of discussion at the prefects’ meeting during the inspection would have graced any voluntary sector meeting. In response to the OFSTED students’ questionnaire, prefects had carried out their own survey of student attitudes, analysing and summarising the results, and feeding back conclusions to each other and the head of sixth form. Students are very well prepared for the responsibilities of further education, employment and community life.
23. Levels of attendance are high and punctuality is generally good. Upper sixth pupils respect the additional freedoms they are given to work at home or go out at lunchtime.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

24. In nine out of every ten lessons the teaching was good or better, in six out of every ten lessons it was very good or excellent and there was no unsatisfactory teaching in any subject or year group. The criticisms of teaching in this report are relative, since generally they reflect the difference between good teaching and very good teaching. They do not indicate significant weaknesses.
25. Intellectual rigour was apparent in almost all teaching and learning. Teachers expect pupils to think for themselves and they question and challenge to help the pupils develop the skills to do this. Relationships are excellent. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, as in all subjects, the teachers have a high level of subject knowledge and expertise which they are keen impart to students and which helps them to provide inspiration and challenging ideas. Pupils recognise, respect and draw on this to develop their own knowledge and skills. Teachers also have a very good understanding of the requirements of examination courses, but teaching is not examination dominated. In the good and very good lessons in all year groups, the work is well-planned and pitched at an appropriate level for the range of attainment in the class. The tasks build very clearly on what pupils already know and can do. Pupils listen carefully to instructions and use resources sensibly.
26. Learning objectives are very clear and shared with pupils so that they know what is expected and respond constructively. Teachers have high expectations of pupils’ ability to extract and analyse ideas. In a very good lesson on the contemporary media coverage of the sinking of the ‘Titanic’, pupils identified detailed reasons for how various newspapers handled the unfolding story and incisive judgements on the contrasting role and attitudes of newspapers today. This leads to pupils learning to critically explore the reasons behind what they hear or read. In almost all lessons, the good range and variety of activities develop both subject specific skills and more general skills of independent learning that help pupils to make good progress. Research projects and investigative work develops pupils’ skills in formulating and testing hypotheses.

27. Teachers are very good at creating a secure environment where pupils can learn by taking risks and making mistakes. They also make learning fun, using humour very appropriately. The variety of activities and teaching techniques holds pupils' attention and the review at the end of the lessons helps consolidate their understanding and ensures that they know what to do next. The pupils can see that they are making progress and their confidence increases. For example, in an excellent physics lesson in Year 10, the use of demonstrations, explanations and paired discussion helped pupils to acquire very quickly a good understanding of the movement of waves and the appropriate technical vocabulary. In a Year 9 lesson the girls had just started work on plotting quadratic graphs and the clear explanations from the teacher helped pupils to understand the work quickly and make rapid progress. In an excellent Year 7 religious education lesson, the teacher's animated telling of stories central to the beliefs of Hindus, drew the pupils into the story of Rama and Sita and their follow-up work showed a clear understanding of the story, and of its significance and importance for Hindus.
28. Teachers are skilled in managing discussion, through questioning which challenges pupils' thinking and helps them to develop and sustain an argument or point of view. Discussion frequently drew on pupils' knowledge and wider reading. In a high proportion of lessons the use of group and paired work was skilfully managed and very successful. Pupils listened very well to each other and developed their own ideas further through discussion. This was evident in an excellent Year 11 graphics lesson where the teacher used a range of targeted questions to lead both group and individual discussions. This enabled the pupils to use their knowledge to share and solve problems very effectively as a group.
29. Literacy skills are developed well through the teaching of the specialist subject vocabulary and the wide range of written and oral work. Numeracy skills are developed as appropriate in subjects such as science and geography. In ICT lessons teachers give pupils opportunities to improve literacy and numeracy skills. For example, a Year 9 class was expected to ensure that the vocabulary used to encourage older people to use a community centre was appropriate for the audience. In Year 8 pupils planned personal expenditure over a year using a spreadsheet. In ICT, however, as in other subjects, not all opportunities for literacy and numeracy activities were as exploited as they could have been.
30. Pupils' work is regularly marked and the best marking gives pupils good guidance on how to improve their work. The pupils' were acting on the advice. The quality of marking is not consistent either across the school or within departments. Its usefulness depends too much on the individual teacher. In general it is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. The less helpful marking gives pupils a clear idea of whether the work is correct or not, but does not give them much guidance on how to improve. The evidence from pupils' work shows that there is some variation from subject to subject, particularly in Years 7 to 9, in the use of information from assessment to set targets.
31. The satisfactory teaching showed some of the strengths of the good and very good teaching but there were some relative weaknesses. In general the learning objectives were not as clear enough and the level of challenge was not as high as it could have been. This was more evident in some lower school classes for example in a Year 9 lesson on questions regarding the Holocaust, some pupils were unsure of their task, and so they did not achieve as much as they might have. In a Year 7 science class who were investigating electric circuits, where the pupils had the skills for example accurate Ammeter reading to take the work much farther and faster. On a few occasions it was clear that pupils are not prepared to tolerate what they regard as less than effective teaching. Learning was very occasionally better than teaching because pupils are well motivated and willing to work hard.

32. The very good range of teaching and learning strategies is consistently established across the school, resulting in teachers planning very appropriate tasks and preparing suitable materials to help pupils with special educational needs to have access to the full curriculum and be able to engage with challenging and appropriate work in all subjects. Learning support assistants who work with statemented pupils provide very good support, for example through a well-planned programme for enlarging work and ensuring access through the excellent use of ICT. The specialist teacher for specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) has a positive impact on the progress of pupils identified as having literacy or organisational difficulties, for example by teaching pupils strategies for improving their spelling and writing skills on a one-to-one or small group basis. The school has sound plans to further develop ICT resources for pupils with writing difficulties through extending the use of *Alphasmart* equipment and ensuring that extended time is available in examinations for pupils with specific learning difficulties.

Sixth form

33. In the sixth form almost all the teaching was good or better and two thirds of it was very good or excellent. All the strengths identified in the main school, for example the range of activities, teaching methods, level of expectation and challenge, are present and none of the relative weaknesses.
34. The teaching enables students to develop very secure knowledge and understanding of the subjects they study and very good learning skills. The level of challenge is high. For example, in an excellent Year 13 sociology lesson the teacher brought alive the social, moral and cultural implications of the government's views on crime through their slogan 'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'. This was then linked with the thinking of realism theorists on adaptation to circumstances and with the communities' and victims' reactions to 'zero tolerance' and the Stephen Lawrence murder. In the Year 12 psychology classes, students were encouraged to develop their skills through discussion and role-play. This led to excellent outcomes in which student participation was a strong feature of the work. In design and technology, all students gained good feedback through the process of critical analysis and were able to put the information to good use. Here, the team approach to problem solving was a strong feature of the students' ability to work together with the view of securing high standards for all.
35. Teachers identify actual or potential difficulties quickly and take appropriate action. In history many activities focus on the critical analysis of sources. In the history course covering the 16th and 17th centuries, many of the written sources present particular linguistic challenges. Teachers provide good prompts that assist students, while still leaving them the challenge of interpretation. In a Year 12 mathematics class when the students were experiencing some problems with the difference between the use of a mathematical model and a real situation, the teacher identified the problem and dealt with it effectively. Very occasionally the teacher's desire to ensure that all students understood resulted in more direction than was necessary and less encouragement of independent work. In all subjects the marking of work is thorough, detailed and gives the students clear guidance on how to improve. Teachers give generously of their time to support individual students and this is much appreciated.

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

36. At the time of the last inspection the curriculum for pupils aged 11-16 was judged to be appropriately broad and meets statutory requirements, except that the arrangements for teaching ICT did not guarantee full coverage of the National Curriculum in all years. The school has

successfully moved on and taken further steps to improve the curriculum, its organisation and planning. The curriculum now effectively meets all statutory requirements in Years 7 to 11 and the range and quality of learning opportunities are now good.

37. The Key Stage 3 curriculum (Years 7 to 9) includes the full range of National Curriculum subjects, with some worthwhile enhancements including drama, dance, Latin and a second modern foreign language. In the current academic year, a thinking skills course was piloted in Year 7. This enhanced pupils' learning and will be introduced in an extended form in the coming academic year. The amount of time available for science, design and technology and drama will also increase. Although this will reduce the time for modern languages and allow Latin to be offered outside the normal school day, it will result in a better overall breadth and balance in the curriculum. The Key Stage 3 Strategy is being introduced with an appropriate focus on teaching and learning. However, the implementation of the literacy and numeracy strategies is not consistent across departments.
38. The curriculum for Key Stage 4 (Years 10 and 11) provides mainly the more traditional, academic subjects, though GCSEs in business education and physical education are currently offered. The school's curriculum provides well for the needs of the great majority of its pupils, who achieve well in the courses that they take. The option structure provides a choice of subjects that generally allows pupils to choose a balanced range to meet their aspirations. Satisfactory steps are taken to identify the small numbers for whom this pattern is not appropriate. Most pupils take nine GCSE subjects. The school considers this to be an appropriate number to allow them to take part in a range of other activities.
39. The curriculum is good in most subjects and very good in geography, history, modern languages and religious education. For example, in history there is very good balance between breadth of content and the depth at which skills are taught and religious education provides varied, interesting and challenging activities. The significant recent developments in the scheme of work have improved the science curriculum. The school is moving forward well in its development of a citizenship programme. The creation of a scheme of work is still at a very early stage but some elements of the provision such as the School Council, make a strong contribution.
40. Although the curriculum is good overall, there are relative weaknesses in some subjects. In mathematics, science, design technology and music, the curriculum for Years 7 to 9, while meeting the needs of most pupils, could do more to challenge the gifted and talented pupils. In design technology in Years 10 and 11, course choices do not include the more intellectually challenging electronics, or systems and control options. The music curriculum does not provide sufficient focus on non-western music. The only area where the curriculum is less than good is drama in Years 7 to 9 though here there has been recent improvement.
41. The school's technology college status has been an important factor in improving the curriculum. This is particularly so in respect of ICT. At the last inspection, provision was inadequate in terms of range and quality of resources, taught courses and opportunities to use computers in other subjects. Significant improvement has taken place in each area with a good taught course in Years 7 to 9 and an increasingly popular GCSE option. Opportunities to use computers in other subjects are now good in all years. The other main area identified as in need of improvement by the last inspection concerned the balance of the curriculum. A number of subjects were disadvantaged by the length of lessons, because they were too short for practical work. The timetable now has a more flexible structure and all the organisational weaknesses identified in the last inspection have been remedied. For example, double lessons allow practical activities in science, design technology and physical education, while a single lesson is more suitable for modern languages. Some imbalance does remain however, for example in ICT, where single lessons are too short to

effectively combine practical work and opportunities for pupils to reflect upon their use of computers. This reduces standards in an important aspect of ICT capability as well as reducing opportunities for social and moral development.

42. The school places great importance on encouraging its pupils to take part in a range of activities to extend and enrich the curriculum. Most subjects offer good extra-curricular opportunities and they are very good in history, ICT and modern languages. Fieldwork visits make a strong contribution to the learning of geography and history. However, those studying art would benefit from better opportunities to visit art galleries. Drop-in sessions, in which pupils are able to make use of the facilities in ICT rooms before school and at lunchtime, are very popular. In music and physical education, the school has succeeded in providing excellent extra-curricular opportunities. These have enabled pupils to perform to a high standard in a number of contexts, for example, taking part in instrumental performances and establishing a national reputation in hockey. These subjects make a significant contribution to the opportunities that the school provides for its gifted and talented pupils.
43. Provision for careers and vocational education is good overall. A very well planned careers programme begins in the Year 7 enrichment programme, when pupils learn about the structure of various types of organisation and participate in a business simulation. This develops well and in Years 10 and 11, pupils participate in work experience and receive guidance about future options. The careers library, which is split between the main school library and a room in the department, benefits from the regular updating of prospectuses and information from companies.
44. The school provides very effectively for pupils' personal, health and social education (PHSE) within its overall objective of educating the 'whole person'. The school's extra-curricular programme, provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education, key skills and citizenship are well integrated with PHSE. The new taught PHSE curriculum, including areas such as health, sex and relationships and drugs education, is comprehensive and draws on a wide range of external resources, including the police, drugs advisers and drama groups, for its delivery.
45. The school has an ethos of inclusion. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress as a result of the very good provision the school makes for them. Effective provision is made for the highest attainers, including gifted and talented pupils, by allowing them to take up to eleven subjects, including separate sciences and, for the most able mathematicians, early entry to the GCSE examination in Year 10 and further mathematics in Year 11. However, there are not always sufficient extension activities for them in some subjects of the Key Stage 3 curriculum, for example, mathematics, science and music. Although the school does not formally monitor pupils' attainment by ethnicity, inspection evidence showed that pupils from ethnic minorities achieve at least as well as other pupils.

Sixth form

46. The overall quality and range of learning opportunities in the sixth form are very good. The school currently offers twenty-five courses at advanced level, covering a wide range of subjects. These courses meet the needs and aspirations of students and complement other local provision. The school is responsive to suggestions, for example the need for a psychology course came from the students. Plans to introduce a vocational course in travel and tourism next year are intended to extend the opportunity of sixth form study to a broader spectrum of students, making it more inclusive.
47. The school ensures that students have advice about where they can access courses that the school does not offer. They are encouraged to apply to other post-16 providers to achieve a combination of academic and vocational courses, though the take-up is very low.

48. Examples of very good planning at departmental level were seen in history, drama, mathematics, religious studies, modern foreign languages, sociology and geography, and good schemes and systems were noted in biology. None was less than satisfactory and planning in psychology was excellent. Curriculum provision is unsatisfactory, however, in one respect: the school does not comply with the statutory requirement to teach religious education in Year 13.
49. Key skills are developed very effectively and in a variety of ways. All Year 12 students can follow a course in ICT and achieve at least a key skills level 3 in communication skills. Mathematics, geography, biology, psychology, design technology, sociology and business all make a strong contribution to the development of students' numerical skills.
50. Courses are planned for Year 12 and 13 so that all students have appropriate time for private study. They have access to the learning resource area to work at these times, as well as a computer suite and other rooms when these are empty. The range of resources available for private study, and readily accessible in the library, has been extended. All subjects now have an adequate allocation of time. These changes represent a significant improvement since the last report. Though students felt that they have a lot of work to do, no one thought that she had too much free time. All believed that they had made the right choice in staying on at Beaconsfield High School.
51. The curriculum is so designed to be consistent with the school's aim to discover and develop the full potential of each individual. To this end academic opportunities are supplemented and enriched by the extra-curricular programme. Students enjoy access to a wide range of recreational activities, many of which they have chosen, for example aerobics, Tai Qwando and Yoga. Groups of students have formed school branches of, among others, The Christian Union, Young Enterprise, Model United Nations and Amnesty International. Teachers run coursework support sessions after school in a range of subjects. For those with particular talents there are many opportunities to play sports such as netball, hockey and athletics, school choirs, an orchestra, string quartet and a performance dance club. The school is responding to the wishes of pupils and students in planning a drama club. Students appreciate the opportunities they have to attend lectures, conferences and to join trips abroad, for example this summer a party of sixth formers will visit India.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

52. Overall the provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. It has improved since the previous inspection when provision was judged to be good. These aspects of personal growth are underpinned by the centrally held ethos of "educating the whole person." Pupils' response to this provision is very good and the school exudes a very strong sense of community.
53. Provision for spiritual development is good. The school ethos is one within which all pupils are encouraged to grow and flourish, respect others and be respected. Individual self-esteem and high aspirations are consistently encouraged. Teachers value pupils' questions and encourage them to explore their own thoughts and ideas. Spiritual development permeates teaching and learning in religious education, where pupils respond well to opportunities to explore values, beliefs and the impact these have on peoples' lives. An excellent example of this was in Year 13 where students were involved in an intellectually rigorous debate on whether people could ever be described as truly free. Aspects of spiritual development are also successfully encouraged in other subjects, for example in English where pupils studying *Othello* explored perceptions on the philosophical and religious connotations of love, envy and jealousy. A number of assemblies made positive contributions to spiritual development, in some instances through providing opportunities for silent

reflection and prayer, but the statutory requirements for a daily act of collective worship which is broadly Christian in character are not consistently met.

54. The provision for pupils' moral development is excellent. Teachers are excellent role models and have high expectations of behaviour to which pupils respond extremely positively. Pupils clearly understand the difference between right and wrong and are very solicitous of each other's well being throughout the school. This emphasis on caring for others is formalised through the highly effective "buddy system." Carefully planned opportunities to explore moral and ethical issues are provided through speakers representing a range of organisations. Drug awareness is effectively promoted through the PHSE programme. Moral issues are regularly discussed in tutor groups, assemblies and in some subjects. Pupils discussed environmental and ethical implications in science lessons. In modern foreign languages they had conducted an enquiry in French into the effects of racism suffered by North African migrants. In RE pupils sensitively and intelligently discussed moral and ethical issues related to abortion and euthanasia. Sixth form students in a psychology lesson investigated issues related to reasons for racist behaviour.
55. Provision for social development is also excellent. Virtually all subjects contribute strongly to this and the particular emphasis on group work and presentations enhances social skills. The wide range of extra-curricular clubs and societies and charitable and fund raising events all strongly support social development. The School Council is a particularly good example of a highly effective vehicle for developing personal responsibility. The school places a very real and strong emphasis on consultation and the views of all pupils are actively sought. Council elections are held regularly and representatives are effective in forwarding ideas and concerns for consideration. In the council meeting held during the inspection week the level of participation from pupils and students of all ages and the quality and range of the debate which ensued was very impressive. The house and prefect systems support social development. Sixth formers are effective in the role of prefects and provide excellent role models to younger pupils. They lead house assemblies and organise a range of worthwhile and interesting activities for younger pupils. The spirit of friendly competition between houses further encourages social development.
56. Cultural provision is good overall. Once again pupils' development is enhanced by rich extra-curricular provision which includes visits and residential journeys. The mainstream curriculum provides good opportunities across a range of subjects. A wide and challenging range of literature is studied in English with appropriate consideration given to different cultural heritages and influences. Drama productions are currently being planned including one with a local boys' school. In music, where there is a strong emphasis on the classical tradition, a large number of pupils have individual instrumental tuition and perform in the school orchestra and other musical ensembles. The multi-faith emphasis of the RE curriculum in Key Stages 3 and 4 involves sensitive and respectful handling of religious and cultural issues. In design and technology pupils learn how modern designers make use of different cultural traditions. However, the overall cultural emphasis in the curriculum and extra-curricular provision is predominantly western, particularly in music, where there is too little emphasis on music from other cultural traditions.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

57. The school takes careful steps to ensure that the welfare of pupils of all ages is safeguarded. The good arrangements for child protection are understood well by staff and used as required when concerns arise. Teachers know pupils very well and this results in good formal and informal monitoring of personal development and behaviour. Personal development is very well supported through a reward system that values considerate behaviour and positive attitudes. Health and

safety is taken seriously, though there were some minor issues which were drawn to the attention of the school.

