

INSPECTION REPORT

UPTON - BY - CHESTER HIGH SCHOOL

Upton - by - Chester

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111422

Headteacher: Miss J.L. Jackson

Reporting inspector: Mrs J. Tracey
20270

Dates of inspection: 10th - 14th March, 2003

Inspection number: 249692

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	C. Councillor D.K. Rowlands
Date of previous inspection:	March, 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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20270	June Tracey	Registered inspector	Educational inclusion	What sort of school is it? The school's results and pupils' achievements How well the school is led and managed
13762	Norman Shelley	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
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12825	Niall Carr	Team inspector	Psychology	
11966	John Clay	Team inspector	Design and technology	
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14841	Michael Duffey	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
2941	Andrew Henderson	Team inspector	Physical education	
23926	Douglas Howorth	Team inspector	Geography	
28882	Barbara Jones	Team inspector		
2959	Brian Leek	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (Sixth form)	

11975	Thelma McIntosh-Clark	Team inspector	Music	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
32243	Susan Moore	Team inspector	Mathematics	
19452	Anthony Pearson	Team inspector	History	
31680	Philip Redican	Team inspector	Art	
24887	Yvonne Salmons	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages English as an additional language	
22985	Jacqueline Sparkes	Team inspector	Biology	
32122	Judith Straw	Team inspector	Religious education	How well are pupils taught?
21866	David Tracey	Team inspector	Science	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Upton-By -Chester High School is a much larger than average, mixed comprehensive school with 1655 pupils on roll, including 284 in the sixth form. About one third of the pupils come from outside the local area. The mobility rate of pupils entering and leaving the school at other than the normal times is much higher than in most schools, the main reason being that the school caters for pupils from a local army base. About one fifth of the pupils in Year 11 did not start their secondary education at the school. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (about 7%) is below the national average. The majority of pupils are white British; a very small proportion comes from Asian, African and Chinese backgrounds. None is at the early stage of learning English. The proportion of pupils with special learning needs (8%) is below average, as is the proportion with formal statements of need. Disabilities include learning and emotional difficulties. The school also provides an integrated unit for a small number of pupils with hearing impairment. Overall attainment on entry to the school, and the sixth form, is average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Upton-By-Chester High School is a very effective school that provides a very good quality of education for its pupils and students. Standards are well above average in Years 9, 11 and 13. Throughout the school, pupils and students respond well to the very good teaching. The school is very well led and managed and provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils' performance in national tests, GCSE and Advanced level examinations is consistently good.
- The quality of teaching is very good. Pupils and students respond well to teachers' high expectations.
- The leadership and management are very good. The school has clear aims.
- Subject managers and pastoral team leaders provide very well for pupils' educational and personal development.
- Provision for extra-curricular activities, including sport, music and the performing arts is very good.

What could be improved

- The form tutor time in period 1 each day is not used well enough. The teaching of aspects of the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme in these sessions is inconsistent.
- The school does not have a consistent system for communicating with parents on a regular basis about homework and day-to-day matters.
- More use could be made of information and communication technology skills (ICT) across all subjects of the curriculum.
- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to study practical and vocational subjects in Years 10 and 11.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection in 1997. High standards have been maintained and the school has made satisfactory progress with most of the issues identified in the last report. The proportion of very good teaching has increased. The management system is more streamlined and subject managers have greater responsibility for the work of their department and the outcomes. The provision for PSHE has improved significantly in Years 9-11, but it remains inconsistent in Years 7 and 8. The tutorial time in period 1 does not lead to a crisp start to the school day for many pupils. The time allocated to physical education in Years 7-9 has increased and arrangements at lunchtime have improved, albeit that they are still inadequate because of lack of space and social facilities for older pupils. The school still does not provide for religious education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	B	B	B	C
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	*	

Key	
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

National comparative data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not available

Years 7, 8 and 9

Pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well above average in English, mathematics and science when compared with all and similar schools. The school has maintained consistently high standards, improving them year-by-year at a rate broadly similar to the national trend. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls when compared with boys and girls nationally. The overall standard of pupils' work in Year 9 is well above average. Pupils achieve very well from their starting point in Year 7. Standards are at least average in all subjects and better in most.

Years 10 and 11

In 2002, pupils' GCSE results were above average. Most pupils enter for more than eight subjects. The proportions gaining five or more A*-C and five or more A*-G grades were well above average when compared with all and similar schools, and with pupils' prior attainment in Year 9. In almost all subjects the proportion gaining A* grades was at least equal, if not better, than the national average. Almost all pupils, including those with special educational needs, gained at least one grade at GCSE. This is a very good achievement, especially so since about one fifth of the pupils in Year 11 joined the school at other than the usual time in Year 7. The trend in results over recent years is broadly similar to the national trend. Girls' attainment in this period is better than that of boys to a similar extent as found nationally. The governors set high and challenging targets. The school came very close to achieving all of them in 2002. Pupils' performance in modern foreign languages (especially German), although satisfactory, is not as good as in other subjects. The overall standard of pupils' work in Year 11 is well above average. Pupils achieve very well. Standards are average in French, German, ICT and citizenship. They are outstanding in art and well above average in English, mathematics, science, drama, geography, history and music. In other subjects they are above average. Throughout the school, pupils with learning difficulties and those for whom English is a second language make good progress.

Sixth form

A level results in 2002 were similar to those in 2001 when the overall standard was well above that found nationally. National averages for 2002 are not available for comparison. Evidence from the inspection indicates that the overall standard of work in Year 13 is well above average. Students achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment at GCSE.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils have very good attitudes towards school and want to do well. They work conscientiously and are ambitious for themselves.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The vast majority of pupils behave well and respect the school's disciplinary code. A small minority is less co-operative and inconsiderate of the welfare of other pupils, particularly out of the classrooms. The number of exclusions is low for a school of its size.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Most pupils work well together. They respect and value others' contributions in lessons and other activities.
Attendance	Good. Attendance is above average.

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.

Overall, teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. This, together with pupils' and students' very good attitudes, is a contributory factor to the very good achievement. Teaching meets the needs of pupils of all abilities and backgrounds very well.

Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subjects. Most convey their enthusiasm in such a manner as to make pupils of all abilities want to learn. They have high expectations that are transmitted to pupils. Thorough planning is linked to the criteria for examinations so pupils gain confidence in their ability to succeed. Pupils' work is generally marked well, usually with indications of how it could be improved. However, in Years 7-9, pupils are not always aware of how the standard of their work relates to National Curriculum levels. The quality of the satisfactory teaching could be raised to that of the best through a sharper focus on the aims of lessons and what it is that pupils are expected to learn. The very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching observed occurred in lessons that lacked challenge and pace because they were not planned effectively to cater for pupils of different abilities. In these lessons, teachers did not engage pupils' interest sufficiently and their behaviour was variable.

Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school in English, mathematics, science, drama and geography. They are also very good in art in Years 7-9 and music in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is exceptionally good in art in Years 10 and 11. It is good in all other subjects and year groups except in modern foreign languages in Years 7-9 where it is satisfactory. The overall good teaching of basic literacy and numerical skills is becoming an integral part of the work across the whole curriculum. Practices are more advanced in some departments, and more so in literacy than numeracy.

In the sixth form, students are challenged well. They are encouraged to be receptive to ideas, think independently and justify their views. The style of teaching and open-ended questioning fosters students' development into mature young adults.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The curriculum is biased towards the academic subjects but it meets the needs and aspirations of the majority of pupils. However, better provision could be made for the significant minority of pupils who would like to study physical education or more vocational courses at GCSE. The curriculum is enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular activities, particularly sport, music and the performing arts.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good overall. Pupils make good progress because staff know them well and plan accordingly. The quality of provision for hearing impaired pupils is good.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The small proportion of pupils for whom English is a second language achieve well and integrate well within the school community.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is very good. Satisfactory opportunities are provided for spiritual awareness and pupils' personal, social and health education, including citizenship. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good overall. Support and guidance for pupils' educational and personal development are good. Pupils' progress is monitored very well on a regular basis. The information gained is used well to inform planning and set targets.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The leadership team provides clear direction and is decisive in its actions. The school has high expectations of its members. There is a good team spirit within subject departments that leads to the high standards of achievement.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a good understanding of the issues facing the school and manage the budget well to meet the priorities. They are closely involved in strategic planning. Statutory requirements are met, except for the provision of religious education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship throughout the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school monitors its results systematically and takes effective action where necessary to sustain and further improve performance.
The strategic use of resources	Resources for learning are well used to their optimum potential. The older parts of the school buildings are in poor condition and limit the necessary extension of the curriculum in some areas of provision. There are not enough social areas to cater adequately for pupils' recreational needs. The school practises the principles of best value well in dealing with financial and educational matters.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standards of attainment are consistently high and pupils make good progress. The school expects pupils to work hard and give of their best. Teaching is good. The school is well led and managed. The school helps pupils to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The school could work more closely with parents. Better opportunities could be provided for parents to check homework and communicate with teachers on a daily/weekly basis. A more extensive range of extra-curricular activities could be provided. The behaviour of a minority of pupils could be better. Better provision could be provided for pupils' welfare and social activities at break and lunchtimes.

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. Two of the concerns are mainly attributable to the fact that the school does not have a reliable means of daily or weekly communication with parents. Otherwise, inspectors consider that there are good channels for communicating with parents. The range of extra-curricular activities is considered to be very good. The school achieves good standards of behaviour overall, despite the fairly regular intake of a number of pupils who have previously had an unsatisfactory record of behaviour. Behaviour is good in the majority of lessons but it is not always managed well enough out of lessons. Inspectors judge that the school manages lunchtime arrangements as well as can be expected in view of the limitations of the accommodation and the number of pupils on the site. Parents have requested the provision of lockers for the storage of pupils' property. The school has not taken action, mainly because of constraints over space. However, it does provide storage for equipment for practical lessons. Inspectors found that it was always possible to gain access to toilets somewhere on the site, but that their condition was often poor.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

Upton-by-Chester High School, which serves an extensive area based on the city of Chester and its surrounding villages, has a sixth form, comprising 154 females and 130 males. About 60 per cent of Year 11 pupils continue into Year 12, joined by a relatively small number of students from other schools. The intake of students is drawn from a wide range of economic and social backgrounds, and their attainment on entry, overall, is close to the average. The sixth form sets a basic requirement for admission of five GCSE passes at grade C or above. A wide choice of subjects is offered at Advanced Level.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very successful and very cost-effective. The quality of students' learning is very good and they attain well above average results. The school offers a wide range of academic courses and the staff provides a very high standard of care, commitment and guidance. Students respond well to the very good teaching.

Strengths

- Public examination results are consistently good in almost all subjects.
- There is a very good range of enrichment activities, particularly in art, music, drama and dance.
- Teaching and learning are very good; students achieve very well.
- Careers, educational and personal guidance are of a very high quality.

What could be improved

- The school does not meet the requirement for the provision of religious education in the sixth form.
- The facilities for social activities are unattractive and not extensive enough for the size of the sixth form.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. Teaching is very good. Standards are well above average and students achieve very well. Students' attitudes are very good.
Chemistry	Good. Results are consistently above average. Students make good progress as a result of good teaching.
Biology	Very good. Results are well above average as a result of very good teaching and highly motivated students.
Design and technology	Good. A level standards are above average. AS level results in 2002 were high. Results are better than expected from students' GCSE results. Students have very positive attitudes. Teaching is consistently good.
Business Studies	Very good. This is a high performing department with high expectations and very good teaching which puts the students at the very centre of learning. Students have very good, positive and mature attitudes and work very hard.

Information and communication technology	Good. Results are above average and standards are good. Students have very positive attitudes to learning and this, coupled with good teaching, ensures that they learn well.
Physical education	Good. Examination results have fluctuated, but have improved recently in response to good teaching. The subject is increasing in popularity in Year 12, and students achieve well in relation to their overall GCSE results, particularly at AS level.
Art	Very good. Teaching and learning are very good, and students achieve very well. Teachers create a confident, positive learning environment in lessons.
Music	Good. Students develop secure musical knowledge with particular strengths in performing. Teachers have high levels of musical expertise; provision for enrichment in music is very good
History	Very good. Standards are well above average and examination results are improving. Students achieve very well due to very good teaching. Their own very positive attitudes also cause the quality of learning to be very good.
Religious education	Good. Good teaching and the very positive attitudes of the students lead to good results.
Psychology	Very good. Examination results are above average. Standards of work are above average. Teaching is very good. Students enjoyed their learning. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subject.
English	Very good. Very good, challenging teaching, and students' enthusiastic and positive attitudes ensure that standards are well above average.

In addition to the subjects inspected in depth, lessons were also seen in physics, theatre studies, performance studies, geography, environmental science, government and politics, sociology, English literature, French, German, and general studies. In physics, environmental studies, government and politics, performance studies and geography standards were well above average; in English literature, French, German and sociology above average; and in general studies satisfactory.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are very well informed about subject choices and opportunities in and beyond the sixth form. Induction into the sixth form is good and high quality academic and personal support and guidance are consistently provided.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The sixth form is well led and managed, supported by a caring, committed team of tutors. Students' progress is well monitored through regular formal reviews by tutors and annual and interim reports from subject teachers. All students have equal access to a high quality of education.

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 quality of teaching, support and guidance • Subject choices meet their needs • The range of enrichment and extra-curricular opportunities • The independence and respect they are given 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilities for performing arts, physical education and private study • Social facilities – the common rooms are too small

Students are justifiably very pleased with the quality of education, academic and personal support and guidance and range of enrichment experiences that are available to them. The facilities for private study are mostly good but are limited for the performing arts and physical recreation. The common rooms are too small for the number on roll.

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. Overall standards of work are well above average in Years 9,11 and 13. Pupils and students achieve very well throughout the school.

Standards in Years 7, 8 and 9

2. Currently, attainment on entry to Year 7 is average. In 2002, pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. The proportions of pupils exceeding the level expected for their age was well above average in each subject. Results were well above average compared with similar schools. The school has consistently sustained high standards over recent years whilst improving them year-on-year at a rate broadly similar to the national trend. There is no significant difference between the achievement of boys and girls when compared with boys and girls nationally. The targets set by governors are suitably challenging.

3. Evidence from the inspection, including lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work, indicates that standards are well above average in English, mathematics, science, art, drama and geography. They are average in citizenship, design and technology, music and modern foreign languages and above average in all other subjects.

Standards in Years 10 and 11

4. Pupils' average point score in GCSE examinations in 2002 was above average compared with all schools and average compared with similar schools. Most pupils enter for in excess of eight subjects. Taking just eight subjects into account, including English, mathematics and science, the average point score is well above the national average. The proportions of pupils gaining five or more A*-C and five or more A*-G grades were well above average when compared with all and similar schools, and with pupils' prior attainment in Year 9. In almost all subjects the proportion gaining A* grades was equal to, or better, than the national average. The trend in results over recent years is broadly similar to the national trend. Over time, girls' performance tends to be better than boys, but only to the same extent as found nationally. Almost all pupils, including those with special learning needs, gain at least one GCSE grade. The few that do not are persistent non-attenders. Considering that up to one fifth of the pupils in Year 11 did not start their secondary education at Upton in Year 7 the school's achievement is particularly good. This is because the school makes good arrangements to ensure the progression of pupils' work when they come from other schools and more distant locations. The targets set by the governors are high and very challenging. The school came very close to achieving all of them in 2002.

5. Pupils' performance in modern foreign languages, particularly in German, has been of concern in recent years. Strategies are in place to improve standards, which are currently average overall in French and German. Achievement is satisfactory overall, compared with other subjects where it good and often better. Standards of work in art are outstanding. They are well above average in English, mathematics, science, drama, geography, history and music and above average in religious education, design and technology and physical education. Overall standards in ICT are average and achievement satisfactory but they are higher in the GCSE examination groups. A good start has been made in establishing citizenship as a new subject this year. The average standard at this stage represents good achievement.

The school as a whole

6. Pupils with special educational needs throughout the school, including those in the sixth form, make good progress in most subjects, particularly when they receive additional support from learning support assistants. They make very good progress in English, sociology, geography, history and art. The lack of

sufficient learning support slows pupils' progress in music and design and technology lessons. Pupils in the unit for pupils with hearing impairment make good progress towards their targets in most areas of the curriculum, often achieving, and sometimes exceeding, predictions for their success. In GCSE examinations almost all pupils with special educational needs achieve a grade. Higher attaining pupils, including the gifted and talented, achieve very well.

7. All the pupils for whom English is a second language are at the intermediate or advanced stage of learning English. Their standard of English is similar to that of other pupils of similar ability and they make equally good progress.

8. The opportunities for, and the standards achieved in, the performing arts, including art, music dance and drama, are very good and a particular strength of the school's provision. Pupils' good response to the teachers' commitment and enthusiasm is clearly evident and a contributory factor to pupils' very good achievement in extra-curricular activities.

9. Pupils' standards of literacy are well above average by the time they leave the school. The overall quality of their speaking and listening, reading and writing skills is well above average school because the school has a sound policy for developing these skills. However, some pupils of all ages do not spell as well as they should. The school has targeted this as an area for improvement.

10. Overall, pupils' numerical skills are above average. The majority of the direct teaching takes place in mathematics lessons but good transference of mathematical skills is evident in subjects such as science, geography, art and business studies. A whole school policy is being developed to promote consistency in the teaching and practices in numerical work. Some subjects departments are more advanced in introducing this policy than others.

11. Overall, pupils' ICT skills are reasonably well developed, being above average in Year 9 and average in Year 11. The difference is due to the fact that in Year 11 pupils taking the GCSE course make faster progress than those whose development of ICT skills is through other subjects. Provision for the latter is patchy, being too dependent on the subject department's access to computers.

Sixth form

12. Course completion rates are high and almost all students transfer to higher education. Overall, standards are well above average in Year 13. Students achieve very well over the two years taking into account their GCSE results on entry to the sixth form. In the 13 focus subjects inspected in depth, standards are well above average in English, mathematics, art, biology, business studies, history and psychology. They were above in chemistry, design and technology, ICT, physical education and religious education. Standards are average in music.

13. Since the previous inspection advanced level results in art have been well above average, and in most other subjects consistently above average. In 2001, the latest year for which comparative data is available, the results were above or well above the national average in all subjects, with the exception of graphical applications, which were average, physics and general studies, which were below average, and physical education, which was well below average. In 2002, the results remained consistently high, with the best results in English language, mathematics, physics, and performance studies, the last two achieving 77% and 83% at the highest grades respectively. Results in physical education and general studies improved on those in 2001. All the students entered achieved pass grades, at least a third at the highest levels in each subject.

14. The AS results were above average overall in 2001, with the best results in biology and physics. Standards were maintained in 2002, the best results being in history, performance studies and design and technology.

15. Students' literacy, numerical and ICT skills are above average. They contribute to the very good achievement in the sixth form. The few students with learning difficulties all make good progress.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

16. Pupils' attitudes and personal development are very good. Their behaviour and attendance are good although a small minority of pupils makes too little effort to arrive at school on time. The good standards described in the previous report have been maintained with some improvements. The large majority of parents is satisfied with standards of behaviour but a small minority believes that standards are not high enough.

17. Most pupils are very enthusiastic and positive about school and they support the various activities in large numbers. Their attitudes towards their lessons are almost always good or very good. They are conscientious and want to do well.

18. Pupils with special educational needs, including those in the hearing impaired unit, work hard, are keen to learn and display an impressive determination and interest. They work well together, in pairs and in groups, in full classes and in the very effective withdrawal sessions for pupils with the greatest need.

19. Standards of behaviour are good overall. This is particularly impressive taking into account the number of pupils who are transferred to the school from elsewhere. In many instances these pupils have been used to different circumstances or expectations; a significant minority join the school having been excluded from other schools. Most integrate well into the school community. The majority of pupils behave very well in lessons and unacceptable behaviour occurs in only a small minority of lessons where teaching is insufficiently stimulating or where a teacher is less effective in applying appropriate behaviour management strategies. The behaviour of a significant minority of pupils, other than in lessons, is less reliable. Some boys indulge in inconsiderate activities and girls misuse toilets more often than boys. Much litter is dropped despite pupils being involved in litter picking groups. However, the conduct of the large majority of pupils is mostly orderly and responsible. Pupils are polite towards adults and often extend courtesies in passing. School and pupils confirm that incidents of bullying are few. The number of exclusions is low compared to the average for secondary schools.

20. Relationships between pupils of all abilities, backgrounds and race are very good. They work together very well in their lessons. They listen with interest to the contributions of their peers and are mutually supportive yet competitive when occasion demands. Their respect for the feelings and beliefs of others is very good and most pupils develop a good sense of moral and social values. When given the opportunity, pupils exercise initiative well, for example, they organised support for charities and designed and built seating for the school grounds. Their maturity grows through involvement in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, exchange visits, Young Consumer projects, work experience and an industry week. By the time they reach the end of Year 11 most pupils have made very good progress with their personal development.

Sixth form

21. Students' attitudes towards school and their studies are very positive and they appreciate very much the quality of education and support that they receive. They are firmly committed to succeeding in their examinations and work very conscientiously. They participate well in the various extra-curricular activities, that many of them describe as brilliant, and are pleased to be involved in assisting teachers and pupils in the lower school. Their attendance is high and is well above that of the main school.

22. Relationships between students and with their tutors are extremely good and are characterised by a high level of mutual trust and respect that is deserved. Students are very responsible and they conduct themselves in a mature manner. They have a clear sense of moral and social values. They work capably individually and collectively demonstrating very good independence and interdependence. They respond very positively to their tutors' guidance. Students show resourcefulness, for example, in finding themselves facilities in school during private study time.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

23. Overall, teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. Pupils respond well to teachers' expectations. A high proportion (40 per cent) of the 220 lessons observed were judged to be very good or better; ten lessons (5 per cent) were outstanding. A few lessons (2 per cent) were judged to be unsatisfactory. This very good quality of teaching, combined with the positive and co-operative attitudes of the majority of pupils, accounts for the very good level of achievement found in the school.

24. Several very good features contribute to the most effective teaching. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects, coupled with a clear understanding of how pupils learn. They have high expectations and encourage pupils to achieve as well as possible. Careful and thorough planning leads to an efficient use of time. Lessons are often clearly linked to examination criteria, which helps students to understand more easily what is required of them to be successful. Pupils' work is generally marked well, often with indications of how it can be improved. However, in Years 7-9, pupils are not always aware of the link between their marks and the National curriculum levels at which they are working. The teaching of ICT skills in specific lessons is good but not enough emphasis is placed on developing these skills in some other subjects of the curriculum. This is mainly because there is insufficient access to computers within subject departments.

25. Outstanding lessons were observed in music, mathematics, dance, drama, modern foreign languages and business studies. The characteristics of these featured expert and inspiring teaching, well-motivated, well-behaved pupils, individual attention for every pupil and a keen sense of purpose and enjoyment. For example, in a very successful music lesson with a Year 7 group, pupils made excellent progress as well as enjoying themselves because tasks were well matched to their abilities and their energies were immediately channelled into concentrated creative activity; excellent learning resulted. Significant gains in learning were made in a Year 7 drama lesson on 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' because the teaching was vivacious and energetic. Pupils developed confidence and expertise in devising 'freeze-frame' interpretations to illustrate key scenes. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, insufficient attention was given to matching the work to pupils' differing abilities. In some cases there was a general lack of challenge. Pupils were not taken forward in their thinking and too little was expected from them. Some of these lessons lacked pace because they had not been planned effectively. Teachers did not share the aims of the lesson with the class so pupils were unsure about their progress. Pupils' behaviour in these lessons was variable and relationships with teachers were not as positive. Weaknesses in the teaching in some modern foreign language lessons related to too little use of the target language.

26. The quality of teaching and learning of pupils with special educational needs is good. Teachers are mindful of pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) and refer to them often. Teaching in the hearing impaired unit and in the supportive education department is very effective, as is the support from learning assistants when it is available. There is a good balance between intervention to help pupils move on and allowing for independence. Resources are readily accessible and used well, for example, worksheets in a Year 9 French lesson used illustration and text with clear frameworks that gave the pupils security in their learning. However, as at the time of the previous inspection, the number of learning support assistants in the school is not sufficient to provide such help for all the pupils who need it. Consequently, in some lessons and subjects the progress of pupils with special educational needs does not match that of the other pupils. Pupils for whom English is a second language achieve well and make good progress. Their command of English is such that they make similar progress to that of other pupils of equal ability. The teaching of higher attaining pupils is well directed towards their needs.

27. Strategies for teaching literacy skills are effective. Most departments have incorporated the development of pupils' literacy skills in their policies following whole school training. However, practices across departments vary significantly. They have the greatest effect on pupils' standards where they are monitored closely and regularly upgraded to reflect the impact, or not, of their success. The development

of pupils' numerical skills is mainly through mathematics. Links with other departments are being established to promote consistency in the use of units and common method of working. The teaching, use and application of mathematical skills are more advanced in some subjects than in others, for example, in mathematics, geography and science. The planned sessions for teaching a numeracy activity in one of the Year 7 form tutor sessions each week are very effective because teachers see the relevance of consolidating basic skills at an early stage.

28. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school in English, mathematics, science, drama and geography. They are very good in music in Years 10 and 11 and art in Years 7-9. Teaching is exceptionally good in art in Years 10 and 11. It is good in all other subjects and year groups, except in modern foreign languages in Years 7-9 where it is satisfactory. In Years 8 and 9 in particular, in both French and German, the aims of the lessons were not always clear or sufficiently challenging.

29. Parents recognise the good quality of the teaching. Inspectors agree with their views.

Sixth form

30. Teaching is very good overall with some excellent practice. Teachers are well qualified and they communicate interest in their subjects with energy and enthusiasm. They are caring in their attitudes and generous with their time. Students have respect for their teachers; they develop very good relationships and shared aims. The regular focus on the examination requirements in all subjects generates an awareness of what is expected and an appreciation of the need to sustain the momentum in their studies throughout the whole of the sixth form. Students have a mature appreciation of the value of time, the need for punctuality and the importance of their own individual research.