58. The school has a strong sense of community. Pupils take responsibility for themselves and go out of their way to help others. This has been fostered by the introduction of a School Council and buddy system run by the oldest students. Staff are given very clear guidance on behaviour management and, where necessary, sanctions are used to reinforce pupils' accountability for the way in which they behave. The school has strong anti-bullying measures and pupils are confident that the systems and procedures will sort out problems if they arise. The school also has effective measures to promote high levels of attendance.
59. The procedures for placing pupils on the special needs register and for identifying support are effective. Good liaison between the SENCO and Year 7 pastoral staff, ensures that primary school data and information from parents is used to identify pupils' needs. There are good plans for implementing tests for Year 7 pupils to identify pupils with dyslexia and other learning difficulties at an early stage. The very good system for information exchange established through the pastoral system aims to ensure that pupils' and students' needs are regularly considered and reviewed. The range of support for pupils with special educational needs is good. The work of the specialist teacher and the learning support assistants enable pupils to have full access to the curriculum. The school's assessment procedures meet the requirements of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice. Statements are reviewed regularly and the special needs governor and SENCO monitor the support specified in statements. Statutory requirements of statements are met.
60. The school has not always received data on the results of tests at the end of Year 6. Hence mapping progress and achievement between key stages is difficult for some pupils since their improvement cannot be based on national benchmarks. This places the school at some disadvantage when comparing its performance against these benchmarks. It does however have access to a range of attainment data for pupils who join the school. A very effective system for managing and distributing this data to all staff has been developed. Staff receive subject and tutor group lists which provide them with the base line performance of all the pupils. Three times a year pupils' progress is assessed with the information generated being added to the database. This information is shared with the pupils during 'academic review' days held twice a year. The data is supplemented in Year 10 by the addition of information from the Yellis system which provides predictions of performance at GCSE. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection and the central systems for tracking progress are very efficient.
61. The school assessment and marking policy provides for the information to be used by heads of department and key stage directors to set targets for pupils. However the effectiveness of this varies somewhat between subjects. In science and design and technology for example, the data is specifically used to raise achievement. Pupils and parents are aware of the targets and pupils are given guidance on how to improve. The approach is not used consistently in all subjects or year groups, although it is better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Older pupils know their target grades in most, but not all subjects. In Years 7 to 9 the situation is far more variable with only a minority of subjects setting clear targets which are known and understood by the pupils. The levels of the National Curriculum are not being used consistently across subjects to support assessment. Marking seen in exercise books, particularly in Years 7 to 9 does not provide enough guidance on how pupils should reach their targets. Some individual teachers provide good guidance but this is not the result of agreed systems or criteria. As a result, some opportunities are missed for raising still further the high attainment or occasionally for picking up on individual difficulties.

Sixth form

Assessment

62. As well as having access to all the information on student performance generated in the main school, the school also uses data from the 'ALIS' and also the 'Alps' systems. Both provide good information about the potential performance of the students at AS and A2 level. The ALIS system provides subject specific predictions, the Alps system more general information. Both are useful systems for ensuring the students are progressing according to their capability.
63. Individual subjects have developed their own very effective systems for monitoring student performance over time, and for providing effective student guidance on their potential grades and information on how to improve. In mathematics for example, the assessment system is based on regular tests, geared to examination standards. Results are in the form of percentages which students can directly relate to AS and A2 grades and students have a very good idea of their capability and progress. Other departments, although using slightly different strategies nevertheless provide the same level of help. Design and technology for example, provides additional information through the use of written comments on students work. In all subjects, the approach is enhanced by the willingness of staff to provide personal guidance to individual students. This usually takes the form of subject tutoring and deals effectively with particular difficulties which the student may be experiencing. These strategies clearly have a significant impact on the high achievement of students in the sixth form.

Advice, support and guidance

64. The very good quality of care offered to pupils in Year 11 when choosing their A level subjects is extended to the sixth form. Students are very well supported at an individual level and for personal development, and improved sixth form systems are developing from very good practice in place in departments. Procedures for monitoring and improving attendance in the sixth form are good. Subject teachers have very good methods for providing academic support and guidance. They hold clinics out of lessons and offer individual support. They are knowledgeable about their subject and how to prepare students for further and higher education. Guidance on careers and future options is good. Students receive individual advice on applications for further and higher education and employment. There are regular visits from speakers and taster conferences take place to support students in their choice of what to do next.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

65. The school has a very good partnership with parents. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. Parents are very pleased with the work of the school. They believe the school has high expectations of its pupils, that their daughters make good progress and are taught well. They particularly like the way in which the school helps their daughters to become mature and responsible. At the parents' meeting, parents recognised the school's strength in providing a good all-round education with high academic standards. They also value the school's extra-curricular provision, particularly in music and sport. Parents included many positive comments on the written questionnaires.
66. A few parents, both at the meeting and in written responses were concerned about the high levels of turnover amongst staff with the impact they felt this had on standards, the quantity (both too much and too little) and usefulness of homework, the quality of reports and how well the school worked with parents. There were also one or two written comments about the quality of

teaching in modern languages. In general the inspectors agree with the parents' positive comments and in addition feel that the staffing changes have not had a detrimental effect on standards because the school has recruited good staff. Homework is used well by teachers and is generally appropriate in content and volume. The quality of teaching in modern foreign languages is very good.

67. The large majority of concerns are dealt with well by the school. However, the school's procedures are not always robust enough to deal with unusual circumstances and gaps in communication can occur. A very few parents find that their concerns are not dealt with adequately or that they are not told soon enough of difficulties their daughters face in their academic work. Homework diaries, for example, are not widely used to communicate with parents. Although reports are satisfactory overall, comments in some subjects do not contain enough information about what pupils know and can do. Information about targets is not always specific enough or integrated into girls' day-to-day learning. Academic review days do not, at present, include parents who, as a result, may not always be familiar with targets set.
68. The school has effective links with parents. Form tutors are the first point of contact for parents and issues raised are usually addressed quickly and effectively. The school provides satisfactory information about pupils' progress, including an annual meeting with parents. Termly effort and attainment grades are regarded as quite helpful although some girls feel that there are issues of consistency of grading between different subjects. Written information, for example, the school's prospectus, annual report to governors and half-termly newsletter, is of good quality.
69. Parents make an important contribution to the work of the school. They value their daughters' education and support them effectively at home. Parent governors make a very good contribution to the work of the governing body. 'Form parents' are allocated to each class and enhance the sense of community in the school. Groups of parents actively support the musical and sporting life of the school and several parents help in the library. The active parent teacher association raises money for the school.
70. There are good arrangements for parents to be involved in reviewing the progress of pupils with special educational needs, for example, through good home-school liaison by the SENCO who has meetings with pupils on a rolling programme.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

71. The quality of leadership and management of the school is very good. The head teacher is a very effective leader. She has the confidence of the pupils, staff, governors and parents and is fully supported by a team of highly skilled managers. She has identified a very clear educational direction for the school and, with the excellent support of the governing body and the senior staff, has put in place a new management structure that is taking the school forward. Her leadership, typified by a total lack of willingness to accept anything less than good teaching, has led to a high level of commitment to improve amongst staff. Her vision for the school is clear; she knows where she wants the school to be in the short, medium and long term. There is no element of complacency about the obvious success of the school; instead there is a robust commitment to creating an environment within which every one of the pupils feels valued, respected and able to

develop their full potential. The leadership group have a sharp awareness of the school's challenges, strengths and areas in need of improvement and this is demonstrated, for example, in the imaginative and well-planned approach to the current building and refurbishment project.

72. The head teacher has broadened the base of the leadership group in order to translate the aims of the school development plan into achievable actions, and in response to the part time secondment of one of the deputy head teachers. Although a new team, it is already very effective. The appraisal of the senior management is very effective in highlighting their particular strengths and areas for development and encourages both reflection and action. The delegation of roles and responsibilities of the leadership group works very well. They each know their own role in promoting higher standards and use close critical analysis to spread good practice. All members of the leadership group work closely with the heads of department and other teachers to promote a common understanding of the school's vision. A strong shared commitment to succeed has been created and is aided by the good communication between the leadership team and staff.
73. The school is adept at self-review and acting on the results. Wide discussions and comprehensive surveys are translated into a very good detailed, and financially viable, development plan. Planning is succinct and focused and is clearly linked to developments within subjects. In addition to the excellence of the priorities themselves, the actions taken are also very effective. The leadership group has tackled levels of complacency with vigour and has been prepared to make difficult decisions when needed. The performance management systems are excellent because they are strongly focused on improving learning and raising standards. The improvements in the quality of teaching and learning can be largely attributed to the increased openness, the extensive programme of monitoring and the desire to improve which is shared by the vast majority of staff.
74. All staff carry out their responsibilities effectively. The overall quality of heads of departments and pastoral staff is very good, with a significant proportion being excellent. Data and information gathered from a very detailed scrutiny of how well students achieve are now used to set everyone targets to do better. Middle managers are generally well supported by senior managers in carrying out their roles effectively through the rigorous performance management system and regular reviews. The pastoral responsibilities of the school are very well organised.
75. Governors provide very good support to the school. They use their expertise gained outside of education very well. They hold the school very effectively to account; they are rigorous in the ways they oversee the work of the school, through relevant active committees. They set demanding targets for the head teacher in annual performance reviews. They play a full part in shaping the direction of the school, not least as a result of their very deep knowledge of its strengths and its weaknesses. Governors are linked with individual departments and many make focused visits to monitor developments and gain first hand information. They also ensure that they are well informed about the statistical data on the school's performance and question examination results in detail to make sure that the school's targets are appropriate, both in terms of the attainment of the particular year group and maintaining the improvement in standards at the school. Governors carry out their statutory role very well in most respects. However, they have not ensured that all pupils take part in a daily act of worship or that religious study is fully covered in Year 13.
76. The school's management of its finances is very effective. To run the school at the same level of spending as it received prior to its change to foundation status, the school needs to raise additional money each year. Money comes from several sources including the parents, sponsorship schemes and various fundraising events. The sale of two pieces of land has enabled the school to embark on a major building project that will, when complete, be of great benefit to the pupils and the staff.

These plans have been very well costed and the governing body is closely involved and very committed to the programme. To realise the target amount the school is aiming to raise £300 per pupil. Parents receive regular bulletins on how the work is progressing.

77. Financial control is extremely rigorous. The school makes good use of information technology to operate its finances and ensure systems run smoothly. The principles of best value are applied very well. The school improvement plan has clearly understood and communicated aims and purposes although the way that priorities are expressed makes the task of evaluating the impact of the spending more difficult to quantify than it might otherwise be.
78. The governors and the school leadership team closely compare the performance of the school against other local schools and schools with a similar intake. Since the last inspection there is a much greater awareness of the potential of the school and the school targets and individual staff targets reflect this added challenge.
79. The resources overall are good and meet the needs of the curriculum. They have a good impact on standards in science, geography, history, ICT, modern foreign languages and religious education. Resources are very good in design and technology where pupils have very good access to computers and software. Pupils with special educational needs also make very good use of ICT to enhance their learning. The learning resources centre is satisfactory overall.
80. The school is fully staffed with subject specialists and a more than adequate balance of newly qualified and experienced teachers in the school. The turnover of staff has caused difficulty in maintaining continuity for pupils. In most subjects the changes have been well managed, as for example in mathematics where standards have been largely unaffected and in science where standards are improving. In a few cases, for example art and textiles, pupils' work shows how the lack of specialist teachers in the past has had a detrimental effect on the standards and pupils' progress. Across the curriculum as a whole the school is well supported by technical assistants and administrative staff.
81. The school has been very active in managing the recruitment of new staff, for example by becoming proactive in recruiting graduate trainees, in fast-track qualifications and in partnership schemes with initial teacher training institutions. The loss of teachers caused the senior staff and governors to think deeply about ways in which individual strengths could be maximised. The school sees teachers as its key resource. Interviews with leaving staff have provided information which the leadership team and governors are using to improve staff morale and motivation. These are proving very effective both in involving staff in whole school issues and preparing them for promotion.
82. New teachers, including those new to the profession have settled into the school routines well. The induction arrangements work well. Staff feel well supported by the programme of activities offered and the 'buddy' mentor system ensures there is someone who will listen and speak on their behalf if they want help and support. Overall, staff morale is good and the school is taking some imaginative steps to help new staff feel part of the successes of the school and to be ready to contribute to areas where improvements are needed.
83. The school is in the middle of a major building programme which is affecting some departments but not standards. Governors are well aware of the implications for the staff and the school but improvements and additional accommodation in the three-phased building programme will address the needs in several of the subject areas with unsatisfactory accommodation. For example, a new suite of rooms will be available for mathematics and English in September 2003 as will further

changing areas for physical education. Accommodation was an issue in the previous report. The school and governors have made improvements to the present accommodation by grouping the teaching rooms for geography, information technology and design and technology and by upgrading some science laboratories. Some classes such as history are taught in non-specialist areas. Drama facilities are unsatisfactory, as the facilities limit what can be attempted. Overall accommodation is satisfactory.

Leadership and management of the sixth form

84. The sixth form is very well led by the head and deputy heads of sixth form. The head of the sixth form has only recently been appointed but is already having a very positive effect on standards and ethos. He has a clear vision that is well supported by the sixth form tutors and leadership group. He leads a close-knit team of tutors who meet regularly, both formally and informally. This allows any problems to be identified at an early stage and the system of referral from class teacher up to the head of sixth form allows him, and his tutors, to have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in provision. Very good use is made of the data available on standards. A very clear development plan has appropriate targets with success criteria. The school is committed to providing a wide range of courses that effectively meet the needs of its students. The sixth form is organised and managed along strongly pastoral lines to develop and support the students and to foster their potential to enter higher education after they leave Year 13.
85. The school's aims and the values that underpin the work of the sixth form are very relevant to the needs of the students and are embedded very well in all aspects of the school's work. The relationship between the sixth form and the main school is excellent. Pupils in the main school and in particular those in Years 10 and 11, appreciate the support and guidance provided by the older students. The emphasis on students developing a sense of responsibility and the school's expectations of them as mature young people is a major strength of the school and can be clearly seen in such events as the school council. Standards and provision are regularly reviewed with curriculum leaders and appropriate action taken to raise standards and the head of the sixth form is well informed about students' achievement. Students' views are canvassed regularly and appropriate action taken to improve provision.
86. As in the main school the financial arrangements for the sixth form are rigorously costed and accounted for. The sixth form broadly operates within the budget that it receives or has allocated for it. The strategic plans and the resources allocated to them are in line with the underlying principles for the sixth form and are very effectively managed. Some courses cost more to run than the funding they generate but these costs are offset against more popular subjects and bigger groups. This enables the school to maintain a broader range of subjects, provide progression from the main school to the sixth form and to encourage students to stay in the school to take advanced courses rather than go to neighbouring schools or colleges. In this way the school's priorities are very well matched to spending and the principles of best value thoroughly taken into account.
87. Staffing in the sixth form is very good. In art and design and music students' benefit from being taught by teachers who are practising artists and musicians. In Spanish classes the excellence of the teachers' linguistic skills generates high quality work and a passion for learning. In religious education, psychology and mathematics teachers' command of the subject is excellent. Teachers have very secure expertise. They are at the cutting edge of their specialist subject and know the examination requirements very well. As in the main school, teachers and students are supported well by technicians and administrative staff.

Sixth Form Resources

88. Resources overall are good and meet the needs of the curriculum. They have a good impact on standards in mathematics, biology geography, history, modern foreign languages and religious education. Resources are very good in design and technology where pupils have very good access to computers and software. Pupils with special educational needs also make very good use of ICT to enhance their learning. In drama resources are unsatisfactory for productions, as the lighting and ICT are inadequate. In business and economics access to ICT is limited. The learning resources centre is satisfactory overall; it is good in mathematics, modern foreign languages and design and technology.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

89. To promote the highest levels of challenge and attainment, and building on the very good practice already in existence in the school the head teacher, staff and governors should ensure

1. That there is greater consistency in:

- the use of assessment to track progress and set targets, particularly where individual pupils may be having difficulties or for the very highest attainers;
- providing pupils with information on how to improve their work, particularly in Key Stage 3;
- the use and reporting of National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3;

Paragraphs 30, 61, 67, 97, 98, 112,113, 114, 120, 127, 138, 145, 154,181

Sixth form

90. There are no major issues.

Minor issues

In addition to the issues identified above the governors should consider including the following in their action plan

Ensuring that

1. The systems for communication are clear and robust enough to meet the needs of the few individual pupils where circumstances are unusual *Paragraphs 67, 68*
2. Collective worship meets statutory requirements to take place daily and to be broadly Christian in character *Paragraph 53, 75*
3. The minor health and safety issues identified are dealt with

Paragraph 83

Sixth form:

1. Collective worship meets statutory requirements to take place daily and to be broadly Christian in character *Paragraph 53, 75*
2. Religious education is provided in Year 13

Paragraph 75

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

| | | |
|--|--------------|-----|
| Number of lessons observed | Years 7 – 11 | 115 |
| | Sixth form | 52 |
| Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils | | 75 |

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

| | Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|---------------------|-----------|-----------|------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|
| Years 7 – 11 | | | | | | | |
| Number | 18 | 55 | 32 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage | 16 | 48 | 28 | 11 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Sixth form | | | | | | | |
| Number | 9 | 25 | 17 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage | 17 | 48 | 33 | 2 | 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. Percentages may not total 100 because of rounding up.

Information about the school's pupils

| Pupils on the school's roll | Y7 – Y11 | Sixth form |
|---|----------|------------|
| Number of pupils on the school's roll | 794 | 237 |
| Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals | 2 | 0 |

| Special educational needs | Y 7– Y11 | Sixth form |
|---|----------|------------|
| Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs | 2 | 0 |
| Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register | 50 | 15 |

| English as an additional language | No of pupils |
|---|--------------|
| Number of pupils with English as an additional language | 72 |

| Pupil mobility in the last school year | No of pupils |
|--|--------------|
| Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission | 6 |
| Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving | 17 |

Attendance

Authorised absence

| | % |
|-------------|-----|
| School data | 4.8 |

Unauthorised absence

| | % |
|-------------|---|
| School data | 0 |

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| National comparative data | 7.8 |
|---------------------------|-----|

| | |
|---------------------------|-----|
| National comparative data | 1.2 |
|---------------------------|-----|

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

| | | | | |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
| | 2002 | n/a | 148 | 148 |

| National Curriculum Test/Task Results | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|-----------|-------------|----------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above | Boys | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| | Girls | 148 | 146 | 148 |
| | Total | 148 | 146 | 148 |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School | 100 (100) | 99 (100) | 100 (99) |
| | National | 66 (64) | 67 (66) | 66 (66) |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School | 93 (99) | 98 (98) | 86 (93) |
| | National | 32 (31) | 45 (43) | 33 (34) |

| Teachers' Assessments | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|-----------|-------------|-----------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above | Boys | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| | Girls | 148 | 148 | 147 |
| | Total | 148 | 148 | 147 |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School | 100 (100) | 100 (100) | 100 (100) |
| | National | 67 (65) | 70 (68) | 67 (64) |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School | 97 (100) | 100 (100) | 90 (99) |
| | National | 32 (31) | 44 (42) | 34 (33) |

Percentages in brackets refer to 2001.