31. In the subjects focused on in the inspection, teaching was very good in mathematics, biology, business studies, art, history, psychology and English. It was good in the other subjects. The best teaching observed was characterised by a wide variety of activities that challenged and inspired the students. For example, in a business studies lesson in Year 12, the teacher's high expectations provided the opportunity for students to exploit sophisticated learning skills. The intelligent collaboration of the students ensured that they effectively led the lesson and evaluated their own performance. Similarly, in a drama lesson, challenging and creative teaching required students to choose their preferred working methods and have control of their learning. They made good progress in their knowledge of theories and methods as well as developing self-awareness and powerful, individual creative performance.

32. Teachers know their students and capabilities well. Students trust their judgements and engage in fruitful discussion throughout their time in the sixth form. Teachers challenge them and encourage debate that causes students to listen to others and justify their opinions. In doing so, students become mature young adults prepared to modify their views in the light of reasoned argument.

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

33. The school provides a satisfactory curriculum with an appropriate range of learning opportunities for all pupils, including those with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented. It also provides well for the relatively small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. Statutory requirements are met. This is an improvement from the previous inspection when there was insufficient time for physical education for pupils in Years 7-9, and for religious education. A very good range of extra-curricular activities, which includes sport, musical events, theatre and field trips and foreign tours and exchanges, makes a significant contribution to the curriculum. Many pupils and students participate in these activities and good relationships are fostered.

34. Pupils in Year 7 are taught in mixed ability groups. In Years 8 and 9 they are allocated to different bands according to their attainment. This arrangement enables pupils to make progress at a suitable pace for them to consolidate and extend their learning. In Year 11, a small number of pupils, for whom the full

curriculum is not appropriate, follows a work-related learning scheme. They benefit from being able to apply classroom-based learning to practical situations that are more meaningful to them. The school does not meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship, nor did it at the time of the previous inspection.

35. In Years 7-9, pupils are taught all National Curriculum subjects and religious education. In English, an additional teacher sometimes works alongside the subject teacher. This provides good support for pupils whose literacy skills are underdeveloped. In Years 8 and 9, pupils are grouped by ability in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages. More able pupils study a second foreign language. This arrangement, however, reduces time for design and technology and increases the allocation of time for physical education for some pupils; the school is currently reviewing these arrangements to ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils next year. The current practice of teaching modern foreign languages in double-length lessons, which in some cases occur on consecutive days, is not appropriate for the development of pupils' skills and, ultimately, has an effect on the level of attainment. Another anomaly in the timetable is the rotation of lessons between music and ICT in Year 8. This interrupts the continuity of learning and, together with the low allocation of time, adversely affects pupils' progress, particularly in music.

36. In Years 10 and 11, pupils follow a common core of seven subjects together with a further two subjects selected from humanities and creative and performing arts. The range of choices is narrower than found in most schools. No GCSE courses are available in physical education or dance although a significant number of pupils have expressed interest. There are very few vocational education courses. Those offered, in business studies and child care, provide very well for pupils who choose to take them and lead to good levels of achievement. A small number of pupils who need to consolidate their learning in English, mathematics and science are permitted to discontinue modern foreign languages and design and technology at the end of Year 9. This assists them to achieve success in the basic subjects. Religious education is taught as part of PSHE. Pupils achieve well in the time allocated but this is insufficient to prepare them for the short course GCSE examination without after-school lessons.

37. Because of the staggered lunchtime arrangements, some lessons are split; as a result, continuity of thought and effort is interrupted. Learning in such lessons is sometimes not as effective as in other lessons of the day. The timetable is organised into 44 teaching periods and one tutor period of similar length at the beginning of each day. This period in four days out of five is designated as form time, the fifth being a year group assembly. Two of the periods are occupied with pastoral matters, the others being used for a programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE). In Years 9-11, pupils have additional PSHE lessons within the framework of the normal timetable. Provision for PSHE has improved since the previous inspection. A regular team of committed teachers has been trained to specialise in certain areas, for example, sex education and first aid. The programme is satisfactory and includes topics such as the dangers of smoking, alcohol and drugs. Citizenship is taught as part of the PSHE programme and is also successfully integrated into work in other subject areas. As yet, teaching in PSHE is not sufficiently well monitored. The teaching of the elements programmed into the tutor period is inconsistent. It is not as effective as the rest of the provision, which is taught by specialist staff. Insufficient time is given over to the scheduled programme of PSHE activities in many of the tutor periods. Some of these are very effective in establishing relationships and community spirit within the form group but many lack a real sense of purpose other than as registration sessions. The school fosters harmonious relationships between pupils of all abilities, backgrounds and cultures. The policy for racial equality satisfactorily reflects the school's aims to develop thoughtful young citizens willing to contribute to the community, and to society in general.

38. Strategies for developing pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy are good.

39. The vast majority of pupils with special educational needs, including those in the hearing impairment unit, follow the full National Curriculum. They achieve a good degree of success at GCSE, meeting and often exceeding expectations based on their prior attainment. A good policy of transition allows for careful choice of GCSE subjects and counselling for career prospects. This includes work experience

and taster days of suggested course work in further education. However, there are few opportunities for pupils to follow other courses leading to different forms of accreditation, which many would find beneficial and more relevant to their interests. The school identifies pupils in Year 7 who seem, from their performance in earlier tests to be gifted in school based subjects. Pupils who display talents in related or other areas are also identified and this information is shared with all subject departments. No special arrangements are made for these pupils within lessons other than would normally be made for pupils of differing ability. However, a range of external activities is used to extend and challenge them. For example, the school promotes mathematics competitions, problem-solving activities within commercial organisations, Young Enterprise, an Engineering Education Project, Nuffield Science Bursaries, and major involvement in the organisation, training and performance for the school's prestigious annual productions in music, drama and dance. In physical education, talented youngsters are encouraged to reach their full potential through area and national trials and through high level coaching courses, for example in badminton. Pupils have been selected for national squads, such as the England Youth Football Team.

40. Careers education and guidance are good. The programme of study enables pupils to consider their suitability for a range of career options, what they need to do to achieve them and how to apply for vacancies. A careers advisory service provides very good support and organises work experience for pupils in Year 10. It also helps to find a suitable alternative curriculum for pupils who are at risk of exclusion or who are likely to have difficulty finding employment after school. This service effectively improves the employment prospects of the pupils involved and could usefully be extended to more pupils. Mock interviews with employers are not arranged but an industry week involving business-solving problems is a good experience for the pupils. Teaching is good and is supported by an appropriate range of literature and software applications.

41. The school's involvement with partner institutions is very good and its relationships with the primary schools that provide most of the Year 7 intake are excellent. Curricular links are very well established, an excellent example being the drama work done with the pupils in Year 6 of a nearby school. Close and frequent liaison ensures that all relevant information, including that for pupils who have special education needs, is shared in a timely fashion. Transition arrangements between the schools are very well managed and pupils are as well prepared as they can be to move to their new school.

42. The school has established very close links with the Army Welfare Service in order to integrate as sensitively as possible those pupils who belong to Army families currently serving abroad but whose regiment returns to the locality after a tour of service. The arrangements are very good and ensure the effective integration of the pupils.

43. The school has very well established links with colleges of further and higher education and various organisations and employers that provide opportunities for vocational experiences, industry related competitions and projects for the pupils.

44. Involvement with the community is very good. Examples of use of the community include exchanges with European students, ski trips, theatre, art, music, and drama experiences out of school, residential fieldwork and visits to government buildings in London. Links exist with local sporting clubs and pupils and students use local facilities such a leisure centre. Much competitive sport is played with other schools. Links with industry are extensive and include young enterprise and engineering schemes, a young consumer project and work with health organisations and St. Johns Ambulance Brigade. Pupils and students organise and support charitable causes.

Sixth form

45. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good. The school provides a good quality of education for its students. However, the statutory requirements for religious education are not met.

46. The school offers courses in 24 subjects at AS and A2-level, but does not provide the opportunity to follow any advanced vocational courses. Students are made fully aware of the opportunities available to

them through other post-16 providers in the district where these types of courses operate in better-equipped and more suitable environments. The senior management of the school is considering the possible introduction of a range of vocational courses for pupils aged from 14 to 19. However, current students say they are very satisfied with the courses on offer. They consider that the curriculum meets their needs and interests and allows them to build on their prior attainment and continue to make good progress.

47. The sixth form provides opportunities for a very good range of enrichment activities. These include a major production in music, dance and drama, more general involvement in the orchestra, bands and choir, helping younger pupils, for example in special educational needs groups, a significant charity fundraising effort involving the whole school, and helping out in local primary schools. The limitations of the facilities for physical education make it impossible for the school to provide formal recreational opportunities for sixth form students. However, the students do, through their own ingenuity, form teams for various sports and individually take advantage, during the time free from formal lessons, of the leisure centre which shares part of the school's site.

48. The school provides students with very good advice on universities and other higher education institutions, often involving external speakers from those establishments, and has a wide range of literature and prospectuses in the school library/resource centre. Members of the Connexions Service have a base in the school. They help students with advice on higher education and on careers informally or in organised individual interviews.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

49. Provision for the development of pupils' spiritual awareness is satisfactory. There is an act of worship, broadly Christian in character, every day for some pupils. This provision falls short of the statutory requirement. Assemblies provide an opportunity for issues to be raised and reflected upon. There is usually a moment of prayer or quiet reflection. The music provided at assemblies greatly enhances these occasions. Assemblies also provide an opportunity to celebrate achievement and develop a sense of shared community. Awareness of the spiritual dimension of life is encouraged in a number of other ways within the curriculum. For example, specific units within religious education lessons focus on spirituality and look at belief in God and consider the questions of evil and suffering. Aesthetic awareness is promoted well within the expressive and creative arts. A good display of Year 7 work in geography shows how pupils are encouraged to think about the cycles of nature and of life.

50. The school's provision for moral education is very good. Pupils respond positively to the high expectations of teachers with regard to their behaviour and work. There is a clear code of conduct that pupils understand and accept. Sixth form students are encouraged to provide leadership for younger members of the school and help to co-ordinate the many events used to raise money for different charities. Pupils successfully learn about the differences between right and wrong in many aspects of school life. Moral issues are explored effectively. For example, in psychology, students consider the contribution of money to human happiness. Business ethics and human exploitation form the basis for profound discussions, as do topics such as abortion and the implications of developments in human cloning techniques. The current political situation regarding the war in Iraq is a topic that is recurring in a great number of lessons.

51. Provision for social development is very good. Pupils' work together in pairs or larger groups thus developing their social and communication skills. They listen to each other and to their teachers with respect and learn the rules for civilised debate. In many subjects they look at the organisation of society into rich and poor and the levels of interdependence and goodwill that are required for society to co-exist. Teachers explain clearly the values and objectives of individuals, society and governments. Students are guided to appreciate the views of others and the effect of individuals' choices on society and the environment. Lessons on the importance of social harmony help pupils to recognise the factors that help, or hinder, harmony within the community. Global issues are explored effectively in subjects such as geography and business studies.

52. The school makes good provision for pupils' cultural development. Within the curriculum there are many opportunities for pupils to learn to appreciate their own culture and that of others. School productions and musical activities enable pupils to participate in, and enjoy, traditional and modern entertainments. The modern foreign language department celebrates European culture in displays of work and promotes links with two schools in Brittany through exchange visits. The art department offers a 6th form visit to Italy and ensures that the art of many different cultures is studied. The religious education department enhances pupils' understanding of world religions and the history department raises awareness of the experience of black people in America, Islam in the middle ages and the place of religion in determining present day attitudes. An equal opportunities committee has operated in the school since 1989. Its brief is to raise awareness of issues that might have implications for life in school, such as religious differences and gender issues.

53. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is therefore good overall. The provision is incidental rather than explicit. Its importance would be further enhanced if departments were required to make it explicit in their schemes of work.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

54. The arrangements for pupils' health, safety and welfare are good. The monitoring of pupils' academic performance and personal development are good. Educational and personal support and guidance for pupils are good. Some improvements have been achieved since the previous inspection but some concerns remain. Some parents are not satisfied with some aspects of the school's provision for pupils' welfare.

55. The procedures for child protection are well managed and the overall arrangements for health and safety with regard to the premises and the curriculum are good. First aid provision is adequate. The school is well supported by relevant specialist education and health agencies. Improvements have been made to dining arrangements at lunchtime and they are now satisfactory. Seating has been installed in the grounds through the initiative of pupils. Owing to the need to have two sittings at lunchtime, recreational activities are limited while half of the school continues with lessons. The condition of some toilet facilities continues to be unsatisfactory. Despite the presence of adult supervisors, the school does not fully succeed in eliminating smoking and the mistreatment of toilets. The school has not, therefore, fully dealt with the issue raised by the previous inspection, which was to give greater consideration to pupils' needs at breaks and lunchtimes.

56. The quality of pastoral care is a strength of the school. Relationships between pupils and year heads and tutors are constructive and mutually respectful. Pastoral staff go to considerable lengths to meet the individual needs of the pupils and succeed in making pupils feel safe, valued, supported and encouraged. The school makes exceptionally good arrangements for the transfer of pupils from other schools, especially the children of parents who have been serving abroad in the armed forces and who are then relocated nearby. These pupils integrate well and their attainment and achievement by the time they leave the school is similar to that of other pupils of equal ability.