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

| | | | | |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
| | 2002 | n/a | 166 | 166 |

| 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 | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| | Girls | 164 | 165 | 165 |
| | Total | 164 | 165 | 165 |
| Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified | School | 99 (100) | 99 (100) | 99 (100) |
| | National | 50 (48) | 91 (91) | 96 (96) |

Percentages in brackets refer to 2001.

| | |
|--------------|------------------|
| GCSE results | GCSE point score |
|--------------|------------------|

| | | |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| Average point score per pupil | School | 60.6 (60.4) |
| | National | 39.8 (39) |

Figures in brackets refer to 2001.

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13) 2001

| | | For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations | | |
|----------|-----------------------------------|--|-------|------|
| | | Boys | Girls | All |
| School | Number of candidates | n/a | 101 | 101 |
| | Average point score per candidate | n/a | 20.6 | 20.6 |
| National | Average point score per candidate | 16.9 | 17.7 | 17.4 |

| | | For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations | | | For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations | | |
|----------|-----------------------------------|--|-------|------|---|-------|------|
| | | Boys | Girls | All | Boys | Girls | All |
| School | Number of candidates | n/a | 101 | 101 | n/a | 0 | 0 |
| | Average point score per candidate | n/a | 20.6 | 20.6 | n/a | 0 | 0 |
| National | Average point score per candidate | 16.9 | 17.7 | 17.4 | 9.8 | 11.4 | 10.6 |

Figures in brackets refer to 2001.

Ethnic background of pupils

| Categories used in the Annual School Census |
|---|
| White – British |
| White – Irish |
| White – any other White background |
| Mixed – White and Black Caribbean |
| Mixed – White and Black African |
| Mixed – White and Asian |
| Mixed – any other mixed background |
| Asian or Asian British - Indian |
| Asian or Asian British - Pakistani |
| Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi |
| Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background |
| Black or Black British – Caribbean |
| Black or Black British – African |
| Black or Black British – any other Black background |

Exclusions in the last school year

| No of pupils on roll | Number of fixed period exclusions | Number of permanent exclusions |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 841 | 5 | 0 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 31 | 1 | 0 |
| 2 | 0 | 0 |
| 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 | 0 | 0 |
| 13 | 0 | 0 |
| 68 | 1 | 0 |
| 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 0 | 0 | 0 |

| |
|--------------------------|
| Chinese |
| Any other ethnic group |
| No ethnic group recorded |

| |
|----|
| 14 |
| 4 |
| 12 |

| | |
|---|---|
| 0 | 0 |
| 0 | 0 |
| 0 | 0 |

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|--|-------|
| Total number of qualified teachers (FTE) | 60.57 |
| Number of pupils per qualified teacher | 17 |

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|---|-----|
| Total number of education support staff | 16 |
| Total aggregate hours worked per week | 302 |

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

| | |
|---|------|
| Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes | 72.5 |
|---|------|

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

| | |
|-------------|------|
| Key Stage 3 | 29.2 |
| Key Stage 4 | 22.9 |

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

| | |
|----------------|-----------|
| Financial year | 2001/2002 |
|----------------|-----------|

| | £ |
|--|---------|
| Total income | 2879406 |
| Total expenditure | 2879405 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 2785 |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | 3899 |
| Balance carried forward to next year | 3900 |

Recruitment of teachers

| | |
|--|-------|
| Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years | 36.45 |
| Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years | 31.5 |

| | |
|--|------|
| Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE) | 0 |
| Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE) | 1.35 |
| 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 | 1031 |
| Number of questionnaires returned | 343 |

Percentage of responses in each category

| | Strongly agree | Tend to agree | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know |
|--|----------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| My child likes school. | 43 | 50 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| My child is making good progress in school. | 48 | 50 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Behaviour in the school is good. | 36 | 57 | 3 | 1 | 3 |
| My child gets the right amount of work to do at home. | 26 | 55 | 14 | 3 | 2 |
| The teaching is good. | 29 | 62 | 5 | 0 | 4 |
| I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on. | 34 | 51 | 12 | 2 | 1 |
| I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. | 49 | 44 | 5 | 1 | 1 |
| The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best. | 67 | 31 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| The school works closely with parents. | 26 | 54 | 16 | 1 | 2 |
| The school is well led and managed. | 40 | 49 | 8 | 0 | 4 |
| The school is helping my child become mature and responsible. | 51 | 45 | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons. | 40 | 42 | 8 | 3 | 7 |

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Results in national tests and GCSE examinations have been very high and current standards are the same.
- Teachers plan stimulating lessons and have high expectations of what pupils can do.
- Pupils work very hard and behave in excellent fashion in lessons.
- The department is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Much marking, especially in Years 7 to 9, lacks sufficient detail and advice.
- Younger pupils do not do enough extended writing.
- Some teaching is insufficiently clear about how to enable some pupils to achieve the very highest grade.

91. Results in the 2002 national tests at the end of Year 9 were very high compared to national average. They were better than those achieved by pupils in similar schools and represented good progress. Pupils in the school did better in English than they did in science, but their results were not as good as those they achieved in mathematics. Teacher assessments were accurate.
92. The standard of work of pupils currently in Year 9 is very high compared to the national average. This is good achievement from their standards when they joined the school. By the end of Year 9 higher attaining pupils can write perceptive notes on literature, and make mature use of complex sentences and paragraphing in essays. Average attainers can write in a range of styles. They use technical terms well and have good techniques for analysing literature, but tend to explain plot, character, or issue in too much detail. Lower attaining pupils can explain how effects are achieved in texts or film, and use reference or quotation effectively when comparing. They are less adept at seeing alternative interpretations so that persuasive writing rarely tackles the prejudices which the reader might have.
93. GCSE results in 2002 were very high in both English language and English literature. Pupils did better in language than in literature, a reverse of the situation in the previous year. Despite a significant increase in the number of pupils gaining the A* grade, pupils generally made more progress in their other subjects than they did in English.
94. The evidence of pupils' work and lessons observed showed that attainment in Year 11 is very high. Their achievement is particularly good in terms of the proportion of pupils working at grades A and B. Higher attaining pupils write with authority, developing their own interpretations of literature or issues with skill and perception. Average attaining pupils express themselves very well. They develop ideas well, showing a mature ability to balance general points with precise detail and surface meaning with the inferences which lie behind it. Lower attaining pupils redraft work well and develop competence over a good range of styles. They tend to rely on broad generalisation followed by over-lengthy explanation, and can show indecision when analysing texts. Their work is, however, always clear in meaning and interesting in expression.

95. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Teachers discreetly make sure that they understand the nature and purpose of work. Additional time or extra resources are provided so that pupils feel confident about tackling work which they find more difficult.
96. The overall quality of teaching and learning are good. Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic, and give very effective explanations. Lessons are very well planned so that pupils can see the purpose and direction of what they are studying. In a very good lesson on the contemporary media coverage of the sinking of the 'Titanic', pupils came up with detailed reasons for how various newspapers handled the unfolding story. They came up with incisive judgements on the contrasting role and attitudes of newspapers today. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' ability to extract and analyse ideas. This leads to pupils learning to explore critically the reasons behind what they hear or read, and being able to assess the extent to which ideas are intellectually sound or justified. This was evident in a lesson on 'An Inspector Calls' where pupils quickly applied the concept of dramatic irony to the plot and could identify where and to what effect the technique of foreshadowing events was used by the playwright. A relative weakness in teaching is that younger pupils do not do enough writing, spending too much time on notes or planning, so that they are not refining their written skills.
97. Teachers mark work regularly and accurately. In Years 7 to 9, however, pupils are not given enough indication as to how marks have been arrived at, nor given sufficient advice about what precisely they need to do to gain improved grades. In general teachers could better plan how they are going to extend the learning of the highest attaining pupils so that they demonstrate their full potential.
98. Pupils' attitudes to English are very good and their behaviour is excellent. Relationships between pupils and with teachers are strong so that each values what the other can contribute in lessons. Tasks are tackled enthusiastically and pupils of all ages show a rare ability to work independently for long periods. Occasional instances of inattention or fussiness stand out from the general atmosphere. Written work is completed with care and pride; books and files are very well organised. Teachers allow too much leeway to a minority of pupils who present incomplete or uncorrected written work.
99. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Standards are higher, teaching is better, and there is more encouragement for pupils to use their own ideas and express opinions. The curriculum gives good opportunities for learning about ICT skills, and the media. Topical or contentious issues are looked at from a moral and social point of view, making pupils more aware of the rights and responsibilities of the individual. The department is well led and managed. Issues such as the variable quality of marking, the need to standardise procedures, and the need for younger pupils to write at length more regularly are already being tackled. Morale amongst the largely new team is very good and teachers are keen to effect the further improvements which are within their grasp. The department will move into new accommodation in September 2003. It is a tribute to both teachers and pupils that despite the unsatisfactory classrooms being used during the week of the inspection, there was no detrimental effect on the quality of lessons.
100. **Drama** is introduced as an option choice against Latin in Year 8, and Year 9 pupils have a single period of drama which alternates with music. The proportion of pupils opting to take the subject at GCSE is higher than that typically found. Current standards are above those expected nationally by the end of Year 9, but this represents unsatisfactory achievement. This is because the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is poor: providing neither sufficient time nor continuity for pupils to systematically develop skills. The school is aware of this and plans improvements for next year.

Within the time available progress is good, because teachers make good use of time, manage pupils well in both whole class and group situations, and introduce interesting topics. Pupils are encouraged to research and portray issues relating to moral and social issues past and present, such as the treatment of the suffragettes or the conditions and image of refugees. The quality of teaching to GCSE groups is very good and pupils' standards are well above national average although pupils did not do quite as well in Drama as they did in their other subjects. Pupils learn how to plan quality group improvisations quickly and perform them confidently. They explain the reasoning behind decisions very effectively and have very good understanding of the value of detailed evaluation. Teachers' planning and expertise ensure that lessons are enjoyable and demanding. Both the resources and accommodation available for teaching drama are basic and place some limitations on the range of activities and study which can take place.

Literacy

101. On entry pupils have very good literacy skills, particularly in terms of their reading and speaking ability. Teachers have accepted the importance of further developing literacy skills, and the national strategy is now but successfully applied across the school. A group studying teaching and learning strategies is leading the initiative. Recent developments and direction have resulted in strategies which are satisfactory, but classroom practice remains variable. Lessons in history, geography and design technology show very good awareness of literacy issues..
102. Excellent use is made of class and group discussion by most teachers, but a few lack skill in developing rather than merely using pupils' speaking skills. In the best lessons, pupils learn to use speech to clarify and develop ideas. Formal presentations are well used in subjects like geography; spoken accuracy is emphasised in modern foreign languages. Some mathematics lessons would benefit from group discussion; in some art lessons there is too little use of teacher comment and question to focus discussion.
103. Reading for information is a strong feature of design and technology and art, where literature is sometimes used as a stimulus. In history there is specific teaching of skimming and note-taking skills. Many pupils read aloud very well, and quickly pick up quite complex meaning and inferences when faced with a new text, as seen in religious education.
104. Writing frames are well used in modern foreign languages and history to provide structure for essays, and in design and technology to guide pupils through the design process. In mathematics there are no opportunities for pupils to write up investigations, and most note-taking is from the board. In contrast science teachers encourage some independence in note-taking and tabulating results. In general marking across the school pays too little attention to the correct use and spelling of specialist terms and to correct grammar, but this is not a major issue as pupils generally write accurately.
105. The library, (LRC) was poor at the time of the previous inspection. It is now bright and well organised with a satisfactory range and quality of books, although fiction stock is low. It has a good balance of books for various ages, and for subject-related study and wider reading. Videos, CD-ROMs and computer links to both internet and the school's intranet supplement book resources. Activities such as workshops by professional authors, book signings, competitions, and a reading club stimulate awareness of the value of reading for pleasure and research. The provision is overall because its use as a sixth form study centre makes the LRC unavailable to classes for a third of the week.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Results are very high and the overall achievement of is pupils very good.
- Very good teaching has motivated pupils. They are enthusiastic learners who work very hard.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.

Areas for improvement

- The new schemes of work, currently being developed, need to include work on investigations and the use of ICT.
- Teachers need to make greater use of pupil performance data to set pupils' targets for improvement and raise attainment still further.

106. Most girls join the school with knowledge, skills and understanding which are well above average, though not as good as in English, and the intake includes some pupils whose attainment at the end of Year 6 is average. Over time, the school has maintained a consistently very high level of attainment and results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 are far above expected standards. In 2002, when compared with selective schools, the results were below average. In particular the numbers attaining the highest levels were lower than expected. Overall there is no significant difference between the results of mathematics, English and science, although in 2002 mathematics did less well at the highest levels than the other two subjects.
107. Standards by the end of Year 9 are well above average. Girls in Year 7 were working successfully on solving linear equations and good use was being made of ICT to develop and practice their skills. Although emphasis was placed on the development of numeracy skills through the use of well prepared starter activities, some of the girls lacked confidence in their use of multiplication tables and this inhibited their progress. Year 9 girls had just started work on plotting quadratic graphs. As a result of well planned teaching, including clear explanations from the teacher and a good pace to the lesson, the pupils quickly understood the work and made rapid progress to reach the higher levels.
108. Pupils generally achieve well in Years 7 to 9. Some girls who enter the school at Level 4 do particularly well and make very good progress by the time they take the tests at the end of Year 9. A Year 9 class just starting work on simultaneous equations was able to solve simpler pairs of equations mentally. The topic was introduced through some stimulating practical examples, which successfully caught the attention of the pupils. Higher attaining pupils also do well, but the pace of coverage of the national curriculum from Year 7 to Year 9 could be increased.
109. GCSE results in 2002 were very high with virtually all the year group being graded at C or above. Some of the pupils had taken GCSE at the end of Year 10 and had moved on to successfully take Additional Mathematics at the end of Year 11. This is excellent preparation for future A and AS level courses and is welcomed by the pupils when they move on to A level mathematics. Because they take the GCSE examination a year early, a small number do not attain the A* grades which they would get had they taken the examination at the end of Year 11. As a result, GCSE A* grades appear slightly lower than would be expected when compared with similar schools.
110. Standards are very high, particularly in the top group which has taken GCSE early. Pupils were successfully working on Newton's Laws and were able to derive the equations through the use of basic differentiation techniques. This represents very good achievement for those pupils who had successfully coped with the considerable demands placed on them to take the examination early. Other groups, although less advanced were still working at levels of work where the highest grades

can be attained. There is an overall expectation that all pupils taking GCSE will sit the highest level paper and this high expectation from teachers motivates the pupils to achieve very good results.

111. The overall quality of teaching is very good. The use of starter activities was effective and the main section of the lesson was well presented with the girls being set clear learning objectives. Lessons were well paced and with a variety of activities. Very good teaching enabled effective learning throughout the long teaching periods of up to 80 minutes. In some lessons, the activities were totally teacher directed for the whole time, giving the girls little time for work on their own, or for teachers to assess fully the progress made in the lesson. The use of questioning was always very good and the response of the pupils positive. They generally showed a very high level of motivation and a strong desire to learn. Rarely, where the work is less well managed, the level of concentration of the pupils is not so consistently high.
112. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been good. The department is well led. It includes a significant number of staff who are new to the school and the team has quickly developed a strong collegiate approach. All are well-qualified with a very good command of the subject. Schemes of work are currently being re-written and need to include reference to suitable ICT and investigative work. In Years 7 to 9 they also need to include more materials to challenge the gifted and talented pupils.
113. Marking and assessment requires further development to be in line with the school policy. The department has good systems for the collection of data and teachers have good knowledge of what pupils have already achieved and their potential. The pupils are not routinely made aware of their potential levels or grades and often are given little or no guidance on how to improve. Marking and assessment in Years 10 and 11 is better than in Years 7 to 9.
114. Staff are very good at ensuring the pupils use and understand mathematical terminology and there are lists of words displayed in most rooms and the resources in the library are good. Literacy, however, is not as well developed as it could be because it is not yet part of the scheme of work. The department is due for new accommodation soon and this will improve the rather shoddy areas which are currently in use.

Numeracy

115. The department has a numeracy policy which has still to be fully implemented across the whole school. The general level of numeracy is good. Improving use of the starter activity will raise the standard still further. Some good examples of the application of numeric skills were seen in other departments. Geography makes skilful use of graphs, bearings and coordinates, in PE pupils in Year 7 were calculating pulse rates and recovery times following exercise and in science pupils were effectively using graphs, for example in enzyme experiments, and working on surface area and volumes. Overall, strategies for teaching numeric skills are satisfactory.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Well above average attainment and good achievement at GCSE level.
- Very good recent improvement in teaching, curriculum, monitoring of standards and development planning.
- Some excellent teaching role models.
- Excellent departmental leadership.
- Pupils' very good attitudes to work.

Areas for improvement

- Continue to implement departmental plans to raise attainment by: disseminating the excellent practice of some teachers, ironing out some inconsistencies and increasing the pace and challenge in some lessons, particularly in the lower school.

116. Results in the Year 9 national tests in 2002 were in the top 5% of schools nationally. However these results were well below what would be expected of the pupils from their attainment on entry to the school and when compared with mathematics and English. Results at GCSE in 2002 were well above average, although there were fewer A* and A grades than in the other core subjects. The point score was much higher than average and closer to those in mathematics and English. This is in line with results achieved in other grammar schools although pupils tend to score less well than the average in the other subjects that they take. The department has recognised that raising attainment is a priority, especially in Year 9, because standards have been somewhat below the other core subjects. It has taken a number of steps to improve it and the effects of these are evident in the standards of work observed in the school.
117. Attainment is very good in Year 9 and pupils are achieving well. Detailed tracking of attainment shows that pupils are now performing at a higher level than that expected from their prior attainment. Year 9 work shows good learning, very good in the top three sets, and a more than usual depth of knowledge in areas such as human karyotyping, survey work (including statistics) on genetics, very good essays on selective breeding which show high level literacy skills, very good information processing, balancing of chemical equations and work on electric circuits. In some classes, standards are moving to very high, although there are still elements of inconsistency with some classes where standards are high but, with more challenge, could be very high. The same is broadly true of Years 7 and 8, although Year 7 has made a smoother transition to the new, more challenging, curriculum.
118. Attainment is very good in Years 10 and 11, particularly in the highest sets, which are taking the separate science examinations though as yet there are no GCSE results for these groups. Year 10 and 11 work shows very good learning in all three sciences. In biology, there is very good work on surface area/volume ratios, enzymes and very accurate and detailed knowledge and understanding of human physiology. Syllabus coverage is excellent. In chemistry, there is very good work on rates of reaction, which benefits from the use of ICT. Very good numeracy skills were shown in calculations and in graphical work such as reciprocal plots of reaction rate. In physics, work is very high level in some classes, with very good work on forces and greater than usual depth of explanation on such topics as static electricity, distance speed graphs and astronomy. Overall standards of work in science are improving. They are now very good (and in some classes, excellent). Achievement, on the evidence of the work seen, is good. Pupils with special educational needs and pupils with home languages other than English also make good progress.
119. The teaching is very good overall. Recent changes in staffing have done much to improve the quality of teaching. The teaching and learning were strongly facilitated by pupils' very good attitudes that lead to excellent discussions, very good co-operative working and good laboratory skills. For example, these were very evident in a Year 8 practical on chemical reactions, a Year 10

lesson on slaked lime and a Year 10 lesson on the social and economic implications of limestone quarrying. Similarly the pupils' attitudes led to very good revision and information gathering as shown both in lessons and in their written work. Where the teachers made best use of the pupils' potentialities the results were excellent, such as the GCSE work on waves, distance/time graphs and limestone quarrying. The same was true in some lower school lessons, such as investigation of yeast. At its best, science teaching makes a very good contribution to social, moral and citizenship issues, strongly promoting independent work, thought and reflection about the world outside school.

120. There were some relative weaknesses in the teaching. All teachers had very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects, but they did not all fully develop the potential of their pupils. This was more evident in some lower school classes. For example, a Year 7 class investigating electric circuits, had the skills needed to take the work much farther and faster. In one case, the general high quality of relationships was less evident and progress on ionic bonding in a Year 11 class, which had been affected by staff changes, was only sound and a lot lower than pupils were capable of. Even in some good lessons such as Year 8 work on chemical reactions, Year 9 work on acid rain and Year 10 work on slaked lime the pupils could have learned more had the teachers been more conscious of the need to challenge the potential highest attainers to think more deeply as they worked. The department is aware of these relative weaknesses and is tackling them effectively.
121. Recent changes in curriculum have also led to improvement. The lower school curriculum is now more demanding and the teaching of Year 9 now much less fragmented. GCSE schemes of work have been put in place since September 2002, as have various enrichment activities such as trips, visiting speakers, a magazine, lunchtime classes and clubs. The quality of assessment information has been much improved and pupils who are underachieving are being identified and supported. These changes have been instituted by a head of department who started in April 2002 and amount to very good improvement in a short time. Thus leadership in science is excellent. Management is very good, with some further work needed for the changes to have maximum impact. Staffing is good. Resources are good, with some recent improvement and plans to further improve the use of ICT. Library provision is sound and could be further developed, with some clearer distinction between books suitable for different age groups and purposes such as curriculum or background reading. Accommodation is satisfactory and health and safety is well dealt with, although in some of the more cramped laboratories, it owes a lot to the co-operation of the pupils.
122. Comparisons with the previous inspection are difficult since the department has changed so much since then. Standards are now higher and unsatisfactory teaching has been eliminated. The main previous weakness was a lack of challenge. There are still some remnants of this, but recent changes have gone a long way to eliminate it. Overall, improvement, particularly since September 2002, has been very good.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Very good teaching, teachers' subject expertise, knowledge and understanding, and very high expectations for all pupils
- Use of computers for research and to manipulate images
- Pupils' excellent behaviour, attitudes and enthusiasm for learning
- The contribution of the subject to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Areas for improvement

- Use of National Curriculum levels - by teachers when they plan lessons and assess pupils' work and, by pupils when they evaluate their work and set targets.

123. In 2002 teacher assessments of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 were well above those reported nationally. Attainment of pupils currently in Year 9 is very high. When pupils joined the school, their knowledge and understanding of artists' work was generally further advanced than their practical skills. Pupils in Year 9 are able to use their increasing understanding of art, craft and design to inform their individual work. Their practical skills, and their understanding of basic elements, are now very secure. Pupils work in two and three dimensions and use computers to carry out research and to manipulate images and text. They respond very well to the teaching and their achievement is very good.
124. In one Year 9 class, pupils designed the front page of a newspaper, selecting appropriate type faces and considering the balance of text and images. In another class pupils were also developing critical decision-making skills. They had carried out research on a range of social and moral issues in preparation for their large scale, mixed media work and were at the point of selecting some images and slogans in preference to others. In both lessons the work demonstrated a good sense of scale, space, composition and an awareness of how to create an impact. The themes were of particular interest to the girls, fostering their wider appreciation of 'issues based' work and the artists who use their art as a means of expressing a personal viewpoint. Information on the selected themes and ideas was gathered from a range of published materials and the Internet and included vivisection, child abuse, crime and punishment. The work made a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and touched on some aspects of the citizenship curriculum. In this and other work there are good opportunities to develop literacy skills. Work in sketchbooks is annotated and in most cases completed to a very high standard. Standards are higher than at the time of the last inspection and the use of computers for research and image manipulation has greatly improved. Pupils have insufficient information about their attainment against National Curriculum levels. Teachers do not make enough use of these to plan and assess pupils' work, set targets and track their progress.
125. All pupils who took the examination attained A*- C grades in the 2002 GCSE examinations which was very high compared with national averages and a very high proportion gained the highest A* and A grades. The overall trend has remained consistently strong and well above the national average. Even so, and despite this very positive picture, a few pupils did less well than expected, given their prior attainment, and when compared to their attainment in their other subjects.
126. From the evidence of the pupils' work and in the lessons seen, standards in Years 10 and 11 are very high and all pupils, including those with special needs, achieve well. In one lesson seen, pupils benefited greatly from one-to-one tutorials and the teacher's assessments and recommendations of where improvements could be made. Pupils' knowledge and understanding of the examination requirements, and the marking criteria, helps them remain focused, ensures they make best use of their time and maximises their achievement. The work of Year 10 pupils is of a very high order. In some cases the quality of drawing is outstanding and the ability to abstract sections of their work and thoughtfully re-order and amalgamate the images is indicative of standards well beyond the scope of GCSE. Experimentation is creative and thoughtfully and intelligently used in different contexts and because pupils read widely they give coherent and well-chosen examples, in speech and writing, of artists who have used similar starting points. The language and basic elements of the subject are understood and applied. The achievement of these pupils is very good.
127. Teaching and learning are very good. The effectiveness of the learning lies in teachers' excellent subject knowledge and very high expectations. Relationships are very positive, the work teachers' set is challenging and pupils' curiosity and independent learning skills fuel high levels of interest and creativity. Computers are in regular use and often combined with other more traditional media. This

is a significant improvement on the provision reported at the time of the last inspection. In Years 10 and 11 teachers make good use of examination requirements and marking criteria to plan and assess pupils' work. As a result pupils are well informed, take responsibility for their own learning and plan their time very effectively, both in and out of lessons. In younger classes teachers make insufficient reference to National Curriculum levels in their lesson plans and when they mark pupils' work. Objectives are not sharp enough and opportunities are lost at the end of the lesson to review what has been achieved and what needs further consolidation.

128. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The subject is strong and has maintained the high standards and success in examinations. However the sketchbooks of many pupils show how their learning has, in the past, been affected by the changes of staff. Future changes need careful management if the good improvement that has been achieved since the last inspection is to be built upon, and the huge potential for further improvement is to be realised.

CITIZENSHIP

Overall, the quality of provision for citizenship is **good**

Strengths

- Wide consultation on citizenship and good progress made towards implementing the statutory guidelines.
- Thorough and well considered planning builds on existing strengths, especially in Years 7 to 9.
- School Council provides excellent opportunities for pupils to contribute to decision making, and to which all rise in an outstanding manner.

Areas for improvement

- Develop a scheme of work that makes a clear distinction between learning objectives for citizenship and subject-based work.
- Identify tasks that pupils undertake in each strand with an assessment and recording system to provide teachers and pupils with a clear picture of standards achieved.

129. At present the curriculum is a part of the Enrichment programme which includes PHSE and careers education and guidance, with support for related themes and topics covered in other subjects. The development of citizenship has been built on pupils' willingness to take the initiative and demonstrate the independence that was evident at the time of the last inspection. Pupils reach very high standards by the end of Years 9 and 11. They make a significant contribution to the community within school, and are involved in a wide range of activities, such as Amnesty, model UN and Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme that are designed to increase their understanding of citizenship.

130. In Years 7 to 9 the key units of the programme are taught by form tutors and involve visits from community police and other relevant agencies. Very well planned activities help students to think, write and discuss issues. Debates led by sixth form students are planned at the end of each unit to enable students to reflect on the process of debating. Although no teaching of these units could be seen during the inspection, the quality of teaching elements of citizenship through other subjects was very good. Students have a very good understanding of aspects of society. For example, in geography, Year 7 pupils are quick to identify local out of town shopping centres and identify the negative aspects of city centre developments. In history, Year 8 pupils consider the level of commitment needed to take different sides in a civil war. Pupils in Year 9 interviewed people from three different generations about remembering the dead as part of a religious education project. Their presentations were articulate and sensitive.

131. Careers education provides good support to the development of citizenship in Years 10 and 11 as students plan for their future beyond school. The religious education department delivers key parts of the citizenship programme most effectively, particularly topics such as faiths, tolerance and rights and responsibilities underpinning society. Science and geography departments discuss many global inequality issues. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have the expertise to engage pupils in discussion of issues with objectivity and sensitivity. As a result, older pupils show very good respect for other's viewpoints. This, and their willingness to enter into genuine debate are strong features of lessons observed. A valuable subject audit has been undertaken to identify coverage of topics, and departments are annotating schemes of work with links to citizenship. However, planning for this phase of the subject is still at an early stage and care needs to be taken to ensure that citizenship topics are covered by all students regardless of their GCSE options choice.
132. Many other subjects also make an effective contribution to the development of citizenship. For example, in drama, pupils are able to examine through role play the treatment and situation of refugees, and in art pupils research images that explore social issues of crime and punishment. In physical education pupils learn to co-operate and accept decisions. Older students become the decision makers when they act as referees or coach teams of younger pupils. The range of opportunities for pupils to negotiate, decide and take part in school activities is excellent. The house system was set up in response to suggestions from a group of students who were concerned at the lack of contact between different year groups. Student participation in School Council, through the House system, is exemplary. Every girl is a member whose viewpoint is valued. The election of Main Council members is supervised by the sixth form politics group. House prefects ensure that the correct procedures are followed in meetings that run parallel to the School Council meeting. Minutes of previous meetings show that suggestions have been acted on. The team was impressed with democratic process at work in the meetings they attended. There was excellent participation in all years and pupils made valid but realistic points concerning the motion 'Is the balance right between academic and cross-curricular provision?'
133. Although the school has undertaken very detailed work to identify suitable learning challenges that teach students about becoming informed citizens, implementation of the subject is in its early stages and does not meet all the statutory requirements. There is no scheme of work to establish a clear distinction between learning objectives for citizenship and subject-based work or to ensure that the work is appropriately assessed. The clear opportunities that build and encourage active citizenship within the school community have not yet been related to participation in relevant action in the wider community. Senior managers have led the introduction of citizenship well and have involved all staff in training. They recognise that many areas of the statutory guidance have still to be incorporated into the provision. Responsibility for this has been given to a member of staff with the enthusiasm and authority to achieve this.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths :

- Standards in the subject are very high.
- Very good teaching leads to very good learning.
- Teachers provide very good individual support for all pupils.
- The very good relationships between pupils and teachers lead to a very good climate for learning.

Areas for improvement:

- Extend the range of courses in Years 10 and 11 to provide greater challenge for higher attaining pupils.
- Strengthen the procedures for marking and assessing pupils, work in Years 7 to 9 to ensure they are fully informed about how well they are doing and how to make further progress.

134. Standards at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average and other similar schools. Teachers' assessment of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 in 2001 confirm that pupils are working well above the national expectation. Although teacher assessments indicate a slight drop in 2002, standards of work seen during the inspection remain consistently high. Standards at the start of Year 7 are above average, and by the end of Year 9 they are well above average across a range of activities including making and designing products in food, resistant materials, textiles, graphics, and electronics. This is good achievement. Pupils respond very well in lessons and are well motivated to follow teachers' very good guidance. Pupils are familiar with using the design process, which supports them well in demonstrating each stage of developing their individual products. They use both text and drawings well to show how products have been designed, although at this stage their range of drawing skills are limited. All pupils use ICT very well to research and present information and have very good opportunities to use computer aided design and computer aided manufacturing processes.
135. GCSE results in 2001 show that the proportion of students achieving A* to C grades was very high compared to the national average and that of similar schools. These improved further in 2002. Results were best in graphics, food and textiles. The work seen during the inspection of Year 10 and 11 was of a very high standard. Very high quality practical work showed particularly good levels of product development in all specialist areas. Pupils developed advanced making skills which included a wide range of industrial processes. They showed confidence in using computer aided design and manufacturing processes. They were very familiar with the process used for designing. This helped to ensure the products they developed were of very high quality. They showed very high order skills in both designing and making and gave very good attention to the needs of potential users when they established the criteria before initiating their first design ideas. Very good attention was given to detailed evaluation of products at each stage of its development. GCSE ideas often stemmed from pupils sharing information and ideas in class.
136. All pupils, including those with special educational needs achieve well in design and technology. Good basic skills in designing and making are established in Years 7 to 9 and pupils are taught to refine the process to a very high degree when they prepare work for GCSE examinations. Pupils show imagination and accuracy in the work they do. The realisation of all products is supported with well-developed plans from all pupils.
137. The overall quality of teaching is very good. Teachers structured the lessons very well and provide clear objectives to guide and support pupils in their work. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject, and pupils benefited from the very good guidance in all year groups, and particularly with examination coursework in Years 10 and 11. Very good relationships between students and teachers result in very good opportunities for open discussions and conditions for learning. In examination groups, teachers created opportunities for pupils to discuss

their work as a group as well as individually with the teacher. This generated a unique learning environment where pupils valued their own work, and took the opportunity of sharing ideas with others. This was evident in an excellent Year 11 graphics lesson seen during the inspection. The teacher used a range of targeted questions to lead both group and individual discussions. As a result of the pupils' high level of research and knowledge base about the subject, they participated particularly well in discussion. This opportunity to share and solve problems as a group resulted in highly motivated and challenged learning. Work showed evidence of a much wider range of ideas and solutions to problems than is seen normally. The lessons which were good rather than very good provided fewer opportunities for pupils to share ideas and to think for themselves. Lower-attaining pupils received very good individual support from teachers, and as a result, they achieved levels in line with other pupils in the group.

138. Teachers used a very good range of strategies to strengthen and develop skills in literacy, including the development of technical vocabulary associated with the subject. They provided frames for writing which helped students to present their design information in a range of ways to best effect. They prepared a good level of resources, which guided pupils including those with special educational needs to structure their writing so ensuring all the relevant information was presented. This has had a positive effect on the pupils' ability to refine the stages of designing and acquire the necessary skills to show how work has been developed. Marking was very informative for pupils doing examination courses in Years 10 and 11, and they are well supported with information on how to make further improvements. Marking was less consistent or helpful for pupils in Years 7 to 9.
139. The use of ICT was very good. Pupils developed advanced skills in communicating information to support the presentation of their work, for research and to enable them to process the data they generated when conducting surveys and user research. In resistant materials and graphics, pupils developed well above average skills in computer aided design and computer aided manufacture. Pupils studying food technology used computers well to calculate the nutritional value of food, and to evaluate the products they made. In textiles, pupils showed a good level of competence in designing and making products using the computer aided sewing machines. Pupils developed above average skills in numeracy as they measured and marked out materials. They processed information when calculating values in food and resistant materials. In GCSE food lessons, pupils used the process of sensory analysis very well and presented their results in the form of charts and graphs.
140. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The new head of department maintains very good working relationships within the department, and staff work hard to maintain very high levels of efficiency. The monitoring of teaching and learning is good and this has had a positive impact on raising standards in the subject. It is important however to continue the good work on teaching and learning in the department and the roles and responsibilities of the head of department and other key staff in the department need to have a clear focus. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good and has resulted in increased standards and improvement in teaching and learning. However, the present curriculum does not include the full range of courses normally seen in a technology college and this limits the challenge for very high attaining pupils. The very good technician support makes a very positive contribution to the efficiency of the department.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- The very good teaching, particularly strong in Years 10 and 11, that results in very good learning
- The very high attainment and good achievement of pupils at both Key Stages 3 & 4
- Very good behaviour and positive attitudes of pupils, including their ability to work independently

Areas for improvement

- Single lessons in Key Stage 3 limit the range of activities and methods that can be used and constrain learning
- Inconsistencies in assessment in Years 7 to 9 result in a lack of information regarding improvement and progress in relation to NC levels

141. In 2002, the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 showed that attainment is very high with almost all pupils achieving the higher levels. The work of pupils in lessons and the evidence of their previously completed work confirmed the accuracy of these assessments. However, pupils in Years 7 to 9 have little knowledge of their progress in relation to National Curriculum levels.
142. The standard attained by pupils currently in Year 9 is very high. They respond to questioning with detailed factual knowledge and use technical language very accurately. They interpret and explain patterns in statistics and diagrams, for example Year 9 pupils were able to group data and construct excellent maps showing variations in the density of population in Italy. They used latitude and longitude in locating countries and estimating their extent. Year 8 pupils showed a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between physical and human processes as they explained the patterns in farming in the British Isles. Pupils' subject skills are very good, this enables them to make good progress and their achievement at the end of Year 9 is good.
143. GCSE results in 2002 were very high when compared with the national average, two-thirds of pupils achieving the highest grades A* and A. Pupils did significantly better in geography than most other subjects. Standards have risen since the last report. Overall, pupils' achievement in Year 11, relative to their starting point, is good.
144. In Years 10 and 11, pupils who have chosen to study geography make good progress. The standard of work of pupils in Year 11 is very high. They respond well to the challenge of decision-making tasks and enquiry work because they have the skills necessary for independent learning. They take responsibility for their learning and show initiative and creativity, for example, in investigating how human and natural processes interrelate, Year 10 pupils studied the impact of the Montserrat eruptions on the island's population. In a very good lesson on National Parks, groups of Year 10 pupils worked very briskly to prepare presentations. Very good literacy skills enabled them to identify attractions and management issues in such areas. They showed curiosity and wonder as they studied the landscapes, recognised the need for conservation and the impact of change on different groups. This subject makes a particularly strong contribution to pupils' social, moral, cultural, and to a lesser extent, their spiritual development. In another very good lesson, Year 11 pupils showed a very good grasp of factors influencing the location of industry. Well-chosen tasks enabled them to apply their theoretical knowledge and practical skills as they investigated industrial location in Middlesbrough.
145. The teaching observed was very good. Planning enables pupils to build upon their existing knowledge to extend their understanding. Teaching challenges the pupils and teachers have very high expectations of them. This was evident when Year 7 pupils investigated problems facing shops in central business districts and the advantages of out of town location. A strength of the

teaching is the setting-up and testing of hypotheses, answering the where, how, why and what next questions, pupils respond very positively to this approach. Targeted and skilful questioning at the beginning and end of lessons, frequent tests and simple games are used to consolidate pupils' knowledge, understanding and awareness. For example, in Years 7 to 9 lessons start with 'Newsmap', when nominated pupils name places in the news that are then discussed and plotted using atlases and maps. Teachers exploit pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding using a wide variety of methods. In all the teaching a heavy emphasis is placed on developing independence, for example, Year 7 pupils were asked to collect weather data during the half-term break, this to be used as they study weather conditions in the British Isles. The marking of pupils' work is satisfactory; in Years 10 and 11 it is thorough and regular, however, in Years 7 to 9 the quality can vary. Further, younger pupils are not given sufficient information as to how they might improve. The monitoring of pupils' progress is satisfactory. Teachers keep comprehensive records, but the use of data to establish base-line assessments of National Curriculum levels and set targets should be developed further.