57. Very great care is taken to identify pupils with special educational needs and to ensure that those needs are met. This starts with an effective link with the feeder primary schools. The school undertakes further assessment early in Year 7 to pinpoint these pupils' difficulties more clearly and to identify others who may need specific help with their learning. The school meets the needs of these pupils through thorough use of individual education plans, which have been well devised and carefully written. Initially the focus is directed to ensuring that pupils are at least functionally literate. Representatives from every subject department and the co-ordinator for special educational needs meet regularly to discuss their own training needs and to plan for continuity and progression in pupils' studies. This boosts pupils' confidence because they learn to transfer skills from one subject to another. Annual reviews of pupils' work and achievement are conducted sensitively and rigorously, as was witnessed during a transitional review

during the inspection. Pupils for whom English is a second language mostly cope well with their studies and need very little additional support. However, the school needs to revise and extend its general information to staff so that teachers become aware of the specific needs of these pupils at all stages of English acquisition.

58. Attendance is satisfactorily monitored but the absence of a whole-school computerised system results in too much time being spent in administration and follow-up procedures. This inhibits effective analysis and fast response. A minority of pupils makes too little effort to arrive at school on time because they do not sufficiently value the first period of the day, which is always form time or PSHE. Good attendance is recognised and celebrated by the school.

59. The procedures for monitoring and supporting behaviour are good. Most teachers manage behaviour consistently well in lessons. Clear guidelines are in place and codes of conduct are displayed and understood. The school successfully keeps exclusion to a minimum but is less successful in its attempts to eliminate the mistreatment of toilets, smoking and litter, despite the fact that teachers and sixth form students patrol in large numbers. The teaching of moral and social principles and responsible attitudes are very apparent across the curriculum. The arrangements for the induction and integration of new pupils to the school at all times of the year are very good. Good behaviour is celebrated and pupils confirm that most instances of anti-social behaviour are reported and are usually effectively dealt with. Pastoral staff secure the co-operation of the majority of parents in supporting the school's strategies for improving their children's behaviour.

60. The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development are good. Heads of year maintain relevant records. PSHE lessons provide good opportunities to develop appropriate attitudes towards, and awareness of, society, and also for self-evaluation. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to use their initiative and take on responsibility although these could be extended even further. Opportunities such as peer counselling and year councils are organised at the discretion of the heads of year for example. They have limited scope at present. Experiences out of school, such as visits to parliament, exchanges abroad and participation in productions and competitions add a range of dimensions that contribute well to pupils' growing maturity. Each pupil in Years 10 and 11 is assigned to a member of the teaching staff who acts as a personal mentor. This approach contributes very effectively to pupils' efforts and personal development.

61. Assessment procedures are very good. Pupils' attainment and progress are monitored well. The information gained is analysed and used well to assist planning for lessons and in the setting of targets so that pupils and teachers know what is expected of them. Whole-school targets are also set by ethnicity. The results clearly indicate that pupils of all backgrounds achieve equally well in relation to their ability and potential. Subject departments adapt school policies to suit their individual needs. This leads to some inconsistencies. For example, assessment procedures are very good in English, history, geography, art and business education. They are good in other subjects, except for ICT, music and modern foreign languages where they are satisfactory. Overall, monitoring of progress within departments is very good and pupils are aware of the standards they are achieving by way of National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades, and what they should do to improve. The use of assessment data is very good. It underpins the targets set for national tests examinations at the end of Years 9 and 11.

Sixth form

Assessment

62. Assessment procedures are good. Students' progress is closely monitored and supported by form tutors and subject teachers. Students firmly believe that they know what progress they are making and how they should be able to improve their standards of work. Each term in Year 12, sixth form tutors carry out individual reviews with the students, focusing on how they are coping, what school activities they are involved in, reviewing targets and setting new ones, and planning future courses. This is continued in Year 13, when the emphasis is on strengths and weaknesses, deadlines for coursework,

potential grades and how to achieve them, and final decisions on higher education. All reviews are formally recorded in writing. In addition, an annual report is provided for students and their parents, supported by interim reports from subject teachers to assist the process of monitoring progress. Students themselves are required to build up a personal action plan to ensure that they too are clearly aware of how well they are doing and what else they need to do to achieve their potential.

Advice, support and guidance

63. Educational and personal support and guidance for students are very good. Health and safety arrangements are good and students' attendance is carefully monitored so that their whereabouts are known at all times. Pastoral care is of a high order and relationships are such that students are able to confide in their tutors and request their assistance and advice as needed. Students confirm that the quality of teaching and the support of almost all of their tutors enable them to achieve as well as they are able to.

64. Private study facilities are mostly very good except in the areas of performing arts and physical education. The effect on standards achieved in these two subjects is minimal because students use their initiative and find other locations to rehearse. The two common rooms are barely adequate because they are very crowded and separate Year 12 from Year 13 students, which adversely affects the students' sense of community.

65. Students receive very good information about subject choices before they enter the sixth form. Individual discussions are arranged between Year 11 pupils and Year 13 tutors so that questions can be posed and advice shared about the most appropriate actions to take in the light of students' aspirations and suitability. Induction into the sixth form is good and, overall, opportunities and expectations are very clear. Students receive excellent information, advice, support and guidance regarding higher education and are given much valued assistance with their applications for university places. A careers advisory service provides very well for those students who wish to pursue other routes.

66. Form tutors maintain comprehensive records regarding students' personal development and these are included in the discussions between tutors and students at their half-yearly reviews. A very good range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities are available to the students. Their involvement in them and particularly their support for younger pupils in the lower school contribute much to their own personal development, and also to the quality of the whole school community.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

67. The partnership between school and parents is satisfactory. Parents are pleased with the educational standards achieved but some are dissatisfied with aspects of communication and pupils' welfare. The previous inspection report described the partnership as good and parents' views were more positive than at present.

68. Parents' opinions of the school are satisfactory. They are pleased that their children attend the school because they have confidence that they will achieve well due to the good standard of teaching and teachers' high expectations of the pupils. Parents appreciate how the school helps pupils to become mature and responsible. A very good feature of the school is the Parent Year Group Representative Committees, which meet regularly with senior members of staff. However, some parents claim to be unaware of these despite the full contact details that the school publishes. Although most parents consider that the leadership of the school is good, some feel, with some justification, that the school does not work closely enough with them. The school does not provide pupils with a homework diary or similar planner through which parents can check their children's homework or exchange comments with teachers on a daily or weekly basis. This is of concern to parents and accounts for their dissatisfaction with communication about pupils' homework, conduct and awareness of imminent events. In other respects, communication is good.

69. Some parents consider that the welfare of their children is compromised because of the poor quality of many of the toilet facilities. This is partly due to demands placed on facilities on a site that is relatively small for the large number of pupils in the school. Lunchtime arrangements have improved since the previous inspection and the school manages them as well as can be expected in view of the limitations of the premises. The school acknowledges parents' concerns about the provision of lockers for pupils' books and property but is not able to take action because of the constraints of space. Parents are right to acknowledge that although the school promotes appropriate moral and social codes and provides considerable supervision around the buildings, it has difficulty enforcing responsible conduct with regard to the minority of pupils who choose to be disruptive and, for example, vandalise toilets and smoke in them. The range of extra-curricular activities, which some parents regard as insufficient, is very good.

70. The school keeps parents of pupils with special educational needs very closely informed about their progress through involvement in the review of individual education plans, annual reviews of statements, and parents' evenings. Teachers are also very ready to meet with and talk to parents at any time.

71. The school provides satisfactory information about the life of the school through its newsletters. These are accurate and detailed but the presentation is not as eye-catching as is found in many schools today. The use of ICT is not exploited to its full potential in this respect. Annual school reports are satisfactory and there are more than adequate opportunities for parents to consult with teachers at the various stages of their children's education. The information provided for parents of prospective pupils, and the induction process for the pupils themselves, are very good. Last year an ICT education workshop was organised for new parents and approximately one in every four attended.

72. Parents support school performances and activities well. Attendance at most meetings is good. The Friends of School group is very active and raises considerable funds to assist the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

73. The school is very well led and managed and so provides a very good quality of education for its pupils and students. Leadership is decisive. The management structure has been extended since the previous inspection to include a clear chain of delegated responsibilities. Teachers and non-teaching staff are loyal to the school. They are committed to the maintenance of high standards and the provision of opportunities to broaden pupils' and students' horizons on every front. A particularly good example is the involvement of staff from many subject departments in the very successful school productions. The leadership team has established a very good ethos for learning. The provision serves the school's diverse population well in that most pupils, backed by their parents, are satisfied with the range of subjects and opportunities offered. However, some pupils feel that their programme of study is restricted because there are very few opportunities for them to study practical and vocational subjects to examination level in Years 10 and 11. Inspectors agree with them.

74. Pupils, students and adults integrate well in this large community. The headteacher and senior staff have high profiles about the school, particularly at break, lunchtime and after school. They use this time well to talk to pupils and listen to their views. All aspects of the school's work are monitored systematically and the information gained is used to sustain and further improve performance. Managers with curriculum and other responsibilities are accountable for their department's work. They work hard to meet the school's high expectations. There are appropriate channels for communication and cross-fertilisation of ideas but some of these could be refined to avoid duplication of work.

75. The supportive education department and the hearing impairment unit are well-organised and managed. The teachers in charge work closely together and liaise on a regular basis with staff throughout the school, keeping them fully informed of the difficulties which pupils experience and how to tackle them. Arrangements for the withdrawal of pupils from lessons, the deployment of the small number of learning support assistants, and the arrangements for helping pupils outside timetabled periods are successful in raising pupils' standards, particularly of those who need help with reading, spelling,

numeracy and life skills. The learning assistants also provide good support where pupils for whom English is a second language need help in the development of their literacy skills. Since the previous inspection the funding for special educational needs has been thoroughly reviewed and it is wholly and properly dedicated to the education of pupils who experience learning difficulties.

76. The governing body is very effective in carrying out its responsibilities, although it does not fully provide for a religious education in the sixth form and a daily act of collective worship throughout the school. Governors are fully involved in strategic planning. They have a good understanding of the constraints affecting the implementation of priorities, for example, the lack of social areas for pupils to congregate outside lessons and the poor quality of some of the buildings. Nevertheless, governors set challenging targets. They regularly review outcomes and give good support to the school when remedial action is required.

77. The school has a sufficient number of suitably qualified and experienced teachers, who are used to good effect to meet the curricular needs of pupils. Technical, administrative and clerical staff provide good support to ensure the smooth running of the school. However, there are insufficient learning support assistants to fully meet the needs of all the pupils with special educational needs, although there has been some improvement since the previous inspection. The approach to the performance management of teachers is very comprehensive, well documented, thorough and very rigorous. In turn, this leads to a very clear identification of teachers' professional development needs in addition to those already highlighted by departmental and national priorities. Similarly, newly appointed and newly qualified teachers benefit from a good induction programme.

78. Although there has been considerable improvement since the last inspection, the quality of the school accommodation remains a significant problem with the stark contrast between the new, well-appointed provision and older, dilapidated and cramped areas. In particular, better provision is needed for dance and drama, although paradoxically the quality of dance and drama is a strength of the school. Other aspects of relatively poor provision are: indoor physical education, currently necessitating use of the nearby Leisure Centre; social accommodation for older pupils; access for the disabled; better classroom access in a block with no corridors and refurbishment of pupils' toilets.

79. Resources for teaching and learning are generally good. However, although the computer suites are well equipped, there is insufficient provision for ICT within most subject departments, a noteworthy exception being music, which makes good use of its own ICT room. The school benefits from a good library/resource centre, which is very well-stocked, maintained and organised by a qualified librarian, and well used by pupils.

80. Upton is an efficient school, which, because the governors, headteacher and finance manager manage the budget very well, gives very good value for money. Financial information is well presented to the governing body so that every member is fully aware of what is being approved. A close track is kept of expenditure enabling forecasts of flexibility or impending difficulty to be managed well. The school adheres well to the principles of best value, for example in buying into the local education authority scheme for the training of teachers. Comparative data is used well to compare costs of goods and services. Specific grants are spent on their intended purposes.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

81. The sixth form is very well led and managed by a head of sixth form, who is assisted by a caring and committed team of tutors. It is a very popular sixth form, which attracts students from a wide area. It certainly fulfils the school's aims to provide a caring, civilised and challenging learning environment in which high standards are expected, and to match the curriculum to students' needs and aspirations. Reviews of students' progress, as witnessed during the inspection, are thorough, rigorous and searching.

As a result, any underachievement is quickly identified and remedial action taken. Teaching and learning are very good overall.

82. Sixth form documentation guides tutors and students very well. It is comprehensive and ensures a consistency of approach. Students benefit, too, from a very good induction into the sixth form, starting with a detailed programme of preparation in Year 11. This is enhanced by the high quality of advice, guidance and support offered to students throughout their time in the sixth form.

83. As with the rest of the school, the sixth form has sufficient, suitably qualified and experienced teachers whose subject knowledge and scholarship present students with sufficient challenge to be able to succeed. Social accommodation for students is cramped for their number and unattractive, whereas the arrangements for their private study are better, with a dedicated area for them within the school library/resource centre.