146. Relationships are very positive and pupils respond with interest to the enthusiastic and challenging teaching. They enjoy the subject. Homework supports learning and is set regularly. In all lessons, tasks and resources met the needs of all pupils who, as a result, were able to sustain their concentration and complete a considerable amount of work during lessons. However, short lessons in Years 7, 8 and 9 caused difficulties leading to a loss of pace and less productive work, so affecting progress in the longer term.
147. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and teachers try to ensure that any pupil who has been absent is provided with the support she needs to 'catch-up'. Pupils feel supported, they are articulate and confident, and very willing to make their contributions in lessons, not only answering questions, but also posing them.
148. In all years a strong emphasis is placed upon the development of pupils' literacy skills, though, the library better meets the needs of the older pupils. Frequent and very good opportunities are provided for pupils to practise and apply their numerical skills and they are required to make full use of their very good ICT skills.
149. The head of department leads by example and manages the department effectively. Overall, the resources and accommodation provided are good. The response of the department to the areas for development included in the previous report was not wholly effective as timetable arrangements continue to constrain the learning of a minority and work is not assessed against National Curriculum levels. However, improvement since the last inspection has been good. The department has the commitment and capacity necessary to achieve further improvement.

HISTORY

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

Strengths:

- Standards are very high in both key stages.
- Pupils' achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very positive.
- The subject makes a strong contribution to pupils' development as independent learners.

Areas for improvement:

- There is some variability in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in both key stages.
- Some aspects of departmental monitoring and evaluation are too informal to ensure that the highest quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently maintained.

150. Standards of attainment are very high and consistent with examination results. In 2002, teachers' assessment of pupils' performance at the end of Year 9 indicates that nearly all attain at least National Curriculum level 6 with a significant proportion receiving the highest levels 7 and 8. In the 2002 GCSE examinations, almost all pupils achieved a grade B or higher and three quarters achieved A* or A grades.
151. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 with some that is very good. Pupils enter the school at well-above national averages of attainment and continue to make good progress. Pupils quickly acquire the facility to make critical use of a wide range of historical sources and become increasingly skilled in analysing, interpreting and evaluating them. They can write increasingly detailed accounts, selecting and synthesising information from a wide range of sources at progressively more complex levels of critical enquiry. Pupils develop effective strategies for note-taking and research. They produce a wide range of writing including essays, and accounts showing differing historical perspectives. Pupils make appropriate use of ICT skills in both researching and presenting their work. Speaking and listening are considerably enhanced in history lessons where pupils frequently make good quality presentations to the class or engage in role-play activities.
152. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils can clearly explain and analyse reasons for, and results of, events and changes. In lessons based around President Hoover's response to the aftermath of the Wall Street Crash, pupils demonstrated their ability to evaluate hypotheses critically by carefully investigating background evidence and showed their awareness of the danger of over generalisation. Pupils develop independent learning skills in history lessons and their written work is frequently of a very high quality.
153. Teaching and learning are good overall in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Where teaching is excellent or very good, lessons are very clearly structured and pupils are challenged by teachers' enthusiasm for the subject and their high expectations for learning. The purpose of learning is made very clear and well-planned activities are delivered at a brisk pace. Explanations are clear and teachers skilfully ask questions that challenge and extend pupils' thinking. In a very good Year 8 lesson on the English Civil War, the teacher's explanation of complex and unfamiliar language improved pupils' understanding of the background to the war. In an excellent Year 10 lesson on the political implications of the Depression of the 1930s in the United States the questioning drew out a very good range of responses from the pupils and enabled them to make well-informed judgements on significant factors. A particular strength of teaching is the very good balance between pupils working alone, in small groups and as a whole class. This helps to ensure pace, variety and interest in learning.
154. Pupils respond very positively to high quality teaching. They make intellectual and creative efforts in their work and are able to keep up with the brisk pace set. Levels of interaction in discussions and role plays are impressive and pupils develop independent learning skills. There is a very good

dialogue between learners and teachers and pupils regularly ask as well as answer questions. Attitudes to learning are extremely positive overall. Where teaching and learning are satisfactory rather than good or better in Years 7 to 9, the purpose of lessons is less clearly established, tasks are less challenging and classroom management is less effective. Pupils make satisfactory progress but productivity is much lower. Marking and assessment are generally good. Most pupils are clear about how well they are progressing and can explain what they need to do to improve further. Focused assessment tasks are closely marked with detailed comments to inform future work. There are however, some inconsistencies in terms of both quality and regularity of marking in a minority of classes in both key stages. It does not always give pupils' enough guidance on how to improve their work.

155. The history department is well led and the improvement since the last inspection has been good. Systems for monitoring and evaluating the work of the department are in place, but some processes are too informal to ensure that teaching, learning, marking and assessment of the highest standard is consistently delivered and achieved.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well to reach very high standards.
- Good teaching builds well on pupils' earlier learning.
- Very good, often excellent, attitudes and behaviour of pupils make an important contribution to their learning.
- The curriculum has been significantly improved, so that taught courses and opportunities to use computers in other subjects are now good.
- Good leadership and management have succeeded in raising the profile of ICT.

Areas for improvement

- A further improvement to co-ordination would ensure that all pupils have a coherent range of opportunities to use computers in other subjects.
- Subjects need to play a greater role in assessing ICT capability.
- Pupils need more opportunities to reflect upon their use of ICT.
- A system is needed to ensure regular electrical safety checks of computers.

156. The results of teacher assessments of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 were very high in 2002. The standard of the work of pupils currently in Year 9 is also very high. All pupils can use a range of software tools to carry out specific tasks and in doing so, the great majority show considerable confidence and independence. For example, when asked to create publicity material for a community centre, members of a Year 9 class were able to use a range of software with high competence. This included art and desktop publishing packages to create posters and business cards and *Powerpoint* to create presentations. Pupils were able to analyse earlier attempts critically, discussing strengths and weaknesses, suggesting improvement and then independently refine their own work. Standards are now significantly better than at the last inspection, when they were average.

157. The option to take a full GCSE in ICT has only recently been introduced, with the first pupils entered for GCSE in 2002. Only a very small number of girls took the examination in this year, and so it is not possible to make comparisons with national attainment statistics. However, all who entered achieved well by gaining an A* grade. This is much better than the results in the examination previously offered, which were above average at the time of the last inspection. Current Year 11 pupils are also reaching very high standards. The great majority can select

software to carry out specified tasks and use this with high competence and relevance. They are aware of problems that can arise and adept at providing solutions for these, showing a high awareness of the needs of the intended audience. The Year 11 class shows high independence in the wide range of focuses that girls have selected for coursework in which they have produced websites and *Powerpoint* presentations. They are able to use advanced features of spreadsheets to create expert systems for fictitious consultancy businesses to use when matching the needs of clients to solutions. The very highest attainers demonstrate their standards by for example, choosing existing websites that they then improve effectively, to make them easier and more interesting to use, and by the strong way in which they consider alternative approaches before selecting the best.

158. Although there is some variability, the standards with which pupils enter the school are generally well above average. Most pupils achieve well by further improving, to reach very high standards by the end of Year 9. Those who go on to study the GCSE course continue to achieve well by maintaining these. Achievement is better than at the last inspection, when it was satisfactory.
159. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are very good and often excellent. They usually listen with high attentiveness, when teachers are explaining tasks, or when other pupils are speaking in discussions. Willingness to discuss work and ask thoughtful questions is high. The strength of relationships is shown by the respect given to other pupils and adults in the room and by the way in which pairs and small groups work together. Generally, the quality of pupils' response has a significant impact upon how well they learn. When, in a few lessons, a small number of pupils did not pay attention to guidance or instructions being given by teachers, this was usually because they were so intent upon continuing with their own work that they did not realise that they should be listening.
160. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good in all years. In many lessons, it is very good. Teachers plan work that builds effectively upon earlier learning. They explain tasks and techniques well, so that pupils are clear about what they need to do. Work provides appropriate focuses and good scope for making independent choices. Monitoring of individual work usually involves prompts, questions and suggestions, so that pupils keep the responsibility for their own work. Although teachers often employ good strategies for ensuring that all pupils pay attention to instructions and explanations, this aspect is occasionally overlooked, so that some pupils are not given a clear indication that they need to be listening and miss important points. Occasionally, teachers do not ensure that all pupils are fully involved in discussions, by for example, challenging more reticent pupils with directed questions. In most lessons, there is a good balance between helping those girls who need it and providing independent scope for the highest attainers. In a few lessons however, the challenge in planned tasks is insufficient for the highest attainers. In some lessons, the response of pupils is so good that learning is even better than the teaching, because of the very good use made of the opportunities provided. This was the case for example, in a Year 11 lesson, in which the outstanding way in which pupils responded to very good opportunities to work independently and creatively, resulted in excellent learning.
161. There have been significant improvements in the ICT curriculum since the last inspection. At that time, taught courses were inadequate and the school did not provide sufficient opportunities to use computers in other subjects. Now, there is a good taught course in Years 7 to 9. The GCSE offered at the time of the last inspection has been replaced by a more suitable course and the option has been much more popular in the current Year 10. The provision of opportunities to use computers in other subjects is good in most subjects. It is very good in design technology, geography and music and for meeting the needs of pupils with special needs. Opportunities are relatively weak in mathematics as, although just reaching satisfactory levels, there is considerable scope for improvement. The ICT department is aware of a need to improve opportunities for pupils to reflect upon their use of computers. Because lessons in Years 7 to 9 are only a

maximum of forty minutes duration and often less, it is difficult to provide sufficient time for both these and practical activities in the time available.

162. Pupils often have opportunities to improve literacy and numeracy skills. For example, a Year 9 class creating posters to encourage older people to use a community centre was strongly encouraged to use vocabulary that was appropriate for the audience. Pupils often use spreadsheets to make calculations, for example when a Year 8 class planned personal expenditure over a year. Activities often involve translating numerical information from tables into charts and graphs. Not all opportunities for literacy and numeracy activities are fully exploited and these aspects need to be planned more precisely in the scheme of work to ensure that this happens.
163. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. The school's technology college status has provided an effective context for improving the numbers and quality of computers and the extent to which these are used. These developments have had a significant impact upon the quality of the ICT curriculum and standards achieved. Although opportunities across the curriculum have increased, there is as yet no overall co-ordination, to ensure that all pupils have a coherent programme, particularly with regard to the option choices made in Years 10 and 11. The contribution of the subject departments to the assessment of ICT capability is also insufficient.
164. The quality of leadership and management is good. The partnership between those responsible at departmental and whole school levels is effective. It has brought good improvement and successfully raised the profile of both the taught courses and cross-curricular provision. Resources are generally well managed.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- The excellent management of the department
- The very good subject knowledge of teachers and their excellent linguistic competence
- The very good and occasionally excellent teaching in most classes
- The excellent programme of trips and exchanges to France, Spain, Switzerland and Germany
- The very high standards in Year 9 and the well above average GCSE results

Areas for improvement

- To continue to develop opportunities for using information communication technology to support learning
- To continue to raise standards of pronunciation in French and German

165. In Year 7 pupils are able to choose two modern foreign languages from French, German and Spanish. This choice is made after a period of taster lessons at the beginning of Year 7. Some pupils have done French in their primary or prep schools and the department successfully builds upon pupils' knowledge, especially when it is possible to group together pupils with similar experiences. All other modern foreign language courses are for beginners.
166. In 2002 the teacher assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 show that all pupils reached the expected standard (Level 5 or above) and the vast majority of pupils achieved much higher standards. These results indicate that standards in French, Spanish and German increase very well during Years 7 to 9. The standards in French, Spanish and German in Years 7 to 9 as observed in lessons and from a scrutiny of pupils' written and recorded oral work are well above the national average. Achievement in modern foreign languages in Years 7 to 9 is very good overall. It is excellent in Spanish, very good in French and good in German.

167. In all classes in all three languages pupils displayed very good listening skills and coped easily with lessons delivered almost entirely in the foreign language. By the end of Year 9 they were also able to pick out details from extended recorded texts delivered at normal speed. Speaking skills in Spanish lessons were particularly high. Pupils could ask and answer questions confidently and fluently with good pronunciation. By the end of Year 9 more able pupils in Spanish could talk at length with fluency and accuracy on prepared topics. Speaking skills in French are good, but the pronunciation of some sounds is occasionally inaccurate. In German speaking is also generally good, although in one Year 8 class several pupils made very basic errors of pronunciation. Pupils' reading comprehension skills are high in all three languages, writing skills are also well developed, but particularly high in Spanish. In all languages pupils in Year 9 write dialogues, short letters and compositions containing a good range of vocabulary and a variety of different tenses. Standards of spelling and punctuation are very high, although some pupils in German are still not always using capital letters correctly.
168. All pupils take at least one modern foreign language for GCSE and some pupils take two. GCSE results in French in 2002 were very high and well above the national average. All pupils passed with at least a grade C and nearly nine out of ten gained A* and A grades. In Spanish in 2002 results were also well above average with nearly all pupils gaining above a grade C and nearly three fifths of all pupils gaining grades A* and A. In German results in 2002 were well above the national average. All pupils passed with at least a grade C and three quarters of pupils gained grades A* and A. All these results were generally in line with or higher than departmental predictions. Results in Spanish have been maintained at a high level in recent years, in French, they have improved and in German overall standards have been maintained and the proportion gaining A* and A grades has improved.
169. Standards seen in lessons and observed in pupils' written and recorded oral work confirm the high results in the GCSE examination in all three languages. Pupils' listening and speaking skills are very well developed. In Year 10 and in Year 11 Spanish classes pupils had very high listening skills and spoke with confidence and fluency. In their recorded role plays in Spanish, high attainers were very fluent and could make extended presentations and cope with unexpected questions without hesitation. Pronunciation and intonation were excellent. Oral standards in French were good, but pupils occasionally mispronounced certain sounds. Listening skills in one Year 10 German lesson were less well developed, however and some pupils did not understand all of the teacher's comments and instructions. Some pupils also made basic pronunciation errors. The recorded German oral work of Year 11 pupils was, however, of a very good standard. Pupils could understand the teacher speaking at normal speed and could respond to unprepared questions with considerable fluency. The reading comprehension and writing skills of pupils in all three languages are high. Pupils have written compositions, letters, dialogues and presentations on a wide range of topics. All pupils use a good range of tenses, structures and vocabulary. Their writing is generally very accurate and in some cases imaginative and creative. Achievement in modern foreign languages in Years 10 and 11 is very good overall. It is excellent in Spanish, very good in French and good in German.
170. The teaching and learning of Spanish are very good and sometimes excellent. The teaching and learning of French are very good. The teaching and learning of German are good. Teachers' linguistic skills in all three languages are excellent and they have a very good understanding of the National Curriculum and GCSE requirements. Teachers have very high expectations and lesson planning is very good and lesson aims are always made clear which helps pupils to understand what has to be learned. All lessons include listening, speaking, reading and writing activities in a logical sequence and homework is used very effectively to consolidate and extend class work.

171. Modern foreign languages make a strong contribution to the development of pupils' general literacy skills by focusing on grammatical patterns, punctuation and accurate spelling. Pupils with special educational needs are very well supported in lessons, by meticulous marking of written work and by the setting of appropriate targets for improvement. Most pupils participate enthusiastically in lessons and quickly tackle written tasks or oral practice in pairs. They listen very attentively to the teacher and to recorded texts to pick out details. Teachers mark students' work regularly and provide detailed comments and targets. The quality of marking plays a big part in enabling pupils to reach very high standards. The department makes some use of ICT to enhance students learning. Staff have been trained in this area and there is some software. It is, however, an area which could be developed further.
172. The management of the modern foreign languages department is excellent. There is very good monitoring of teaching and learning and teachers share ideas and materials systematically. Departmental documentation, including schemes of work, is very good. Resources are good with the exception of some overhead projectors. The visits and exchanges abroad are excellent and have a big impact on raising motivation and improving oral fluency. The support from the Spanish and German assistants helps to improve oral fluency and provides cultural insights. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- Pupils gain very good musical skills because of the high quality enthusiastic teaching
- The consistently high standards at GCSE examinations
- The school ensembles are of an excellent quality and enhance pupil's personal development whilst improving their performance skills
- The very good use of ICT to support learning in music

Areas for improvement

- The lack of access to computers with music software for a minority of pupils
- The occasional lack of challenge for the more musically talented pupils
- The lack of modern popular music and music from cultures other than western

169. There is a very traditional diet of musical opportunities offered to pupils throughout the school. Teacher assessments show that by the end of Year 9 the attainment of all pupils is well above average. In 2002, all twenty eight candidates entered for GCSE examinations gained A*-C grades which is well above the national average. This level of success has been repeated for the past three years. All pupils; including those with special educational needs and pupils from different ethnic groups do well in the subject. However they do not do as well in music as they do in their other subjects.
170. By the end of Year 9, standards are well above average. This represents a good level of achievement given pupils' musical attainment on entry to the school. Higher attaining pupils, including those who are gifted and talented and those who receive instrumental and vocal tuition either privately or from the visiting tutors, achieve very high standards of performance for their age. They have an excellent vocabulary of technical musical language, which allows them to discuss confidently the music they hear and perform. The good emphasis on the use of literacy and numeracy helps pupils develop their research skills and ability to recognise musical patterns. In one Year 7 lesson exploring the instruments of the orchestra; pupils gave group presentations

demonstrating the various instruments through well researched information and live performances. The rest of the class listened with total interest and asked relevant probing questions. The depth of the research led to discussion of such lesser known instruments as the basset horn and the contra-bass clarinet. By the end of Year 9, nearly all pupils can accurately read traditional notation and confidently use computers with music software to enhance their scores. For example in one Year 9 lesson pupils created a minuet in G major demonstrating good melodic shape and phrasing in the correct style for the genre. Pupils in several Year 8 and 9 classes cannot access computers with music software because the computer room is in use during their lessons.

171. Standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average and this represents a good level of achievement. Standards of performance are very high with many of the pupils already achieving standards beyond A level examination requirements. These skills are greatly enhanced by the regular opportunities to perform with the excellent school orchestra. Three Year 11 pupils and one Year 8 girl have created their own exceptionally high quality string quartet which even undertakes paid engagements. All pupils studying the GCSE course have a superb knowledge of harmony and musical structure which they skilfully incorporate into their well developed compositions. They have many opportunities to use music technology and confidently manipulate and orchestrate their compositions with the software. The more musically talented can create imaginative extended pieces as was seen in one Year 11 girl's composition for double choir and string ensemble incorporating words from a poem by Hopkins. Another was inspired by the story of the tortoise and the hare and portrayed excellent musical imagery and well- structured orchestration. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have very good speaking and literacy skills and are able to express their views clearly when answering spoken or written questions. They are excellent independent learners and also work very well in small groups.
172. Pupils learn very well because the teaching is very good overall. Teaching is characterised by excellent subject knowledge, high expectations, very good planning and a passion for music-making. When lessons are conducted at a lively pace, the tasks are varied and pupils have the chance to be active, rapid learning takes place. This was seen in all Year 10 and 11 lessons. The use of clear introductions to lessons and time spent reviewing and reinforcing the work of the previous lesson enables pupils to build upon prior learning and recognise the continuity of topics. In the better lessons, there is an enthusiasm for the subject that motivates pupils to want to learn. Teachers plan lessons carefully so there is usually a good match of learning activities to pupils' needs. The balance between different types of activities keeps pupils interested and motivated. Explanations are clear so pupils start their work quickly. Teachers use a great deal of musical vocabulary during the lesson so that pupils get the opportunity to listen to a wide variety of technical language so that even from early in Year 7 pupils are expected to use musical terminology when describing the music they play and hear. Pupils enjoy music lessons because of the enthusiastic teaching.
173. In the less successful lessons the pace of learning slows because too much time is devoted to one single practical activity. In these lessons the more musically talented are not stretched enough by the tasks and the excessive amount of time spent on them. For example in one Year 9 lesson two girls completed the task well within the time allowed and their concentration dropped. On another occasion, pupils with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, struggled to keep up with the pace at which the teacher dictated notes and used technical vocabulary because there were no materials produced to help them cope in lessons.
174. Pupils are taught to listen to, and respect, the views of others. They are supportive of each other and work productively at a good pace. The high quality of relationships in classes and extra-

curricular activities results in both pupils and teachers striving together for improvement and ensures a good balance between hard work and enjoyment. Homework is set regularly and supports the work that pupils do in class. There is some good quality marking when teachers indicate where pupils have made mistakes and what they need to do to improve, however, this is not consistent throughout the department. Pupils are occasionally confused about how well they are doing in music because National Curriculum levels are not used to indicate the standards they achieve and clear targets are not consistently set.

175. The head of department has a clear vision for the future of the subject and is committed to raising standards and encouraging pupils to take part in high quality traditional musical activities. Within this range of work, the leadership and management of music are excellent and have resulted in very good progress since the last inspection. There are many high quality opportunities for pupils who study traditional orchestral instruments to perform; including a biannual European orchestral concert tour. The music department contributes well to the ethos of the school through the personal and musical development of the pupils throughout the school. However, the department does not offer activities for pupils interested in wind, jazz or pop music and the resources related to jazz, popular music or music from non-western cultures are more limited, which restricts pupils' enjoyment and understanding of these important aspects of music. The department is supported by eleven visiting instrumental teachers who make an excellent contribution to the overall standards in the subject. These and the extracurricular activities are excellently managed. There is a very wide selection of text books and CD recordings dealing with traditional orchestral and operatic music in the library. There are good opportunities for social development through working together and taking part in the limited range of extracurricular activities.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Excellent management helps pupils maintain good progress.
- Good linking of practical and theory to embed learning.
- Very good teaching methods result in very effective learning.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good so they achieve well.
- Excellent extra-curricular provision enhances pupils' opportunities for learning.
- Teachers have high expectations and good class management so pupils' learning is very good

Areas for improvement

- Ensuring that low attaining pupils follow the high pace of teaching.
- Sharing National Curriculum assessment levels with pupils so they are aware of their learning, achievement and areas for improvement.

176. Pupils enter the school with skills and understanding that are above average in physical education. In 2001 teacher assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 were average compared with schools nationally; in 2002 results were above this. Teacher assessments indicate that pupils are achieving well by maintaining above average standards.

177. The first cohort of GCSE pupils finalise their course in summer 2003. Prior to this, pupils in Year 11 have not taken part in the examination course. At the time of the last inspection there was no examination course.

178. The work seen during the inspection confirms that the standards on entry are above average. For example, Year 7 pupils combined theory and practice in a fitness lesson to understand stamina in interval training and to calculate pulse rate per minute as well as recovery rate after exercise. High attaining pupils were able to complete the work and calculations but some low attaining pupils wasted energy talking as they exercised so that they did not achieve the same targets. Some had not followed the teacher's quick exposition so they were unable to make all the calculations. Standards attained by pupils at the end of Year 9 are above average when compared with national expectations. This judgement is in line with teachers' assessment results and teachers have been accurate in their monitoring. Pupils achieve well in comparison with their above average standard on entry into the school because they sustain above expected standards. For example, in a Year 9 netball lesson high attaining pupils quickly grasped the essentials of reaction passing and were able to sustain footwork allowing time to pivot and place well-angled, accurate shots. Low attaining pupils did not have the same control over footwork or passes, but did improve on direction during the course of the lesson. Pupils were able to suggest suitable exercises for the warm-up but were not always aware of the technical name of muscles. Standards were sometimes affected by absence. In a Year 9 gymnastics lesson, some groups were hampered by non-attenders so that changes and compromises had to be made. Pupils worked hard and adapted, but the qualities of timing and accuracy were affected.
179. The standards on the GCSE course are well above average. The majority of pupils achieve very well when compared with their results at the end of Year 9. For example, in a Year 11 GCSE athletics lesson pupils took responsibility for their own learning by using the internet to research suitable training strategies, informing themselves of rules and officiating and executing both by application in actual events. High attaining pupils managed a variety of high jumps including the Fosbury flop. Low attaining pupils were not fully acquainted with rules concerning legal jumps and exit from the jump area. In the general physical education pupils' achievement is good with pupils working to above expected standards. For example, in a Year 10 dance lesson pupils were well aware of the importance of presentation to depict mood and chose topical and moving interpretations of recent events with spiritual, moral, social and cultural implications such as the recent Chechen terrorist siege in a Moscow theatre.
180. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language achieve well in the practical elements of most lessons because teachers focus well on what is required and have high expectations. Teachers are always clear in their explanations, give good guidance as well as using the school's video camera to show good examples. The camera is also used to record, assess and analyse performance. This is beneficial for all pupils but particularly assists low attaining pupils, those with English as an additional language and those with special needs. Opportunities exist to challenge gifted and talented pupils. For example, pupils assist with practices as part of extra-curricular activities and demonstrate during lessons.
181. Overall, teaching and learning are very good, particularly in Year 11 where teachers have a clear focus on raising standards to meet the needs of the first cohort for GCSE. For example, in a Year 11 theory lesson pupils responded well to very good progressive teaching identifying the positive and negative features of sponsorship. They demonstrated their thorough, successful learning by relating this well to the individual sponsorship received by gifted and talented pupils in the school and sponsorship received by the school itself. Teachers have high expectations and pupils respond well to the challenging teaching, the targets set and the research expected. Teachers review previous learning very well to check understanding and ensure learning before further progress is made. They are equally as good in evaluating learning and identifying areas for improvement, although in theory work this might be extended. Teaching and learning is not as good when pupils are not fully aware of their National Curriculum assessment levels and areas for improvement are

not properly identified. Literacy and numeracy, although a part of some lessons, are not specifically planned.

182. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Teachers check the balance of teams for equal chances in team games and include all pupils in questioning. Pupils are considerate of one another; for example in a Year 11 lesson pupils encouraged each other to achieve. In lessons non-participants contribute well and are engaged in helping others to succeed by giving feedback on performance. Opportunities for learning are enhanced by the excellent provision of extra-curricular activities. Pupils are offered a wide range of activities including team matches; some pupils are involved at county and national level.
183. Leadership and management of the department are excellent. The curriculum is designed to make the best use of the facilities available. Outside facilities are good but accommodation inside barely meets the needs of the curriculum and changing rooms are cramped. The department has had a series of staffing difficulties which has been very well managed so standards have not been affected. Planning has been closely linked to the strengths of teachers to benefit pupils. There is strong teamwork and teachers have the expectation, capacity and will to succeed. Provision of resources is good. Books for independent learning are available for examination courses in the library.
184. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Many of the positive features such as good teaching and extra-curricular activities in the previous report are mirrored in this report. The school has started a GCSE course and is applying for a *Sportsmark*; extra-curricular activities are now excellent. A departmental development plan links with the school development plan and the department teachers adhere to school policies. The department is very well placed for furthering the success of pupils. The department has a high profile because of its popularity, its extra-curricular provision and its recognised success in county and national events where pupils participate in team matches and competition to a high level of performance.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Very good subject knowledge of experienced specialist teachers
- Very good relationships observed between staff and pupils
- Very good teaching leads to very high standards in GCSE classes

Areas for improvement

- Use of the Buckinghamshire Agreed Syllabus levels in the assessment of pupils' work throughout the core provision for religious education.

185. For those pupils who opted to study religious education as a full GCSE examination option, results in 2002 were very high compared with the national average. There are no formal reported teacher assessments at the end of Year 9. Pupils make good progress in religious education.
186. All pupils through Years 7 to 11 receive their entitlement to the core provision of religious education as required by the Buckinghamshire Agreed Syllabus. In Years 10 and 11, pupils may also opt to study for a GCSE in religious education. At the time of the inspection, standards reached by pupils who chose to study GCSE religious education were very high. For example, in a lesson observed on the concept of Christian love, pupils were easily able to move from a

consideration of the general use of the term love, through a series of small group and whole class discussions, to a clear understanding of the sense in which Jesus emphasised its nature and importance. Higher attaining pupils perceptively applied this understanding to a case study, as well as several examples brought up by the class. In Year 10, pupils studying Jewish families' preparations to celebrate the Passover readily recounted not only their activities, but explained clearly the symbolism that lay behind these.

187. Lessons observed in the core provision for pupils in Years 10 and 11 showed standards to be well above expectations. For example, in a class discussion on attitudes towards asylum seekers, the pupils quickly took on board a range of perspectives which extended beyond simple stereotypes. Following a lively discussion, many moved on to reach a high standard of informed explanation of their opinions.
188. Standards of work of pupils in Year 9 at the time of the inspection were well above expectations. Pupils were articulately arguing the merits of commemorating the sacrifice and suffering of the Second World War. Pupils exhibited a high degree of sensitivity to the complex factors, recognising the difficulties involved in evoking largely unpleasant memories, before coming down heavily in favour of remembrance. Their opinions were very much informed by their homework, personal research they had undertaken with several generations of family and friends.
189. During the inspection, teaching and learning were very good overall. Teaching was very good in a class of Year 11 pupils when the teacher's confidence and experience allowed her to structure learning activities that built progressively from pupils' own perceptions and experiences of love to a higher consideration of what Jesus meant and what forms of display they understood to explain this. Teaching was excellent in a class of Year 7 pupils, where the pace and varied activities of the class teacher, and her animated telling of stories central to the beliefs of Hindus, drew the pupils into the story of Rama and Sita. In their follow-up work they demonstrated not only a clear understanding of the story, but its significance and importance for Hindus. Very occasionally, teaching was satisfactory. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on questions regarding the Holocaust, some pupils were unsure of their task, and so not all pupils achieved as much as they might have. Pupils with special educational needs are recognised by teachers, appropriate provision is made, and as a consequence they make good progress. Gifted and talented pupils have many opportunities to develop their interests and reach higher levels of attainment. Teachers use a range of strategies to promote the quality of the pupils' written work, although there was some inconsistency in correcting key words in pupils' exercise books.
190. Responsibility for managing religious education is currently divided between two experienced members of the department. They have successfully maintained the high standards seen in recent years. The department target for increased A* grades in 2002 in GCSE was exceeded. Good use is made of ICT, for example to pay 'virtual' visits to places of worship. The benefits of this were clear from the displays made by pupils. The library resources have recently been reviewed to ensure support for pupils in Years 12 and 13. The librarian has begun building up new and appropriate resources for Years 7 to 11. The department has a collection of artefacts to exemplify symbolism and ritual in the main religions, complementing their well used texts and additional materials. Recent changes to the Buckinghamshire Agreed Syllabus have led to review and revision of the department's schemes of work. There is still a need to incorporate the recommended assessment procedures of the Buckinghamshire syllabus.

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

In the inspection, thirteen subjects 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, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

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 | 1 | 100 | 62 | 100 | 15 | 4 | 1.5 |
| Chemistry | 1 | - | 43 | - | 5 | - | 0.8 |
| Physics | 1 | 100 | 52 | 100 | 4 | 4 | 0.9 |
| Music | 1 | 100 | 84 | 100 | 29 | 4 | 2.4 |

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 | 43 | 95 | 87 | 74 | 43 | 7.8 | 5.8 |
| Biology | 32 | 100 | 88 | 34 | 34 | 6.3 | 5.3 |
| Chemistry | 26 | 100 | 90 | 46 | 43 | 6.7 | 5.9 |
| Physics | 12 | 83 | 88 | 58 | 40 | 6.2 | 6.2 |
| Design and Technology | 11 | 91 | 91 | 18 | 30 | 5.3 | 5.4 |
| Business Studies | 4 | 100 | 92 | 25 | 32 | 7 | 5.5 |
| Economics | 12 | 92 | 89 | 17 | 36 | 5 | 5.5 |
| ICT | 6 | 100 | 93 | 50 | 31 | 6.7 | 5.5 |
| Sports studies | 9 | 100 | 92 | 77 | 25 | 8.4 | 5.1 |
| Art and design | 2 | 100 | 96 | 100 | 46 | 9 | 6.6 |
| Drama | 12 | 100 | 99 | 50 | 38 | 7.2 | 7.2 |
| Music | 2 | 100 | 93 | 100 | 35 | 9 | 5.7 |
| Geography | 14 | 100 | 92 | 43 | 38 | 7.2 | 5.7 |
| History | 24 | 100 | 88 | 63 | 35 | 6.6 | 5.5 |
| Psychology | 31 | 94 | 87 | 48 | 34 | 6.1 | 5.3 |
| Sociology | 15 | 100 | 86 | 40 | 35 | 6.13 | 5.3 |
| Religious Studies | 5 | 100 | 92 | 20 | 38 | 6 | 5.8 |
| English Literature | 22 | 100 | 95 | 82 | 37 | 8.2 | 5.9 |
| French | 15 | 80 | 89 | 33 | 38 | 4.7 | 5.6 |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------|---|-----|----|----|----|---|-----|
| Spanish | 8 | 100 | 89 | 63 | 39 | 8 | 5.7 |
|---------|---|-----|----|----|----|---|-----|

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

Students can take a range of mathematics courses which include AS, A2 and further mathematics in pure mathematics, statistics, mechanics and decision mathematics. In science they can take biology, physics and chemistry. Mathematics and biology were inspected and work in chemistry and physics was sampled. In both chemistry and physics results in 2001 were above average and improved in 2002. Current standards in both subjects are well above average. In the A level chemistry lesson observed, students were working individually on balancing redox equations. Their learning was good and their attitudes to work, very good. Teacher intervention to assist learning was good. Students demonstrated well above average knowledge and understanding of reactions and had very high standards on equilibrium calculations. In the A level physics lesson observed, students were working individually on an exercise to prepare them for the practical examination. They were able to calculate velocity from energy equations and to use logarithmic graphs to calculate indices in a theoretical exercise to relate crater diameter to velocity of impact. Learning was good and attitudes to work were very good but numbers taking physics remain small.

Mathematics

Overall the quality of provision for mathematics is **very good**

Strengths

- The staff have very strong subject knowledge, and students have a high level of confidence in their expertise.
- There is very good teaching with clear and concise explanations of difficult mathematical concepts.
- Attitudes from the students are exceptionally positive. They are highly motivated and have a strong desire to learn and succeed.
- The examination results are very high.

Areas for improvement

- There are no significant areas for development although there are some minor ones

191. Results on all the mathematics courses are very high. In 2001, the grades obtained by students were nearly double the national average, particularly at the highest grades A and B. In 2002, over three quarters of the students obtained grade A or B, a figure which is above the results in 2001. Attainment is also very high in the Year 12, AS examinations.

192. Students' work in files and in lessons, is far above nationally expected standards. Student taking further mathematics were able to deduce the equation of the ellipse derived from the directrix and focus properties. They showed fluency with algebra and were confident in the use of calculus. Students taking an advanced statistics module could successfully identify types of probability distributions. Following some skilful and knowledgeable teaching, they were able to correctly decide when the binomial distribution could be approximated to a normal or Poisson distribution. A mechanics group in Year 12 were experiencing some problems with the difference between the use of a mathematical model and a real situation, but the problem was effectively identified and dealt with by the teacher.

193. Given the high attainment of the students at GCSE the school expects them to be able to achieve the highest grades. This drives the standards forward and as a result the students overall performance is very high, representing very good achievement.
194. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers all possess high subject knowledge and expertise and they provide students with well thought out explanations. As a result the students learn quickly and make very good progress. Work is well marked and provides students with clear indications of progress. Marks are directly linked to probable examination grades. Teachers give freely of their time to provide additional help whenever it is necessary and the high motivation of the students ensures that they request this help. There are opportunities to widen the scope of the examination curriculum by including material which will provide enriching experiences for the students, for example discussion of the use of limits, some specific application of statistics in the biological sciences and the linking between mechanics and physics. ICT is also somewhat under-used.
195. Students are very positive about the school. Recent changes of staff has not changed their view of the effectiveness of the mathematics teaching and they are confident in the staff, are highly motivated and because of the very good teaching do very well. Leadership and management of the department are good and the positive working atmosphere permeates all classes. Library provision is good. The department has made good progress since the last inspection.
196. **Numeracy** in the sixth form is very good and many examples of the proficient use of mathematics were observed in several subjects. In geography statistical work was being carried out as part of field work, and in the analysis of flood hydrographics. Science was using some good inferential statistics and some good ICT packages to plot graphs.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Well above average attainment and good achievement at AS and A level.
- Good recent improvement in curriculum and teaching materials.
- Very strong teamwork across the department.
- Good management.
- Very good student attitudes to work and to the subject.

Areas for improvement

- Raise achievement by: focusing on the skills and understanding needed for the top grades, developing methods to extend independent thinking and learning, extending the range of teaching strategies in the schemes of work.

206. Results in biology at AS and A level are well above national averages. The proportion attaining A and B grades though meeting national expectations is lower than other grammar schools and most other subjects at the school. Results have been stable over the past four years.
207. Standards observed at the school are well above average. This is shown in the results of module tests and extended essays of very good standard, for example on human physiology, DNA and ecology. There is good work on cell ultrastructure and enzyme investigations and good standards of numeracy, for example in statistical work on ecology. Attainment is well above average, but lacks the proportion of work at the A and B grades evident in other subjects. One of their strengths is the very good quality of individual revision notes, but there could be further

development in the standards of independent study skills and investigative coursework. All groups of pupils achieve well and there is a recent trend of improvement.