Resources

84. The provision of learning resources is good. There is a good match of experienced and qualified teachers to meet the demands of the curriculum. The provision of social and private study areas has improved since the previous inspection. However, they are still insufficient to meet the needs of the large sixth form. It is clear from the information provided by the school that the sixth form is very cost-effective.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

85. In order to consolidate and sustain the good quality of the school's work, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

(1) Make better use of the time pupils spend with form tutors by:

- checking whether the time allocated to the tutor period each day is being used effectively,
- improving the administration of attendance procedures to enable staff to make a faster follow-up response to pupils' absence,
- devising a reliable form of daily or weekly communication that increases parents' awareness of homework activities and provides an avenue for regular communication with the school.

(Paragraphs 37, 58, 68)

(2) Improve the provision for PSHE in Years 7-8 by:

- providing specific training in the various elements of the course for all the teachers involved,
- ensuring that the programme is taught consistently, and covered in full, in all classes.

(Paragraph 37)

(3) Provide more opportunities for pupils to use ICT across all subjects of the curriculum.

(Paragraphs 11, 24, 79, 92, 120, 140, 148, 162, 205, 212)

(4) Provide more opportunities for pupils to study practical and vocational subjects in Years 10 and 11.

(Paragraphs 36, 78, 99, 183, 231)

Sixth form

(1) Make provision for the inclusion of religious education in the sixth form curriculum.

(Paragraphs 45, 76)

(2) Provide better social and recreational facilities for the sixth form as soon as is reasonably practicable.

(Paragraphs 47, 78)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	148
	Sixth form	72
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		77

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7– 11							
Number	6	42	69	27	4	0	0
Percentage	4	28	47	18	3	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	4	35	28	4	1	0	0
Percentage	5	49	39	6	1	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1371	284
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	113	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	9	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	143	3

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	36

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	104
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	85

Attendance

Authorised absence

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	6.9
National comparative data	7.8

	%
School data	0.4
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)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	135	144	279

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	102	120	111
	Girls	124	116	118
	Total	226	236	229
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82(84)	85(81)	82(82)
	National	66(64)	67(66)	66(66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	46(56)	65(58)	48(53)
	National	32(31)	45(43)	33(34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	109	127	111
	Girls	131	133	118
	Total	240	260	229
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	86(79)	94(85)	82(86)
	National	67(65)	70(68)	67(64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	51(43)	59(58)	46(53)
	National	32(31)	44(42)	34(33)

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2002	128	133	261

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	75	124	125
	Girls	100	129	129
	Total	175	253	254
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	67(65)	97(97)	97(98)
	National	50(48)	91(91)	96(96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	43.5
	National	39.8

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

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

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	43	77	120
	Average point score per candidate	298.6 (22.2)	296.0 (23.0)	296.9 (22.6)
National	Average point score per candidate	272.9 (16.9)	290.0 (17.7)	281.2 (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	43	77	120	Na	Na	Na
	Average point score per candidate	298.6	296.0	296.9	Na	Na	Na
National	Average point score per candidate	272.9	290.0	281.2	Na	Na	Na

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	1076	4	2
White – Irish	5		
White – any other White background	17		
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	3		
Mixed – White and Black African	1		
Mixed – White and Asian	3		
Mixed – any other mixed background	3		
Asian or Asian British - Indian	4		
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	1		
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	1	1
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2		
Black or Black British – Caribbean	2		
Black or Black British – African	2		
Black or Black British – any other Black background	1		
Chinese	4		
Any other ethnic group	7		
No ethnic group recorded	523		

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)	97
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.1

Education support staff: Y7– Y13

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	302

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	24.6
Key Stage 4	21.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2002
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	£
Total income	4138085
Total expenditure	4213881
Expenditure per pupil	2609
Balance brought forward from previous year	197759
Balance carried forward to next year	121963

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	11.2
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	12.1

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2.4
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

1655

Number of questionnaires returned

423

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31.8	56.7	9.6	1.4	0.5
My child is making good progress in school.	43.8	49.5	4.8	0.5	1.4
Behaviour in the school is good.	24.4	57.3	10.8	2.2	5.3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	21.7	54.1	17.5	5.1	1.6
The teaching is good.	26.7	65.1	5.1	0.7	2.4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	21.1	51.2	22.7	3.8	1.2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	39.3	46.7	9.8	2.6	1.6
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	50.3	44.9	2.2	0.7	1.9
The school works closely with parents.	17.8	48.3	23.7	6.9	3.3
The school is well led and managed.	34.5	51.0	5.7	3.3	5.5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	32.8	55.7	7.2	1.9	2.4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	29.9	39.2	15.6	5.3	10.0

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 **very good**.

Strengths

- Pupils' results in national tests and GCSE examinations are well above average.
- All pupils study English and English literature in Years 10 and 11. They achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Excellent leadership ensures that the department is successful and forward-looking.

Areas for improvement

- The proportion of pupils achieving the highest grade at GCSE could be raised.
- More use could be made of ICT.

86. Standards of work are well above average in Years 9 and 11. This represents very good achievement throughout the school, given that standards on entry to the school are average. Pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 have been consistently well above average over the past four years. Boys and girls have performed equally well. In 2002, results were also well above average compared with schools of similar background. Pupils' performance in English is similar to that in mathematics and science.

87. Pupils' performance at GCSE in English and English literature in 2002 was well above the national average. Since 1999, there has been a rising trend in the proportion of pupils attaining grades A*-C in both subjects, but a steady fall in the proportion of A* grades. This was particularly noticeable in literature in 2002, although more than half of the entry gained grade B or above. All pupils study both English and English literature and the proportion entered for both examinations and achieving grades A*-G is very high compared with national figures.

88. By the end of Year 9, standards in speaking and listening are well above national expectations because there are frequent opportunities for pupils to develop their discussion skills in lessons. Pupils speak confidently, willingly volunteer to read aloud and talk effectively in group work to explore and share ideas. This was exemplified in a Year 11 lesson in which pupils worked in pairs to decide whether an article by Bill Bryson was written to persuade or entertain readers: they then explained and justified their decision to the class.

89. Reading is also well above average. The department and the librarian work well together to inculcate a reading-for-pleasure culture, and pupils are encouraged to keep reading records and write book reviews. By the end of Year 9, most pupils readily make inferences, deductions and predictions based on their reading of fiction, poetry, drama, media and other texts, and can read to find information. All can use the Internet for research. Because all pupils follow the GCSE courses in English and English literature, they read a wide range of challenging texts and make very good progress in their understanding and interpretations. The lowest attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 enthusiastically tackle their course texts, including Shakespeare, whilst higher attaining pupils read Keats's poetry and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* fluently, critically and with assured maturity.

90. The standards and accuracy of writing are well above average in all year groups owing to the teachers' insistence on pupils' correct use of grammar and development of a wide vocabulary and writing styles. However, some pupils of all ages do not spell as well as they should, given their overall ability in English. The department is targeting this skill in particular. By the end of Year 9, lower attaining pupils write simple but interesting stories, descriptions, poems and responses to their reading, such as a

character study of Lady Macbeth, whilst the most able compare Macbeth with Macduff or write about how Shakespeare presents heroism, ambition or retribution in the play. In Year 11, pupils show a good awareness of audience in their work and the most able produce carefully considered and sensitive descriptions and analyses of media and literature texts. The lower attaining pupils often offer description, narrative and unnecessary biographical and historical information, in their literature assignments, instead of interpretations based on the writer's own words. However, many successfully attempt testing textual comparisons because they have learned to apply the useful frameworks provided by their teachers.

91. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is a second language make very good progress because teachers work closely with support staff and use the good quality, individual education plans to meet these pupils' needs. They are prepared well for entry to GCSE examinations in English and English literature. The highest attaining pupils are not yet achieving a sufficient number of A* grades in GCSE examinations. The department is aware of this and is devising strategies to identify and challenge these pupils.

92. Pupils' learning is enhanced by a good quality, broad curriculum. A *Readathon*, Book Week and good use of the library, and the expertise of the librarian, give a high profile to reading outside of lessons. There are writing competitions and visits to the theatre, as well as close links with drama, art, music and dance, particularly in Year 7 for whom there is an annual Visual and Performing Arts Evening. All pupils in Year 7 have a weekly drama lesson. In other year groups, the study of English includes media, as well as literature. Pupils are encouraged to use ICT to develop their learning, and many do so at home, but there are problems, for some classes, in gaining regular access to computers in school.

93. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Most of the teaching is very good, but there are some weaknesses. The marking of pupils' work is supportive and teachers give pupils good advice on how to improve, especially in Years 10 and 11. Further strengths in the teaching include high expectations, of both pupils' behaviour and attainment, and thorough lesson planning. Good quality, interesting, new schemes of work which incorporate the NLS in Years 7-9, and the recent examination syllabus changes in the GCSE, help this planning. In a very good Year 9 lesson, pupils developed their knowledge and understanding of the social and economic background to the Elizabethan theatre through basing their work on the historical heritage in Chester. This was further illustrated and reinforced when they watched an extract from *Shakespeare in Love* and completed observation and comment sheets following paired discussions. In the few less successful, but nevertheless satisfactory, lessons, teachers identified what they wanted pupils to do, rather than the skills, knowledge or understanding they would learn. They also had limited strategies for dealing with challenging behaviour and were not fully aware of individual pupils' progress or the help they required.

94. The management of English is very good. Teaching and marking are well monitored and there is excellent communication through weekly bulletins and regular meetings. Responsibilities are appropriately delegated. Thorough development planning, clearly linked to the school's priorities, is raising the standards of teaching and learning even further. Leadership is excellent. It has sustained vision and morale through some very difficult times, including staffing and recruitment problems and the under-marking of pupils' external test and examination papers. The team of specialist teachers is constantly looking for ways to improve its practice. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Standards have been maintained, the National Literacy Strategy has been well implemented and there are more curriculum enrichment opportunities.

Drama

95. The quality of provision for drama is very good. Standards are well above average in Years 7-9. In Years 10 and 11, standards are consistently well above those found nationally. Pupils' results at GCSE in 2002 were very high, the vast majority of candidates gaining A*-C grades. Evidence from the inspection indicates that standards of work, of both girls and boys in all years, are well above average.

96. Pupils are introduced to the subject's disciplines and techniques at an early stage so, when they start their GCSE course, they have a good understanding of requirements. At the start of Year 10, they can already improvise and role-play, and use freeze frames, thought tracking and hot seating to create characters and to explore situations and concepts. They know how voice and body language, levels and use of space contribute to effective performances. A particular strength is the way pupils co-operate with and support each other. They appreciate and evaluate their own and others' work using the examination board's criteria. They respond readily to the teacher's direction, but also make their own decisions and use the drama studio in a serious and creative way. This was seen in a Year 7 class, which devised excellent tableaux to illustrate quotations from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

97. The drama curriculum in all years is very good. Besides developing pupils' knowledge of dramatists, practitioners and stagecraft, there are regular, planned opportunities for the exploration of important social and moral issues, such as drug addiction, bullying and smoking. Frequent problem solving and decision-making activities form part of most lessons. Additionally, schemes of work are linked to English lessons so, for example, pupils in Year 9 study the Shakespeare scenes set for the national tests. The department's contribution to citizenship is further enhanced through pupils' collaborative working in regular school productions and through visits that give them important experience of the professional theatre. The school productions are of a high standard and show impressive teamwork and co-operation between a large number of staff, from a wide range of subjects, and almost two hundred pupils.

98. Teaching is very good overall: some is excellent. Lesson planning is thorough and activities are challenging and rewarding. There is good support for pupils with special educational needs. Teachers have impressive subject knowledge, know and have high expectations of all pupils and often inspire them to try new ideas and techniques. They give them the confidence to experiment for themselves. Pupils are thoroughly involved in the assessment process, know how well they are doing and the action they need to take to improve further.

99. Leadership and management are very good. Planning is excellent and there are useful links with other curriculum areas. Resources are satisfactory but the single drama studio is insufficient for the number of drama lessons on the timetable. Members of the department work well together, have a common philosophy and are constantly seeking new ways to ensure that pupils' learning is enjoyable, purposeful, relevant and challenging, and that it equips them well for life within and outside school.

Key skills across the curriculum - Literacy

100. Provision for the development of pupils' literacy skills is good. The National Literacy Strategy has been well implemented across the curriculum, following appropriate whole school training. Most departments have an effective literacy policy.

101. Pupils speak confidently and well because there are frequent opportunities for them to use talk to develop and extend their learning in pairs and groups. Some very good and imaginative work was seen in history when pupils held a role-play in which they 'interviewed Archduke Ferdinand'. In almost all subjects, pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own and others' work and to make constructive suggestions for improvement. Such evaluations are common in music, drama and art, for example, but opportunities are missed in physical education and design and technology. Pupils readily volunteer to answer and to read aloud in class.

102. Nearly all pupils read a variety of texts, including Internet research and newspaper and magazine articles, to further their knowledge and to seek information. However, in a few subjects, the reading requirements rarely go beyond the textbooks used. Some of the best practice is in religious education, art and geography. In these subjects, pupils use the school library and the Internet very successfully and this is often reflected in the good quality of their writing.