208. Teaching and learning are good with evidence of recent improvement. For example the quality of teaching materials for the current Year 12 is better than that available in the previous year. There are consistent efforts to build on GCSE understanding, which work very well in the Year 12 classes. Very good teamwork is raising the standards of teaching in the course. Literacy is supported through extensive independent note taking, although the teachers could take a more active role in supporting this process. Numeracy skills are well supported in the statistical work, especially the use of inferential statistics in fieldwork. ICT is used in coursework although it could be developed further in class practical work, spreadsheets and data logging. Marking is mostly confined to module tests and coursework and could profitably be developed in order to extend and challenge student informational research.
209. Teaching is good, but could be made very good by additional thinking about teaching strategies. For example, the heart dissection could be improved by a sharper focus on key structures in relation to their function and further sharing and discussion between students (for example by focusing on the relative musculature of the ventricles in relation to the pressure in the pulmonary and systemic vasculature). The work on blood could be improved by a sharper focus on the use of text to gain information on different blood cells. The work on photosynthesis could be improved and the quality of investigation enhanced by encouraging thought about the need to hold variables constant as different ones are investigated. The work on genetic differences between pea varieties could be improved by encouraging thinking about predictions and patterns at the same time as the students carry out the sometimes time-consuming biological experiments. Students' attitudes to the work and to the subject are very good and they would respond well to the changes suggested above.
210. Management of the subject is good and a great deal of work has been done since the present biology team leader was appointed in September 2002. The work has been well supported by very good teamwork by the four teachers involved in the subject, who have joined the school over the past two years. Over that period, teaching, curriculum and assessment have made good improvement, although it would be beneficial to document teaching and assessment strategies in the schemes of work. The curriculum has particularly improved through the enrichment provided by the development of extensive fieldwork in Amersham and Devon. Assessment is good on all aspects demanded by the examination syllabus. Staffing is now good, as are resources, although library provision is only sound and could be improved. Accommodation is sound. The department has changed completely since the last inspection, but improvement since September 2002 has been good.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Product Design

Overall, the quality of provision in product design is **very good**

Strengths

- Standards in the subject are very high.
- Students develop well above average skills in the use of ICT for designing.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good and this creates very good conditions for learning.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and as a result they provide very good individual support for all students.

Areas for improvement

- To increase the range of specialist technology courses.

211. Standards of work of students currently doing the product design course are very high compared to the national expectations. Although the A level results in 2001 indicated the proportion of students who achieved A and B grades was below the national average, the results in 2002 show a significant improvement in the number of A and B grades achieved. Students achieve well compared to their high level of attainment at the end of their GCSE examinations in Year 11. Students currently doing the A2 course in Year 13 are working at a very high level, having achieved very high standards in the AS course in Year 12. The AS-level results in 2002 and the standard of work seen during the inspection, are at a very high standard. These improved standards reflect the department's recent work to raise standards in the sixth form.

212. The work demonstrated individual creativity, a good range of advanced making skills in a wide range of materials. The course was well structured and closely aligned to the examination requirements. Teachers ensured that students acquired a very high level of understanding and consequently they develop a complex and refined approach to designing. All the important aspects of the examination courses were covered well. Teachers provided very good opportunities for students to develop their basic skills in hand produced graphics and using computer-generated drawings. Students applied highly individual and well developed graphics skills combined with a range of refined writing styles to show each stage of their development work. Students considered both standard production processes and applied above average skills in computer-aided design and computer-aided manufacturing. They mastered a broad range of design skills and their ability to follow this process enabled them to work more independently using their teachers as a guide and mentor. However, some students had only limited experience of working with resistant materials and this leaves a gap in their skills in Year 12. A wider variety of courses in other material areas would enable those students to follow courses in which they have specialised at GCSE level. All students modelled and tested a range of prototypes throughout the process of designing. They used the results of this testing well to ensure products met the original specifications they set near the start of the process.

213. Students' demonstrated good understanding of handling and processing numerical data as well as applying accurate measurements and estimations to both design and manufacturing. They worked to scale when developing prototypes. They made very good reference to standard measurements and processes. The level of presentation was consistently high. Students applied well above average writing skills as part of the overall presentation of their examination portfolio work.

214. The teaching and learning were very good overall. Teachers have high expectations and provided a very good level of individual support for all students to achieve high quality work. Lessons were very well structured, with a good mix of teaching to suit whole group activities and to work with students individually. Teachers had very good knowledge of the subject. As a result, lessons set clear objectives for designing and students' learning was very well linked to their individual needs. They created very good opportunities for students to discuss design problems as a group as well as individually. This gave students very good feedback on their ideas. The relationship between

teachers and students enabled students to be self critical and so gain the kind of information they needed to improve all aspects of their designing. In a Year 13 lesson, the teacher encouraged the sharing of ideas and whole group analysis of proposed designs. Open discussion enabled students to contribute effectively to the work of others in the group, a productive exercise that resulted in most of the students gaining a much broader opinion of their developing product than could normally be achieved on an individual basis. In the main, all students gained good feedback through this process of critical analysis and were able to put the information to good effect. This team approach to problem solving was a unique feature of the students' ability to work together with the view of securing high standards for all. Students are generally enthusiastic and supportive of each other.

215. The management of the subject is very good. The department has focused on raising standards and this is evident in the improved AS and A level results in 2002. Schemes of work are well planned and linked to examination requirements. Work was very well marked and teachers gave students very good feedback, which helped them to make improvements. Standards are now very high and teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers work well as a team to deliver a well structured course. Systems to monitor both teaching and learning are good. The course is now well established and improvement since it was introduced has been very good.

BUSINESS

The focus of the inspection was on A and AS level economics and business as the school has replaced the separate economics and business studies courses with the combined course.

Economics & Business

Overall, the quality of provision in economics and business is **very good**

Strengths

- Very good subject teaching
- Supportive relationships leading to very effective learning
- Students' attitudes to the subject
- The contribution to students' social and moral education

Areas for improvement

- More opportunities to use ICT to enhance teaching and learning
- More opportunities to link the subject to the real world of business through visits and speakers.

206. This is a new subject and no students have yet taken the A2 examination. However, the 2002 AS results were very good. Almost three quarters of students gained grades A or B. Analysis of students' work shows standards are well above course expectations, and students' achievement is very good. Many students build on the successful GCSE course in business and economics, but a substantial proportion begins Year 12 with very little knowledge of the subject. During the first term of the course, they move quickly from this base to a point where they have a good awareness of economic terms and concepts due to clear and well-structured teaching. For example in a Year 12 lesson observed, the students were introduced to reasons for unemployment using a very powerful economic model that was well developed and clearly explained. Students engaged with the material with great intellectual effort. By Year 13, students have carried out a range of interesting coursework investigations. Students enjoy the freedom to pursue their own interests within the parameters of the subject. For example in an investigation *What dictates the corporate social responsibility policies of a business?* students displayed a

high level of intellectual argument. These activities and the material covered on the course contribute significantly to developing the very effective social and moral education of students.

207. Students respond very well to the subject. They have a high regard for their teacher and find the individual tutorials particularly effective in helping them to learn very well and make very good progress. They value the feedback on their coursework and feel well prepared for examinations. Students are all valued in class and, when teaching is excellent, rigorous questioning challenges everyone. The intellectual rigour was sufficient to stretch and challenge the highest attainers as well as supporting the lower attainers. Students enjoy seeing the relevance of the subject to stories in the news and many are very aware of current economic events although this is not universal.
208. Teaching is very good and sometimes excellent. Thorough subject knowledge is delivered in an academically rigorous, though very teacher dominated, way. It is at its best when the links to the real world are made very explicit. For example it was particularly effective when it required students to apply their new learning to analysing real world situations. Students were asked to identify stakeholders who had been affected by the previous week's cut in interest rates, and analyse whether the impact would be positive or negative in each case. This approach could be further developed by the inclusion of trips, visits and guest speakers, together with the use of ICT. Students use it for research and to type up their coursework but a lack of access to ICT prevents its integration into classroom teaching. The marking and assessment of students' work is very good. Feedback has been developed which students find very useful. Assessment objectives are made clear to the students which helps them develop very good examination skills leading to very good results.
209. The subject was not reported on in the last inspection, as it is a newly introduced. It is being very well led and managed. The monitoring of students' progress is well organised and contributes very effectively to their progress.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

210. Art and drama were inspected in depth and other subjects were sampled. The school offers music at AS and A level and one lesson was observed in Year 12. Results over recent years have been above national expectations but numbers entered for examinations are too low to make accurate statistical comparison. In the observed lesson, teaching and learning were very good and students' attitudes were very positive. The lesson focused on the analysis of Mozart's serenade in Eb for wind octet, and standards were above average. The teacher prepared the lesson very well and demonstrated excellent subject knowledge.
211. In media studies examination results were well above national average in 2001 and they improved in 2002. Students made good progress from their GCSE results. In the one lesson observed excellent teaching ensured that students gained new perceptions of the role and value of independent media. The teacher's probing questioning stimulated new insights and a very good level of technical vocabulary from students.

Art

Overall, the quality of provision in art is **good**

Strengths

- The combined skills and expertise of teachers and their knowledge of examination requirements.
- Very good and challenging teaching.

- Students very good attitudes to the subject and their independent learning skills.
- Improved recruitment to Year 12.

Areas for improvement

- Students oral, analytical and critical responses to their own and others' work.
- The longer term planning and the consolidation of recent improvements.

212. The number who took the examination in 2001 was very small and therefore makes comparisons with national statistics unreliable. The two who entered gained A and B grades. Results in 2002 were lower overall and spanned a wider range of grades. Most students who took the subject had previously attained well in their GCSE art examinations and one or two did less well than might have been expected. For several successive years there have been changes in the leadership of the department and the turnover of staff has interrupted the students' progress. Many students who take the A level course go on to art and design related degree courses in higher education.
213. The standard of work by students currently in Years 12 and 13 is above average with some on track for the highest grades. Numbers are small but most are achieving well given their various starting points and previous work and results. Students can choose to work in a range of art disciplines including print, computer generated imagery, photography, painting and drawing. They also complete a contextual study that requires them to research, evaluate and analyse the links between their own artwork and the work of other artists working in contemporary or historical contexts. Students make thoughtful connections and are curious and questioning about the factors that influence their work. In the lessons seen teachers closely questioned and challenged students to think deeply. Whilst some students were able to speak with conviction and authority others did not express themselves with the same confidence and fluency. Their written work, on the other hand, was generally better structured and well argued, showing above average standards of research and investigation. In both Years 12 and 13 students' practical work reflects some unevenness in provision of previous years. However the teamwork of staff, and the stability that this has given through several changes of staff, have been very effective in minimising the disruption. Students would benefit from a sequentially planned and structured programme of drawing, painting and other practical skills. The life drawing classes, planned for current groups and then postponed, would have made a significant contribution to students' work - their portfolios and preparations for foundation courses in higher education. Students are committed to their studies. They are positive about the courses offered and the support teachers give them.
214. Teaching and learning, seen during the week of the inspection, were very good. Over time, students' learning, their results and the way they approach their work, suggests that teaching has been less robust. The strengths of the teaching currently are in teachers' excellent subject knowledge and their specialist skills, together with their up-to-date knowledge of the current examination requirements. This is proving to be very beneficial. Students learn from and make good use of the thorough and regular assessments of their work. There are some very effective systems in the school and department that allow teachers and students to track progress and monitor improvement. This is particularly the case for the contextual studies unit. Time is spent purposefully. Most students have excellent independent learning skills and read and research widely and meet time deadlines. Students made significant gains in their knowledge and understanding in some lessons. For example, where the teacher introduced them to work by an artist who used a computer to manipulate images students were prompted to question the notion of 'value', to weigh the ideas and the skills required and to compare them to the work by artists using more traditional working methods. In another lesson, students were taught, and rapidly learnt, the techniques for making a six colour silk screen print that they could then use and adapt to support aspects of their own personal studies. In both lessons the planning and use of time was very good and the learning excellent.

215. The leadership and management of the subject are good. Although examination results over recent years have fluctuated, in the short term efforts to address the impact caused by a high staff turnover have been effective. Teaching is very good, recruitment to Year 12 has improved and students are enthusiastic and keen to achieve well. The most pressing challenge for the department and school is to ensure that improvements are consolidated, that a shared vision for the subject is established and a long-term plan is drawn up that helps it to be realised. The accommodation is adequate overall but the lack of a designated space for students to use outside of lessons disadvantages them. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

Drama and Theatre Studies

Overall, the quality of provision in drama is **very good**

Strengths

- Very good teaching stimulates students to work with energy and enthusiasm.
- Practical performance skills are outstanding.
- The department is very well managed, and led with a vision which is driving standards up.
- Students have a very clear understanding of examination criteria and drama theory.

Areas for improvement

- In both discussion and written work too few students demonstrate the ability to analyse precisely and concisely.
- Limited resources restrict the opportunities which students have to explore the more technical aspects of drama production.

217. There are 23 students taking AS or A2 courses in theatre studies. The number of students continuing the AS course to A2 level last year was fewer than might have been expected, but the probable retention rate for the current Year 12 is much higher. Standards achieved in the 2001 AS and A level examinations were above national average, representing satisfactory progress by students. Results improved in 2002.

218. Lesson observation during the inspection and a scrutiny of written work indicate that the standards of work of students at present in Years 12 and 13 are well above national average. Year 13 students have made very good progress from their standards as measured by AS level results. This is because they have been made aware of areas where they need to improve, such as written evaluation. They have had very precise teaching of the philosophy and techniques behind the work of such people as Stanislavski, Artaud and Berkoff. They have then been challenged to explore these and integrate them appropriately into their own performance. As a result students show both in their written work and their presentations a mature understanding of the culture of the theatre and how it has been influenced. Standards in practical skills are outstanding. This was evident in an evening of devised interpretation pieces performed to an audience. Disturbing themes were presented with stunning power, imagination, and creativity. Throughout, the audience was challenged to reflect on its own experiences, assumptions and prejudices.

219. The students' very good learning and achievement stems from teaching which is consistently very good. Students learn to be intellectually curious: to examine the potential of techniques such as sense memory, and how to evoke relevant emotion from their own experience to enhance their portrayal of others' emotions and reactions. A consistent relative weakness in learning is how to analytically evaluate both scripts and performance, and how to offer incisive criticism both in essays and discussion. The social and cultural context of theatre is well taught, as when Year 12

students drew inferences from a Lorca self-portrait (“He wants to change his life to what it was in his childhood”) which informed ideas on how they might direct scenes from the play. Students learn to explore complex ideas deeply and personally because teachers are skilled at creating an atmosphere where open discussion and individual response are respected and valued. An excellent balance of warm up and group discussion, script analysis and personal interpretation harness students’ energies and emotions. Relationships are secure, and excellent. Students’ support for each other is exemplary. This includes Years 12 and 13 helping each other with practical work outside of lessons.

220. The teacher in charge of theatre studies has made a thorough and incisive audit of how to improve standards. The department is now very well managed as seen in the way in which decisive changes to syllabus and to the focus on practical work have been implemented. It is led with an energy and vision which have resulted in significant improvements in the standards and status of the subject, and the condition of the drama studio. Despite this, accommodation remains only satisfactory because of the occasional lessons which have to take place in an unsuitable mobile classroom. Students’ practical and written work is now much more closely assessed. They have a very clear understanding of the criteria for success in examination, what their present performance is, and precisely where and how they can effect improvements. Resources are limited, and unsatisfactory because there is insufficient technical equipment for aspects of production such as lighting and sound to be sufficiently explored.

HUMANITIES

The school offers history, geography, religious studies, government and politics, psychology and sociology. Work in government and politics was sampled and the other subjects were inspected in depth. In government and politics Year 13, the lesson observed was good and standards were well above average. The teacher’s effective use of real examples of examination scripts enabled the students to questions identify very quickly why some essays were given higher marks than others and improve their own essay technique. They were thoughtful and willing to question to develop their knowledge and understanding.

Geography

Overall, provision in geography is **very good**

Strengths

- Very good teaching with some of excellent lessons.
- The very high attainment and achievement of students in both AS and A2 examinations.
- The contribution made to the development of students’ key skills.
- Students’ positive attitudes to work and their very good relationships with other students and their teachers.

Areas for improvement

- There are no significant weaknesses.

221. Standards overall are very high. In the A level examination of 2001 results were well above the national average for all schools. Students achieved grades in the range A-E, a high proportion achieving grades A and B. Unconfirmed figures for 2002 show a further improvement with all students passing and over half achieving grades A and B. Students achieved higher grades than were predicted on the basis of their prior attainment. Results have improved over the past three years and since the last report. Students are entered for the AS examinations at the end of Year

12. In 2002, all students achieved a grade in the range A to E, almost two thirds achieving grades A and B. In 2002, all Year 12 students chose to continue to study geography.
222. The standard of work of current Year 13 students is very high and better than at the time of the last inspection. When prior learning is taken into account achievement is good. In lessons seen, students made very good progress as teacher expectations were high and the work was pitched at the appropriate level. For example, as students studied peri-glacial environments and sought an explanation for patterned ground. Their clear understanding of technical terms such as regolith and permafrost and their appreciation of the importance of process resulted in a good understanding of frost-heave. Students have very good literacy skills and write essays of a high quality. They use the Internet to research topics and are aware that bias can render information unreliable and inaccurate. All students have compiled very full records of the modules covered that will support their revision.
223. Year 12 students, who have recently completed work on rivers, have a secure understanding of the different processes of erosion and are practised in using advanced technical language. They have many opportunities to develop such subject skills as mapping and data analysis. Further, they have frequent opportunities to apply and practise their communication, number and ICT skills. They write succinct, well-structured and focused essays. Students had recently started the economics module and were able to interpret various models, identify possible applications and appreciate their limitations, for example the use of the Rostow model in studying the economies of the less economically developed world. Examination questions and frequent tests are used to ensure a full knowledge and understanding of terms and concepts. Students are working at a level well above that expected at this stage of the course and their achievement is good.
224. Overall teaching is very good and some excellent lessons were seen. Teachers showed their very good subject knowledge through their clear exposition and response to student's questions. Students were aware of the objectives and involved in their learning. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, the students achieved a secure understanding of the causes and impact of global warming after taking part in an enjoyable exercise that exposed gaps in their knowledge. Students' previously completed work shows that a wide range of methods and activities is used in the teaching and learning. Students in both years have the skills necessary for independent learning and teachers exploit these to good effect, for example students collect and analyse the data required for their coursework during the summer holiday. Their work is marked thoroughly and teachers discuss strengths and weaknesses with the students. This ensures that students know what they must do to secure improvement. A particular strength of the teaching is the high quality of planning that enables students to build on their prior learning.
225. Students are conscientious and diligent. Always attentive and courteous, they respond very positively to the high quality teaching and the methods used which encourage active learning. They contribute to lessons enthusiastically showing initiative and taking responsibility. Keen to both answer and ask questions, they can discuss confidently the topics they have covered. Year 13 students valued their fieldwork courses.
226. The management of the subject is very effective. The head of department provides very good leadership and teachers work closely together to plan topics and lessons. Teachers reflect on the success of their lessons and share good practice informally. Reliable data are being used increasingly to set targets and monitor students' progress. Teachers share a commitment to improvement and have a clear plan, focused on the improvement of teaching and learning, as to how this is to be achieved. Improvement since the last report has been good.