103. Standards of writing across the school are well above average. Work is well planned and written by all but a few of the least able. These pupils are often provided with prompts and structures to help

them with their writing. In some subjects, pupils are encouraged to write imaginatively as well as discursively. Some excellent work was seen in geography, especially in Years 7-9. Pupils regularly write poetry, stories and diaries that demonstrate both their impressive creativity and their good subject knowledge.

104. The management and strategies for teaching literacy across the curriculum are good. However, practice and success vary widely, both across and within departments. The development of literacy skills is not yet being monitored consistently enough within subject areas. There are excellent links with the primary feeder schools, which give continuity to pupils' learning. Progress units are being used satisfactorily in Year 7 to help pupils raise their work to the National Curriculum level expected for their age (level 4) at the start of secondary education.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average and pupils achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Management and organisation are very good.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to their work.

Areas for improvement

- The variety of teaching and learning styles could be extended.

105. Pupils' results in the national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well above average, maintaining the trend of previous years. Results were well above average compared with similar schools and represent very good progress from Year 7. The proportions of pupils reaching and exceeding the level expected for their age (level 5) were well above average. There was no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.

106. GCSE results in 2002 were well above average. Pupils sustained the very good standards they attained in Year 9. Boys and girls achieved similarly. The proportions of A*/A grades and A*-C grades were well above average. All the pupils entered for the examination obtained a grade, almost all grade F and above.

107. Standards of work are well above average in Year 9. Overall, pupils achieve very well from entry in Year 7 when their attainment was broadly average. Pupils' standards in mental and written arithmetic are well above average and support their work in algebra, graphs and investigations well. Higher attaining pupils understand, can draw and compare graphs of quadratic functions, both manually and using computers, and can competently predict the shape of the graphs. In the lessons observed, average attaining pupils were competent in comparing fractions, decimals and percentages in an oral exercise without calculators. They were able to calculate increase and decrease of various quantities, transferring between percentages and decimals proficiently. The lowest attaining pupils had good spatial awareness and worked together effectively in small groups. They understand nets of shapes, dimensions of length, height and width and can apply these to investigative problems.

108. Standards are well above average in Year 11. Pupils achieve very well over the five years in the school. These high standards result from pupils' good response to effective teaching that enables them to master the GCSE topics. Above average skills in arithmetic support the pupils' learning in algebra, statistics and graphical work. GCSE coursework is of good quality. The highest attaining pupils understand transformations of quadratic functions, can sketch these manually to predict comparisons and

compare graphs using graph drawing software. They are moving confidently towards GCSE grades A* and A. Average attaining pupils are confident in drawing quadratic graphs and relatively confident in finding the locus of equidistant points. They can apply their knowledge to past examination papers effectively. These pupils are working well towards levels B and C at GCSE. Pupils in the lower ability groups are making very good progress. They understand and apply prime numbers, fractions and percentages and statistical averages competently in examination style questions. Most are ambitious and are working well towards the GCSE grades predicted for them. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is a second language make good progress through the school because they are taught well. Many begin their studies in Year 7 with a very weak grasp of basic arithmetical skills but by Year 11 they succeed in entering for GCSE examinations.

109. Pupils' attitudes to their work in mathematics are very good throughout the school and have a positive effect on their learning. Consequently, the learning atmosphere in classrooms is consistently very good. Pupils are confident. They discuss their work with peers and teachers in a mature manner. Behaviour in lessons is generally good.

110. Overall, teaching and learning are very good throughout the school. Teachers prepare pupils very well for national tests at the end of Year 9 and GCSE in Year 11. The overall high quality of teaching supports pupils of all abilities well. Teachers have high expectations. They have developed effective questioning techniques which, combined with a thorough revision programme, enable pupils to achieve their potential. Teachers set and discuss targets with pupils, indicating how they can be achieved. The use of ICT in whole class lessons has been well developed in several areas of the curriculum. Effective use of team teaching with lower attaining pupils in Year 9 is a model of good practice that could usefully be transferred to broaden the range of teaching and learning styles in other year groups. Teachers manage their classes very well and most lessons move at a good pace. Planning is very good. In most lessons, the aims are shared with the pupils at the outset so that they know what they are expected to learn. The structure of the curriculum is usefully shared with pupils so that they understand how different aspects of the work fit together in the progression of their studies. The practice of starting lessons with oral work in Years 7 to 9 is well developed and is effectively used by staff to recapitulate and reinforce prior learning. Learning support assistants work effectively with individual pupils or small groups but this help is sometimes not available in all the relevant lessons. This then slows progress for all the pupils in the class. A variety of activities is being developed to challenge pupils' thinking. However, there are limited opportunities for independent learning, which would enable some pupils to progress even faster.

111. The management and organisation of mathematics are very good. An effective leadership style is encouraging the development of a collegiate approach to management. All staff contribute to the development of a structured and comprehensive curriculum. Administration is shared effectively using a good ICT based system. The National Numeracy Strategy has been incorporated well into the work of the department and has fostered the development of interesting oral starters to lessons. These are clearly enjoyed by the pupils. Monitoring and evaluation of attainment and progress are very good. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. In order to improve further the department should continue to develop the range of teaching and learning styles, incorporating these into the existing curriculum.

Key skills across the curriculum- Numeracy

112. The mathematics department is developing links with other subjects in the school to enable pupils to be presented with common methods of working in arithmetic and data handling. In some departments this is well advanced and has fostered the development of some very good practice. Particularly good examples were observed in art where Year 9 pupils used geometry to analyse the composition of a Renaissance painting, and in geography where pupils were using and developing their skills in representing data in graphs. Pupils competently analyse and use statistical work in English, science and business studies. Good practice is being developed in Year 7 where a numeracy activity is practised each week in one of the form tutor periods. Most staff promote this well and teach it very effectively.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Results in national tests and GCSE examinations are well above average.
- Teaching is very good. Teachers and support staff work together very well as a team.
- The subject is very well managed.

Areas for improvement

- Not enough use is made of ICT to enhance pupils' learning.
- A clearer indication of National Curriculum levels could be included in the marking of pupils' work in Years 7-9.
- Some laboratories are in need of refurbishment.

113. Pupils' results in national tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were well above the national average and of a similar standard to those in English and mathematics. They were also well above average compared with schools of similar background. There is little difference in the performance of boys and girls in these tests. Over the past four years, results have been consistently well above average and have improved in line with the national trend. Pupils' performance at GCSE in 2002 was well above average. In particular, a much higher proportion of pupils achieved A*/A grades than found nationally. Nearly all pupils achieved at least a grade G and the majority did much better. In 2002, girls performed better than boys, which represented a reversal of the position in previous years.

114. Standards of work in Years 9 and 11 are well above average. Overall, pupils achieve very well throughout the school as a result of their very positive attitudes in response to very good teaching.

115. Pupils' work in biology, chemistry and physics is well above average for their age in Year 9. Higher attaining pupils have a very good knowledge and understanding of science and its applications. They and average attaining pupils can devise experiments and are aware of the factors that contribute to the fairness of their results. Lower attaining pupils make good progress in spite of some misconceptions of the processes involved.

116. By Year 11, pupils are acquiring a very good knowledge and understanding of all aspects of the science course. In particular, enquiry skills are developed very well because practical investigations are carried out on a regular basis. These skills contribute significantly to the consistently good GCSE results. In chemistry, higher attaining pupils have a very good knowledge and understanding of atomic structure. For example, they can explain why some atoms are unstable and give off radiation. Average attaining pupils have a good understanding of the difference between ionic and covalent compounds. They relate physical properties such as melting point to a compound's molecular structure. Lower attaining pupils have a sound understanding of simpler concepts and they apply these well. For example, when studying the adaptation of organisms in nature, they successfully investigate why larger animals retain heat better than smaller ones.

117. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make similar progress to other pupils. This is because teaching is well structured to meet their needs and supports their learning well. As a result almost all Year 11 pupils achieve a grade in their GCSE examinations.

118. Attitudes and behaviour are very good because teaching is effective and promotes very good learning. Teachers and pupils have established very good working relationships that help to build pupils' confidence in their ability to work with scientific concepts. For example, lower attaining pupils in Year 9 made good progress in a lesson due to the friendly but firm discipline that enabled all to contribute to a discussion on the differences between combustion and respiration.

119. Teaching and learning are very good overall and have improved since the previous inspection. A major strength of the teaching is the teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of their subject specialisms. This improves pupils' progress and learning, particularly in Years 9 to 11 where teachers generally teach their own subject. Key concepts in science, such as photosynthesis and respiration, are very clearly explained in terms that pupils can readily understand. A relative weakness in some of the teaching is that the aims of the lesson are not explicitly shared with pupils. Thus, there is a lack of focus and the pace of learning is slowed. Pupils' work is marked regularly but in Years 7-9 pupils would benefit from an indication of the National Curriculum level at which they were working. This would help them to appreciate more fully the standard of their work. Homework is set on a regular basis and consolidates pupils' learning well.

120. The science department contributes effectively to the development of pupils' literacy and numerical skills. For example, lower attaining pupils are shown how to structure their writing to reflect the different stages of their work in enquiry science. The evaluation of investigative work is improved by good teaching of the graphical skills needed to interpret experimental data. Although pupils experience some ICT in their science lessons, for example data-logging, it is not used sufficiently to support and extend their learning.

121. The leadership and management of science is very good. Teachers and support staff work very well together as a team to ensure that pupils achieve high standards. Assessment of pupils' attainment is very good and is used very effectively to monitor their performance over time and set targets. The introduction of the National Strategy for Science has been well managed and is beginning to improve standards still further.

122. The department has made very good improvement since the previous inspection. In particular, examination and test results have been maintained at a high standard in spite of constraints on the curriculum, such as the variability of the science accommodation. Some of the older laboratories are in urgent need of refurbishment. They do not provide a good learning environment for the teaching of modern day science.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Standards are very high in Year 11. GCSE results are consistently outstanding.
- Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7-9 and outstanding in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils achieve very well throughout the school.
- Leadership and management are excellent.

Areas for improvement

- There are not enough opportunities for pupils to experience artwork at first hand by visiting galleries.

123. Pupils' results in the GCSE examinations in 2002 were very high. Both boys and girls did much better than they do nationally. The proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades, A* and A, was much higher than found nationally. Over the past three years results have been consistently outstanding. Most pupils do better in their art and design than in their other subjects.

124. Standards of work are well above average in Year 9. Pupils' achievement is very good considering their average standards when they join the school in Year 7. They make very good gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding of the subject. Higher attaining pupils work confidently from

observation in their sketchbooks, for example, drawing complex views of the interior of rooms. All pupils produce delicate compositions based on musical instruments, which show a rapidly growing confidence in using thin washes of watercolour. Pupils also create interesting small sculptures from wire and twigs, which explore the qualities of the materials. In addition, their work in oil pastel is bright and bold, based on lively assemblages.

125. Standards of work in Year 11 are very high. Pupils' achievement is excellent. They make outstanding gains in their skills in a very wide range of materials and processes. The highest attaining pupils create large assemblages from their personal possessions, which show a growing sophistication in compositional skills. Pupils build strongly on their research skills in their sketchbooks, which are increasingly lively, showing a willingness to experiment with materials. They use ICT well to extend and support their ideas. They also work imaginatively in plaster, using incised shapes, or leaves and flowers encased in wax, to create subtle and delicate pieces. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to experience artwork at first hand by visiting galleries. Pupils lack a full appreciation of the variety of scale seen in the art world.

126. Pupils with special educational needs achieve at an excellent level because of the quality of teaching which focuses on very strong individual advice. This builds up pupils' confidence by developing their individual strengths.

127. Attitudes and behaviour are very good in Years 7-9, and excellent in Years 10 and 11. Pupils often choose to work in the art rooms at lunchtime and after school and they try very hard to succeed in their lessons.

128. Overall, teaching and learning are outstanding. They are very good in Years 7-9 and excellent in Years 10 and 11. The older pupils particularly appreciate the opportunities for developing their own ideas, and show very high levels of ownership of their work. This is underpinned by the excellent quality of the teaching. Key features are the very wide range of materials, which are available in all lessons, and the excellent individual advice. Teachers also value pupils' own ideas, and discuss them fully. As a result, pupils show very high levels of engagement with their own work. This produces a very positive learning environment in which achievement can flourish. Because these features are consistently present in lessons, pupils' learning is very good overall.

129. Improvement since the previous inspection is excellent. Standards have risen to a very high level and GCSE results in recent years have been outstanding. The subject also makes a very good contribution to pupils' cultural development by promoting high levels of interest in the world of art, for example, by encouraging pupils to undertake extensive research, enter competitions and study the art of other cultures.

130. Leadership and management are excellent. Teamwork is very strong and all teachers are committed to improving the quality of teaching and learning and promoting variety in the curriculum. There has been a sustained focus on improving standards which has been extremely successful and is the reason for the very high standards and outstanding results seen in this subject.

CITIZENSHIP

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

Strengths

- The organisation and planning for citizenship are good.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Very good practical opportunities are provided for pupils to participate and take responsibility.
- Pupils have good attitudes towards their work in citizenship.

Areas for improvement

- Examples of good practice in the teaching of the subject could be shared more across the programme as a whole.
- Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress in citizenship are inconsistent.

131. Citizenship, a new National Curriculum subject, is being taught through a whole-school approach that includes specific provision within time allocated for PSHCE, other curriculum areas, events, activities and tutorial work. Standards in Years 9 and 11 are similar to those expected nationally at the ages of 14 and 16. Pupils are doing well to reach these standards so early in the introduction of a new subject.

132. Learning is good overall. Pupils have good attitudes to the subject and good retention of previous learning. They make intelligent, fluent contributions to discussions on a range of issues, including the powers of the police, the individual's rights and entitlements, and mercy-killing. Pupils work well in groups, co-operating with each other and sharing experiences, ideas and opinions, and making valid judgements. They have a good understanding of different viewpoints and the need to be tolerant. Pupils respond well to written tasks. An average/below average ability Year 9 group, for example, successfully tackled very challenging work on punishment and its aims, which included reference to retribution, rehabilitation and reparation. They revised previous knowledge, made good notes in their own words using dictionaries, debated the issues that arose, distinguished between several minor and severe offences, and matched appropriate punishments to them, finally filling in worksheets well. Pupils also take responsibility for their own actions by participating in a wide range of active citizenship activities. The school annually fields a team of business studies students for the Young Consumers of the Year competition and in 2000, the students were national finalists. Taking part tests students' knowledge of trading standards and consumer law, gives them the opportunity to perform under pressure, and enables them to meet students from other schools studying the same subject. A number of younger pupils were observed running a Year 8 council, in which they had been assigned agenda items which involved interviewing, writing letters, consulting a web-site, and taking it in turns to write minutes. As a result, the pupils' self-confidence and personal organisation skills are developing very well. Pupils with special educational needs are making the same good progress in their learning.

133. Teaching is good overall. Teachers plan lessons well and manage their classes efficiently, setting a brisk pace. They have high expectations of pupils and involve them in active and independent learning activities, such as role-play and case studies. Teachers know their pupils well and use this knowledge to set achievable targets. The development of literacy skills is an integral part of lesson planning. The use of dictionaries is insisted upon for the exact meaning of difficult key words and for spellings. There are good opportunities for speaking and listening, reading and writing. Very good practice was observed in history, religious education and English, which could usefully be shared across the whole programme. Incorporation of citizenship in these subjects is particularly good. Teachers use imaginative strategies and good materials to make it an interesting part of the course. For example, in history, Year 7 pupils learn about a Roman citizen's duties and rights through a study unit, video and worksheets, the work being structured so that pupils of all levels of ability can understand the topic. The homework tasks are appropriately set at different levels and include exercises in extended writing which might be, for example, to discuss whether life was easier if a person became a citizen of the Roman Empire. The teachers enjoy a very good rapport with the pupils and this creates a good climate for learning.

134. Leadership and management are good. A clear educational direction has been established, backed up by very careful planning. In the case of cross-curricular provision, the respective departments are monitoring teaching, learning and homework very effectively, holding regular departmental meetings to discuss progress and share good practice. The PSHCE Management Group meet six times a year to review the performance of this area of the curriculum, including the Period 1 lessons taught by the form tutor. The quality of the latter is inconsistent and not as good as in lessons taught in the main body of the timetable. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are not yet firmly established.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- GCSE results are above average.
- Pupils have positive attitudes.
- Teaching is consistent and good.

Areas for Improvement

- In Years 7- 9, designing is not developed progressively across the different areas of the subject.
- There is limited use of ICT in Years 7-9 and facilities for computer-aided manufacture are inadequate.
- An insufficient range of resources limits pupils' opportunities to experiment.

135. Pupils' results in GSCE examinations in 2002 were above average. They continue a trend of improvement over the past three years which is slightly greater than found nationally. Results in the graphic products course were better, and in systems and control worse, than in other areas of the subject. Girls' results were better than boys' results by more than the national trend. Overall, results in design and technology were not as high as in most other subjects in the school.

136. The standards of pupils' work at the beginning of Year 7 are below average but they make good progress during Years 7-9 and standards are average by Year 9. The standards of making and of drawing in each area are average and sometimes good. Pupils have a sound knowledge of materials and of control systems. Designing is more consistent than at the time of the previous inspection but aspects such as research into existing products often have little influence on pupils' designs. There are, however, some good examples of designing, for instance, pupils use modelling to evaluate ideas for a game. Some pupils draw a good range of ideas but space in the booklets used for many projects sometimes limits expectations of the most able. Pupils make insufficient use of ICT because of lack of access to suitable facilities

137. Overall standards of work in Years 10 and 11 are above average. However, they vary from below average in systems and control to well above average in graphics products, which is the most popular area. Standards are broadly average in resistant materials, textiles and food technology. Much of this variation is accounted for by the prior attainment of the pupils. Design folders are mostly well presented although tend to follow a routine. The design element of the work could be developed more in all aspects of the subject. Modelling is generally well used to work out ideas in three dimensions but some projects in resistant materials comprise basic shelving or storage with little attention to a specific need. Systems and control projects give insufficient consideration to the user. Food technology projects could make more use of external evaluation. Nevertheless, overall, projects are carried out thoroughly and are well presented with the best in all areas showing imagination and a high level of execution. ICT is used well in projects but there are insufficient facilities for pupils in all areas to make full use of computers. Overall, pupils achieve well in Years 10 and 11 in relation to their average standards in Year 9.

138. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. This is due to the high level of consistency in applying good teaching techniques such as thorough preparation, clear aims, regular marking and good use of questioning. Teachers have a good knowledge of their specialist areas. They give very thorough help to individual pupils. This helps to develop good relationships and enables pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, to succeed. Progress is well monitored and pupils have clear descriptions of standards and what they need to do to achieve them. There are, however, few examples of lessons that inspire pupils with the excitement of designing new imaginative products. In some lessons teachers give thorough attention to developing a technical vocabulary but in others the opportunity is missed.

139. Pupils generally work hard and enjoy their lessons. They use tools and equipment responsibly. They mostly respond well to questions and show a sense of inquiry. They co-operate well in groups. In the GCSE courses, pupils develop the ability to work independently.

140. The management of the subject is very good. There is a now a clear direction for the development of the subject and strategies are in place to raise standards further. The curriculum, development planning and organisation are much more coherent than at the previous inspection. However, the scheme of work for Years 7-9 currently focuses more on the development of individual skills than on the rigour of designing. The continuity of learning has been affected by unsatisfactory timetable arrangements in Year 8. There is a clear strategy to improve this next year. Assessments and examination results are thoroughly analysed and practical strategies to raise standards implemented. The use of ICT has improved substantially since the previous inspection but CAD/CAM facilities are inadequate. Pupils' ability to experiment is constrained by the limited range of resources, which particularly affects experimental work with food. Despite these weaknesses, improvement since the previous inspection is good.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average.
- Teaching is very good with a clear emphasis on developing pupils' thinking skills.
- Pupils achieve very well.
- The contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills is excellent.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The use of assessment to improve learning is very well developed.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT in lessons to support pupils learning is underdeveloped.
- The opportunities for pupils to develop fieldwork skills in Years 7-9 are too limited.

141. Overall standards of work are well above average in Years 9 and 11. Pupils achieve very well throughout the school. This is an improvement since the time of the previous inspection. The attainment of girls is higher than that of the boys and this is reflected in the teachers' assessments in Year 9 and in the GCSE examinations.

142. Pupils increase their knowledge and understanding of different places from a local to a world scale in great depth. By Year 9, higher attaining pupils explain in detail the reasons for population change. They develop their atlas skills very well when describing and accounting for the distribution of the world's population. All groups of pupils gain a good understanding of the idea of sustainable development in their work on energy. The work of lower attaining pupils is above average, for example, they have a good knowledge of the impact of mining on the environment. In work on pollution caused by thermal power stations they begin to understand the worldwide implications of climate change. In Year 7, many pupils reach high standards in their investigation on the effects of weathering in the immediate environment. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils in Years 7-9 to engage in fieldwork. This limits practice in the collection, presentation and analysis of data so these skills are not well developed.

143. In Year 11, higher attaining pupils gain high marks in their investigations. They use ICT very well to research, handle data and present their independent work. The work of a small number of lower attaining pupils is less accurate and sometimes incomplete. Their analyses and evaluations are less

detailed. Nevertheless, their standards are average and represent very good achievement in relation to their attainment at the start of the course.

144. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations have been consistently well above average in recent years and have improved since the previous inspection. In the last two years all candidates have gained grades in the examination. Last year, three-quarters of pupils gained A*-C grades and almost a third of the girls achieved the highest A* and A grades.

145. Pupils with learning and other difficulties now make very good progress because work is carefully matched to their needs and the work of learning support assistants and specialist teachers is very effective. In a lesson where most pupils had learning problems, some through hearing impairment, two teachers used good communication skills and specialist equipment well to enable all pupils to make very good progress in learning about earthquakes.

146. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are almost always very good. They work very effectively in pairs or groups, sharing ideas and helping each other, such as, for example, when analysing the causes and effects of population change. Pupils' very positive attitudes enable learning to proceed with interest and pace and make a substantial contribution to the very good standards of work.

147. Teaching and learning are very good and have improved since the previous inspection. Teachers have high expectations and have placed a special focus on effective learning. For example, as early as Year 7, pupils are challenged not only to identify and describe coastal landforms but also to explain how they were formed. The use of very good resources makes pupils think how, for example, the building of a new factory can provide many other jobs in the neighbourhood. Teachers use decision-making exercises very effectively to enable pupils to increase their knowledge and understanding. Such very good methods demand intellectual thought and develop pupils' skills of analytical thinking. Their imagination was captured as they traced the story of a pair of jeans on a world map to learn about the links of industries and how these are becoming more spread across the world. Occasionally, lesson introductions and conclusions are dominated too much by the teacher and rushed because of insufficient planning. For example, the pace of a good lesson drawing to a close at the end of the day slackened as pupils answered a simple question on population growth. Learning suddenly became active again when pupils were invited to share and justify their answers to more difficult work but the time was too short for this to have maximum impact. Aspects of learning are occasionally too challenging, such as when, for example, with little previous understanding and without a framework, pupils in Year 10 were asked to describe and explain the difference between materials in a river bed at different locations. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject and this includes an understanding of what pupils need to do to achieve well in examinations. Teachers frequently use past questions very effectively to consolidate knowledge and understanding of topics and teach examination technique. Marking is regular and rigorous. It informs pupils how to improve their work. Assessment frequently involves pupils in their own learning, especially in Years 10 and 11, as they annotate their answers in class reviews.

148. The basic skills of literacy and numeracy are very well taught. Pupils use a range of writing styles including reports, creative writing, poetry, diaries and newspaper articles effectively. Geography makes an excellent contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills. Pupils use a very wide variety of graphs competently. Although ICT is used well for research and presentation its use to support pupils' learning in lessons is underdeveloped.

149. Leadership and management of the department are very good and have led to a very significant improvement since the previous inspection. A key feature has been the rigorous focus on how pupils learn best in order to raise the standards and results of boys to those of the girls. It is too early to judge the impact of this innovation. Teachers are very experienced and have a strong commitment to improve through evaluation of their work. They share good practices and continually revise units of work. Assessment procedures are very effective and are well used to track pupils' progress.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well throughout the school. Standards are well above average in Year 11.
- The overall quality of teaching and learning is good.
- The vast majority of pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and behave well.
- The subject is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Computers could be used more extensively to enhance pupils' work.
- There is some variation in the quality of the marking of pupils' work.
- The use of information gained from assessment procedures to assist with curriculum planning is not as well established in Years 7-9 as in Years 10 and 11.

150. The most recent GCSE results in history were above average. Girls' performance was better than that of boys by a margin slightly greater than that found nationally. This broadly reflects the difference found in their performance in the teachers' assessments of their work when they were at the end of Year 9. In 2001, results were well above average and there was no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. A positive and significant feature of the results in both years is that all pupils entered for the examination gained grades in the A*- F range. The teachers' assessments of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 have been consistently above average in recent years. Overall, there is no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls.

151. Standards of work are above average in Year 9. Lower attaining pupils have a reasonable knowledge and understanding of the key features of the periods which they study and can describe the reasons for and results of changes, such as those concerning the role of women in society, brought about by the First World War. Higher attaining pupils' breadth and depth of knowledge and their understanding are often impressive. All pupils are confident in handling a good range of source materials in their investigations and the higher attaining pupils analyse and extract evidence well in support of their conclusions. The pupils' capacity to understand that there can be different historical interpretations of the same event is better than usually found because the teachers ensure that they have good opportunities to develop this key historical skill. Pupils use a good range of ways of presenting their ideas and the results of their investigations. Some of these, for example, a 'transcript' of interviews with eye witnesses to the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, are of high quality, combining accurate historical detail with an authentic feel for the event. Pupils make good progress from Year 7 onwards because they are provided with a good initial grounding in developing their historical skills, which are then regularly and thoroughly tested as they move through the school.