History

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

Strengths

- The very high standards and good achievement of students.
- Good teaching that pays close attention to students' individual needs.
- The very good, often excellent, response of students.
- Good, highly committed, leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers occasionally limit independence by doing too much for students.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning does not always pick up inconsistencies.
- The option structure does not in practice give students a choice of which A level course to take

227. In 2001, A level results were well above average. The proportion of students securing grades A and B was nearly twice the national average and all students passed. The 2002 results show a further improvement in the proportion of A Grades and all students gained at least a Grade D. The current Year 12 students are finding the increased demands of AS Level a considerable challenge. However, they are making good progress. Students generally interrogate sources with competence and confidence and form well substantiated conclusions. Year 13 students are more securely reaching very high standards. Source skills are very high and conclusions are strongly represented in very well-written essays. For example, students following the modern history course presented strong arguments to explain why it took so long to secure Catholic emancipation in the nineteenth century. In a Year 13 early modern history class, students found sources on the English Reformation much more difficult to interpret, but persevered very well, to make good progress during the lesson. Overall achievement is good.

228. The response of students in history lessons is very good and in many lessons it is excellent. Students show considerable interest in the subject and commitment to their studies. In question and answer sessions, they usually volunteer responses willingly and often pose thoughtful questions of their own. Students prepare themselves thoroughly for discussions and debates, during which they listen carefully to the views of other participants and respond with relevance. The minority of students who are less involved nevertheless pay close attention, make a good effort to answer questions when directly asked and diligently make notes.

229. In a discussion, students expressed highly positive views about their history courses. They value highly the way in which teachers take account of their individual needs and provide strong guidance on how to improve, for example through written comments on marked work. There was general agreement between students following both the modern and early modern courses that their studies provide a highly relevant perspective upon today's world and a hugely valuable context for practising skills in extended writing. They regard some of the teaching that they receive as inspiring. While there was general agreement that essays are marked well, a few students would welcome more monitoring of their notes by teachers.

230. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and often very good. Lessons are planned with very appropriate aims and depth and teachers often provide stimulating tasks, such as debates. There is a good balance between studying the subject and ensuring that students are able to use their knowledge, skills and understanding effectively in an examination situation. Often, when students work in small groups, teachers carefully manage the composition of these, to ensure that there a good balance of attainment. This ensures that the relatively lower attainers have good support, while the highest attainers have the increased challenge of leading group discussions. Many activities focus on the critical analysis of sources. In the early modern course,

teachers recognise that many of the written sources present particular linguistic challenges and provide good prompts that assist students, while still leaving them the challenge of interpretation.

231. Teachers have a very good awareness of the needs of individual students, for example taking particular care to ensure that lessons are fully accessible to those with hearing or visual impairment. On a few occasions however, they limited students' independence by providing answers to students' questions rather than challenging them to seek their own. In most lessons, teachers succeed well in ensuring all students take part in discussions. Occasionally though, small numbers of students are allowed to be relatively uninvolved. Marking is often very good, providing clear guidance on progress and how to improve. Not all marking is of an equal quality however.
232. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. A significantly higher proportion of students secures A and B Grades at A level. Strengths in teaching and student responses have been maintained. There is now a better range of learning resources, both within the department and in the school library. Leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form, which were sound at the time of the last inspection, are now good. There is a very high commitment to the subject and the needs of the students. This is shown by the department offering a choice of two separate GCE courses. The effectiveness of this offer is reduced however, as clashes of option choice often dictate which course a student can follow. Less experienced members of staff are strongly supported and encouraged to play a full part in the work of the department. Monitoring of teaching and learning, while generally appropriate, does not always pick up inconsistencies that exist in for example the quality of marking.

Religious Studies

Overall the quality of provision in Religious Studies is **very good**.

Strengths:

- A level and AS results in 2002 are of a very high standard, marking a significant improvement on previous years and an improving trend since the previous inspection.
- Teaching is consistently very good or excellent.
- Students respond very positively to high levels of challenge in lessons.
- The level of dialogue in lessons is of a very high quality.

Areas for Improvement:

- Devise strategies for involving more reticent students in class discussions and debates.

233. Standards at A level in 2002 are very high when compared to the 2001 averages for selective schools. They are also high when compared to other subjects at the school. AS level results reflect a strikingly similar pattern of very high standards. Standards in lessons and in students' work are very high in both the philosophy of religion and in the understanding of ethics.
234. Year 12 and 13 students' achievements were never less than very good in lessons observed. In Year 12, for example students are able to compare and apply the three main arguments for God's existence from the perspectives of significant philosophers and natural scientists, including Aquinas, Anselm, Kant, Paley and Darwin. Higher attaining students in particular respond very ably to the task of arguing the case for or against this premise in the role of one of these thinkers. In another lesson Year 12 students demonstrated their understanding of how both rule and act utilitarianism relates to euthanasia. They also explained Kantian theory linking morality to reason. In Year 13 a very high level of dialogue was observed in a debate on free will and determinism organised under the question "Are we free?" Students apply their previous knowledge and understanding to very good effect, to illustrate their responses with examples from history and everyday experiences and to show their understanding of beliefs from different faith and

philosophical perspectives. Students' written work indicates very good achievement in terms of essays, personal research and note taking skills.

235. The quality of teaching is very good overall and sometimes outstanding. All teachers have excellent subject knowledge and enthusiasm that provide the foundation for confidently delivered, interesting and highly challenging lessons. Relationships with students are excellent and teachers provide very positive role models. Levels of expectation are appropriately very high and students respond very positively to the challenges that are set. Lessons are closely planned and well structured to provide a varied and stimulating pace for learning. Excellent use is made of both group work and role-play and students are used to the idea of arguing and defending standpoints on different issues. Explanations are clear and questioning is used very effectively to elicit information and probe understanding. Students have very positive attitudes to learning in religious studies and refer to how effective teaching encourages them to develop and apply their thinking and to actively challenge their own beliefs and actions. Higher attaining and highly articulate students respond particularly positively to teaching methodologies that focus on ongoing critical discourse. They in turn make very significant contributions to lessons by posing questions and challenging the teachers' arguments in a highly competent fashion. Whilst this is a real strength, however, there are occasions when less confident speakers are not sufficiently drawn into discussions by teachers.
236. Students' assignments are regularly marked and written comments helpful in pinpointing aspects where further improvement is needed. Students stated that they found the method of marking which followed a set format with comments allocated under strengths, weaknesses and areas for development particularly helpful.
237. The AS and A level courses make an excellent contribution to students' personal development and particularly to its spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects. Standards have improved since the last inspection as has the quality of teaching and curriculum coverage. However, the school is not currently fulfilling statutory requirements for all students to study the subject as part of the basic curriculum in Year 13. This was also an issue in the previous inspection.
238. Leadership and management of RE presents a number of challenges due to the recent and considerable staffing changes and part time contracts which make meetings difficult. However, a recent arrangement whereby an assistant head teacher oversees the work of the department is currently working effectively to ensure that high standards are maintained.

Sociology

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

Strengths

- Standards in examinations are consistently well above average.
- Teaching and learning are very good. Good questioning stimulates very effective learning
- Students' attitudes and understanding are very good.
- The leadership and management of the department are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Essay evaluations and conclusions clearly delineated and linked to key words in the title.
- Sourcing of all materials for research purposes.
- Greater opportunities to use ICT to enhance learning in lessons

237. A level results were well above average in 2002. A very high proportion of students gained A or B grades. In 2001 results were lower, but still above average. Since 2000, when the course started, results have remained above the national average. Students achieve very well overall when prior attainment and predicted grades for the course are taken into consideration. The work observed in Years 12 and 13 was well above average.
238. Year 12 students can identify important moral concepts concerning health. For example, they understand the influence of power and politics and the conflict that can exist between relative positions of class and how this may affect the recipients of care and/or treatment. The differences in early infant mortality between classes and the impact of poverty and nutrition in the same health context are also understood. Students have developed good analytical skills, and they apply knowledge and understanding, to enable them to explore the reasons for class and influence in society.
239. Year 13 students have a very good understanding of theorists and different perspectives and relate these to a variety of topics, making knowledgeable hypotheses for discussion. They have a thorough understanding of different perspectives and use their knowledge of underlying principles of studies skilfully. Students apply this thinking to link previous learning to present day issues across aspects of sociology. For example they link the work of sociologists by the similar deviant labelling of miscreants in education with the labelling of the mentally ill in health.
240. Students know how to interpret statistics, analyse graphs, collect data and address hypotheses. High-attaining students are competent at organising essays and understand the value of planning and research. They answer questions very well and use appropriate material linked with the requirements of the question so that essay titles are well addressed to evaluations and conclusions. Lower-attaining students do not always make the same forceful links between key words in questions with conclusions and evaluation.
241. The teaching of sociology is very good. Teachers have an excellent understanding of the subject and this enables them to use questioning that rigorously challenges students. For example, in a Year 13 lesson the teacher brought alive the social, moral and cultural implications of the government's views on crime through their slogan 'Tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime'. This was then linked with the thinking of realism theorists' on adaptation to circumstances and with the communities' and victims' reactions to 'zero tolerance' and the Stephen Lawrence murder. Students learned how manipulation and exploitation of fear and the conditioning of society could affect acceptance of norms and values. Marking is closely aligned to AS and A level grading and teacher comments assist understanding and indicate areas for improvement, especially for those students with special needs or low attaining students. Teachers usually involve all members of the group. The meanings and definitions of specialist vocabulary are emphasised and highlighted. This assists all students but particularly the low attaining students. This very good teaching promotes very good learning so there is good inter-change of ideas and

clear, confident dialogue with students keen to extend their knowledge. They use supplementary information from books and periodicals available in the library and they research topics from their files and books. There is access to school Internet facilities for research and coursework but greater use of this might be made to enhance learning during lesson time.

242. Students' attitudes to the subject are very good. They trust teachers and are prepared to take risks when exploring new issues; they learn from one another. For example, in a Year 13 lesson gifted and talented students discussed the underclass and low attaining students began to understand marginalisation, all instigated by the teacher. Students feel that they have a good understanding of how society functions; they enjoy analysis of the impact of sociology on their experiences in everyday life and can easily relate this to possible career opportunities. Students are very well aware of their achievements and prospects in examinations.

243. The head of department provides excellent leadership. Links with the examining board keep the department up-to-date and fully acquainted with examination requirements. Very good systems of monitoring students' progress enable teachers to be aware of students' strengths and weaknesses. This guides teaching and enables teachers to reflect students' individual needs and interests. The coursework option has been introduced for the 2003 cohort as a result of examination analysis and students' choice.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Very high attainment and very good achievement at both AS and A level.
- Much excellent teaching and very good teaching and learning overall.
- Very good assessment, curriculum and enrichment.
- Excellent management.
- Very good student attitudes to learning and discussion and very mature positive evaluation of the teaching.

Areas for improvement

- No significant issues.

244. Results in psychology in 2002 show very high attainment at both AS and A level. There has been an upward trend over the past few years and the number of A and B grades is now very high, compared with other grammar schools and other subjects at Beaconsfield.

245. Standards observed at the school are excellent. Numeracy is very strong in the use of inferential and descriptive statistics. Year 12 core studies are of very good standard, including extended writing with high literacy skills and a very high degree of insight on such subjects as autism, theories of mind and animal communication. Tests on cognitive psychology show very high attainment across the samples. The work is characterised by extremely good attention to ethical issues and work on cultural anthropology that makes an excellent contribution to spiritual and cultural issues and citizenship in general. Very good use of ICT was made in high-resolution graphical work on recency effects in memory in preparation for the AS research methods component. Standards deepen in Year 13. Investigative coursework shows a very high degree of originality and the research on self-esteem, with its reference to the literature, to statistics and discussion of the issues is of publishable quality.

246. Teaching and learning observed in lessons were very good. Both teachers had very good knowledge and understanding of psychology. In the Year 12 classes, students were encouraged

to develop their skills through discussion and role-play. This led to excellent outcomes in which student participation was a strong feature of the work. Students were able to mobilise their very strong empathetic skills in work on social psychology. Their discussions on stereotyping, de-individualisation and social roles were an excellent contribution to social and spiritual education and citizenship. In Year 13, some of the work was more difficult, such as that on pattern recognition and the biochemical bases of schizophrenia. Nevertheless, very good student attitudes combined with the knowledge and understanding of the teachers, led to very good learning in these complex areas. Very good assessment and individual support for students was a very strong feature of the course and this was strongly appreciated by the students themselves. They had a very mature appreciation of the long-term advantages of independent learning styles.

247. The head of department is a relatively recent acquisition to the school and has made an excellent contribution to the development of psychology. Management is excellent. Staffing overall is very good, with good resources and satisfactory, if small, accommodation. Library resources are sound. Curriculum is very good and is enriched by emphasis on reading around the subject, on press cuttings, websites, visiting speakers, conferences and the use of materials and lectures from the royal colleges. Psychology documentation is exemplary and recent improvement has been very good.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The main areas of focus for the inspection were English literature, English language and literature and French, but work in Spanish and German was also sampled. One German lesson in Year 12 was observed and the teaching and learning were very good. The lesson was conducted entirely in German which promoted students' communication skills. Attainment was mixed ranging from high to average. Students were very motivated and achieved well. Attitudes and relationships were very good. One Spanish lesson in Year 12 was observed and the teaching and learning were excellent. The teacher's knowledge of the subject was excellent and she had native speaker fluency of the language. The lesson was completely in Spanish and students were highly motivated and responded well to the teacher's high expectations by engaging in a lively discussion of the political rights and responsibilities of young people in Europe. The level of students' attainment was very high. Students' achievement was also very high. Attitudes and relationships were excellent.

English Literature

Overall the quality of provision in English is **very good**

Strengths

- Consistent examination results well above the national average.
- Very good teaching and teacher subject knowledge.
- Students' enthusiasm and willingness to reflect on their learning.
- Very good leadership in guiding the department.

Areas for improvement

- Consistency in marking that gives guidance about how to improve standards.
- Clear learning outcomes to ensure pace and challenge is maintained in all lessons.

248. The provision in English caters for some 82 students. GCE AS and A2 courses are offered in English literature and English language and literature. The addition of this second course has proved very popular with students.

249. Standards in GCE AS and A level English literature are currently well above national averages. Standards have risen at a rate that is well above the national average, and this represents very

good progress since the last inspection. Over time, all students gain at least a pass grade, and there has been a significant rise in the number of students gaining the higher grades, with over three quarters achieving grades A and B in 2001. This dropped to just over half in 2002, but AS results in both subjects indicate that next year's A2 results should reverse this downward turn. Achievement is good based on the predictions made from students' performance in their GCSE examinations. The school has set itself high but realistic targets to raise this further.

250. Students are keen to participate in pair and group work and maintain excellent concentration in lessons. Their files are detailed and well organised with a large volume of research notes, summaries and reviews of texts that show very good development of critical skills. By Year 13, their writing is fluent, uses mature vocabulary and is well supported with perceptive references to text. Literature students link critical views of female Victorian stereotypes to their work on *Wuthering Heights*. Students following the language and literature course produce well-focused writing on Sylvia Plath's poem, *Edge* that examines how the juxtaposition of words generates power in the poem.
251. Overall, teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. In the best lessons, teachers not only share their expertise, but also challenge and stimulate students to improve the clarity of their thinking. This results in some high quality discussion. In a lesson on *Othello*, Year 13 students explored the literary, philosophical and religious connotations of truth, envy and jealousy in their analysis of the concept of 'honest' Iago. Year 12 students show considerable insight into the lives of others in a discussion on women's conflict between the duty to care versus the desire to succeed in *Top Girls*. Students are less challenged in lessons when discussions are teacher led and open-ended tasks are not focused on clear learning objectives. Teachers' marking of work is regular and encouraging, however, written comments do not always give clear guidance about how to improve standards.
252. The curriculum is well resourced within the department and the learning resource centre supports students' work effectively. There is ready access to the Internet to support research and both courses make a very good contribution to the development of communication skills. Courses are enriched by trips to the theatre and talks from visiting speakers. Students receive very good support for learning outside lessons and they value the amount of time given willingly by teachers. Teachers have good understanding of the examination requirements so that groups of students with different needs are well prepared for A level.
253. The leadership and management of the department are very good. A strong feature of the very good provision is the collaborative ethos of staff new to the department. There is a shared commitment to the detailed analysis of results and critical use of self-assessment to continue improving already high results.

FRENCH

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Students have very good knowledge of general and specialist vocabulary and a good command of grammatical structures.
- Teaching is generally very good.
- Teachers' linguistic skills are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- Improve some Year 13 students' speaking skills.

254. Results in French A level in 2001 were at the national average and a third of students gained A or B grades. In 2002, however, results were significantly higher and nearly four fifths of students gained the highest grades. In the AS examination in 2001 all students passed and three quarters gained grades A and B. The results 2002 were slightly lower with about two thirds gaining the higher grades. The achievement of most students is very good.
255. Year 12 students have excellent listening and speaking skills and can understand lessons conducted entirely in French at normal speed. They can listen to authentic texts and understand the gist and pick out key points and details. They are able to talk about current affairs in French and can engage in discussions about topics such as immigration. Their reading comprehension skills are very good and they read newspaper articles in French from the Internet. Students' written work is of a very high standard. They have produced a good range of essays in preparation for the AS examination. Year 13 students also have very good listening skills, but their speaking skills are less well developed. They have a very good knowledge of general and specialist vocabulary relating to the A level topics and a good command of grammatical structures. Their course work showed good progression from Year 12 to Year 13. Most Year 13 students have produced a very comprehensive collection of essays on the A level topics, which are generally well presented and accurate.
256. The teaching of French in the sixth form is very good. Teachers have excellent linguistic skills and very good subject knowledge. Lessons are very well prepared and aims are made clear to students. Most lessons are challenging, have a clear structure and are almost completely in French, which greatly improves students' listening skills. The brisk pace motivates students, who work conscientiously and with enjoyment. Relationships are very good and students are committed and hard working. Teachers praise students for their efforts and correct their mistakes sensitively which creates a very positive environment for learning. Students use ICT to research topics and some students word process essays. Lessons are varied and students often work successfully in pairs or groups. Grammar is presented and practised very well, which enables students to bridge the gap from GCSE quickly and effectively. Very occasionally lessons are too teacher-directed and students are not sufficiently involved. Very good use is made of a wide range of teaching resources, including materials from the Internet and the library. The teachers co-ordinate their work well and share ideas and materials. The marking of students' work is very good and sets clear targets to help students improve. The scheme of work is very good and provides full coverage of the A level syllabus. The management of the subject is excellent and progress since the last report has been very good.