152. Standards in Year 11 are well above average. Overall, pupils achieve well. They make rapid initial progress in Year 10 in coming to grips with the demands of the examination course. Lower attaining pupils make particularly good progress and by the end of Year 10 are writing at good length. However, in comparison with average attaining pupils, they are more inconsistent in the way in which they select and apply their knowledge and understanding in support of the conclusions which they draw, for example in deciding whether vigilantes in the American West were a force for good or ill. Higher attaining pupils have an impressive range and depth of knowledge and understanding. They effectively evaluate the reliability of their sources of information, compare their relative usefulness, and use their own knowledge well in support of conclusions. This was apparent in their evaluation of the reasons why Mormons were able to flourish in late nineteenth century America. By Year 11, most pupils are working at, or exceeding, the targets set for them based on their prior attainment.

153. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, whether in classes where pupils are placed on the basis of their prior attainment or where there is a broader mix in the group. Worksheets are adapted to make the learning easier and pupils use editions of the textbooks which make the learning

more accessible for them. Teachers are quick to provide them with extra support in lessons where this is needed.

154. Pupils generally have very positive attitudes to learning and behave very well in lessons. Pride in their work is indicated by the quality of presentation in their exercise books. In the very few instances where classes are inclined to be boisterous or find concentration difficult, pupils respond well to the firm control exercised by the teachers and try hard to meet their high expectations.

155. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good and, in Years 7 to 9, has improved since the previous inspection. All the teaching observed was satisfactory or better; some was very good. The strongest features include lesson planning, which ensures that all the key historical skills receive due attention, and the provision of a good variety of interesting and challenging learning activities, which meet the needs of all pupils. Their learning is also well supported by the use of a wide range of resources. Teachers use their specialist knowledge well in sharp questioning and authoritative explanations. Homework is set regularly and its effectiveness in supporting the learning of lower attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 is greatly helped by the fact that they are allowed to retain a copy of their major textbook at home. The department is committed to using strategies aimed at the development of pupils' literacy skills, but, as yet, these are unevenly applied. Some good practice was seen. For example, a bank of key words was used effectively in a lesson on the Crusades and, in an investigation of developments in road transport, pupils' new learning was tested and reinforced well in the concluding part of the lesson. Pupils' work is marked regularly, in a way that helps them to improve, but the quality of marking is variable. Opportunities for using computers to assist pupils' learning in history are well established in the schemes of work but pupils' experience tends to be patchy, largely due to difficulties in gaining access to machines.

156. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. All the strengths then identified have been maintained and, in addition to some improvement in the quality of teaching, there is now much better provision for sharing the good practice that exists. The curriculum is now strongly enhanced by the study of aspects of local history, including site visits for pupils in Year 10. Assessment procedures are very good and motivate pupils to improve their work. The information gained from the department's thorough analysis of assessment data in Years 10 and 11 is used effectively in curriculum planning, but this valuable process is less well established in respect of Years 7 to 9. Very good leadership and energetic management within a framework of very good working relationships have established a climate which is very open to curriculum development as a means of further improving the quality of the provision and raising standards still higher.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good in Years 7-9 and in the GCSE course in Years 10 and 11.
- GCSE results are above average.
- The commitment of staff in making extra time available to help pupils

Areas for improvement

- Closer liaison between the ICT department and other departments is necessary in order to monitor the provision for, and progress of, all pupils in Years 10 and 11
- More provision is needed for the development of pupils' skills in control technology in Years 7-9
- Progress in some of the specific ICT lessons in Years 7 and 8 is not as fast as it could be because pupils in large classes have to share computers.

157. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations in 2002 were well above average. The proportion of pupils gaining A*/A grades was higher than found nationally. The results were a significant improvement on the previous year. The standards of course work, in particular, are high. Current standards in examination classes in Year 11 are above average. Standards in Year 10 are more varied, but accurately reflect pupils' ability.

158. Standards of work are above average in Year 9. Overall, pupils achieve well considering their average attainment on entry. The majority of pupils in Year 9 can write clearly about the work they undertake and can sequence procedures accurately. They satisfactorily construct and interrogate databases as part of a project focused upon a 'Big Event'. Included in this was the construction of hyper linked web pages. In addition, pupils use spreadsheets well to explore mathematical functions as part of a mathematics project. In Year 8, pupils use graphics and desktop publishing imaginatively to produce holiday brochures of an above average standard. The work in these year groups represents good progress from Year 7 where standards are more varied and reflect the varying experiences of ICT that pupils have had in their primary schools. The overall standard of work in Year 9 reflects good use of the limited time given over to the specific teaching of ICT in Years 8 and 9. This is about half the time allocated in many schools. As a result, there is little time for the consolidation of the skills acquired and standards in the 'control' strand of ICT are below average. However, the provision for this within design and technology is improving.

159. In Year 11, the standard of work of pupils taking the GCSE course is above average. The majority of pupils make good progress. They plan and analyse their work accurately, both orally and in writing. Pupils can set up and use relational databases to produce queries and reports and graph outcomes. They are encouraged to work independently, using a range of knowledge and skills appropriate to the requirements of their GCSE course. Some of the course work is of a very high quality. The standard of work of those pupils not taking the GCSE course in ICT is average. Their progress is more limited, although satisfactory, because not all subjects are providing sufficient opportunities for pupils to use and apply ICT skills in their work on a regular basis. Consequently, taking the year group as a whole, standards in Year 11 are average and achievement is satisfactory. Pupils use word processing skills well in their coursework submissions for GCSE. Pupils with special learning needs make similar progress to other pupils.

160. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7-9 and in examination classes in Years 10 and 11. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 when all pupils' work is taken into account. Those teachers who are not ICT specialists are well supported. In Years 7-9, schemes of work are appropriate, enabling optimum use to be made of the time available. Lessons are well structured and the expected outcomes made clear to pupils. The work is well matched to the ability of pupils. Extension tasks are set for the more able and a step-by-step approach is provided to assist lower attaining pupils. For example, in one Year 9 class, only the more able pupils were expected to complete a mail-merge task. In some classes, however, pupils do not make as much progress as they could because more emphasis is placed on inputting data than on developing skills. Progress in Years 7 and 8 is sometimes limited because pupils in large classes have to share computers. Teaching in one computer suite is very difficult because the arrangement of the computers limits the teacher's view of the pupils. Pupils' work is printed out to facilitate marking and retained in folders or exercise books as well as in computer files. Pupils are made aware of the National Curriculum level they have achieved – although it is not always made clear to them how to improve further. Examples of work displayed in classrooms and corridors celebrate achievement. Sixth formers provide good additional support for teachers in some lessons. This enables pupils to move on more quickly and provides sixth formers with an opportunity to communicate their own understanding to younger pupils. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the course requirements at GCSE. The curriculum is well designed to ensure that pupils progressively build up their skills and aim for the highest grades. Pupils' progress and performance are monitored rigorously. Teachers have high expectations and set challenging targets based on data from previous results. Pupils know what is expected of them and what they need to do to improve, consequently their learning is good. The quality of teaching and learning for pupils not taking the GCSE course is satisfactory overall. It is not as good as in the examination course because there is no overall plan for developing these pupils' ICT

skills, nor are there enough computers within subject areas for teachers to include enough ICT in their planning.

161. The leadership of the ICT department is good. Teachers meet together regularly to standardise work against National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. The commitment of the department to pupils' learning is evident in the provision of extra ICT sessions each lunchtime and after school and the range of documents and CD-ROMS which they make available. The management of the overall provision for ICT across the whole curriculum is not as good however. Responsibility for developing the ICT skills of pupils in Years 10 and 11 who do not take the GCSE course is unclear. Liaison between the ICT department and other departments is limited so there is no real measure of pupils' progress. Overall, leadership and management of ICT across the whole curriculum, for all pupils, is satisfactory. Improvement in ICT since the previous inspection is satisfactory.

Key skills across the curriculum - ICT

162. Although the provision for ICT in other subjects is not monitored on a regular basis there is evidence of good practice. In design and technology, for example, pupils of all abilities make good progress, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Subjects such as art, music, mathematics and modern foreign languages also endeavour to incorporate ICT into the teaching wherever possible. In other subjects, for instance English, science, geography and history, more use could be made of ICT if there was better and easier access to computers. The provision of computers has improved considerably since the previous inspection, but still does not meet the demands for the teaching of ICT across the curriculum.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Higher attaining pupils reach well above average standards in French and German.
- Pupils' progress in writing and the quality of work on display are very good.
- In Year 7, pupils make good progress in French and German.
- The department makes a good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy and ICT skills.

Areas for improvement

- GCSE results could be improved, especially in German.
- The pace of teaching and learning could be increased in most lessons.
- More challenging targets could be set for middle attaining pupils, especially in German.
- Teachers' and pupils' use of the spoken foreign language could be increased in lessons.

French and German

163. Pupils study either French or German from Year 7 as their main language, and, currently, abler pupils study either French or German as a second foreign language from Year 8. Almost all pupils continue with one foreign language to GCSE in Years 10 and 11. Few pupils take a second foreign language at this stage.

164. Teacher assessments in 2002 indicated that standards in Year 9 were slightly above national expectations for modern languages. Evidence from the inspection shows that current standards in Year 9, in both French and German, are similar to those expected for pupils aged 14. Overall, pupils' achievement in both languages is satisfactory. In Year 7, pupils make rapid progress in speaking, listening, reading and writing in both languages. In Year 9, in both French and German, higher attaining pupils make very good progress, reaching well above the National Curriculum level expected (level 5). However, in Years 8 and 9 the rate of progress of middle attaining pupils varies between the two languages. About one third of the middle attaining pupils in French and almost all the middle attaining pupils in German make insufficient progress. This is because the teachers' expectations are not high enough for these pupils, especially in German. The pace of their lessons is too slow. Lower attaining pupils make satisfactory progress in both languages.

165. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in listening but in speaking, many pupils, especially middle attaining pupils, underachieve in Years 8 and 9. They lack of confidence in forming sentences and often speak with poor French and German accents. This is because most teachers, in spite of their good subject knowledge, do not use the foreign language routinely in lessons. Too many pupils do not develop good listening and speaking habits over time. However, the enthusiastic and capable foreign language assistants give pupils infrequent but valuable opportunities for speaking the language.

166. Scrutiny of pupils' work and the exceptional quality of displayed written work show that all pupils make very good progress in writing in French and German. The teachers' clear emphasis on accuracy in spelling and grammar supports pupils' overall development in literacy well. By Year 9, the written work of the abler pupils is excellent, for example, in describing holiday events and future plans using the present, past, and future tenses. Middle attaining pupils write confidently with reasonable accuracy in short sentences or brief paragraphs in French or German, and most have a sound vocabulary. Lower attaining pupils write simpler sentences well because they are given good guidelines on which to base their work. They make satisfactory progress in French and German because teachers understand their learning needs, for example, in a good Year 9 French lesson in which pupils successfully used cards and images to make sentences about the weather. In reading, all pupils make good progress in understanding texts of familiar language and, in the case of abler pupils, in deducing the meaning of

unfamiliar words. Pupils with special learning needs make good progress as teachers provide well for their literacy needs in the groups in which they are mainly placed.

167. In 2002, overall results in modern languages at GCSE were average. They were above average in French but below average in German. Pupils' achievement in GCSE German is better than the results imply because the school enters pupils of all abilities for German whereas the entry nationally tends to be made up of average and higher attaining pupils. In 2002, there were few A* and A grades in French and none in German. Pupils performed worse in modern languages than in their other subjects; boys' results in German were well below those of their other subjects. Teachers' absence due to illness, and the long 70 minute sessions have, in part, contributed to some pupils' underachievement. In recent years, results in modern languages have been average, with pupils consistently gaining lower results in German than in French.

168. Currently, standards in French and German are average in Year 11. Overall, achievement since Year 9 is satisfactory. There is evidence of improvement this year in the standards of many pupils because the pace of teaching and learning is faster. The number of pupils working towards A* and A grades in Years 10 and 11 has increased in both languages. The written coursework of higher attaining pupils is excellent in both French and German; pupils express themselves confidently using a range of tenses and an extensive topic-based vocabulary, when, for example, writing about school, leisure activities, and health. Speaking in French and German is still generally weak in Years 10 and 11, except in the case of the abler pupils, who have developed more confidence. All pupils have good awareness of their progress in Years 10 and 11 because teachers clearly relate their planning and teaching to examination requirements. For example, in a very good higher attaining French class in Year 11, the teacher highlighted key expressions for the GCSE speaking examination, and pupils then practised these confidently in pairs, describing their work experience. These pupils spoke with good French accents, mainly because of the teacher's consistent use of the foreign language. By the end of Year 11, higher attaining pupils have progressed in both languages to well above average standards in writing and reading, and all pupils have a good topic-based vocabulary appropriate for their ability. In German, the standards of the middle attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11 are often unpredictable because of variations in teaching methods, and in teachers' expectations. In French, the standards of middle attaining pupils are above average. Pupils make good progress in reading in both languages, mainly because they have excellent opportunities for home study and revision with their own textbooks. Relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Pupils are well behaved and co-operative in most lessons.

169. Both languages contribute occasionally but effectively to pupils' numeracy development, for example, in simple shopping transactions. The department's use of ICT is developing rapidly and is good overall; colourful displays of pupils' word-processed work, and highly effective use of websites and CD-Roms in many lessons enhance pupils' reading and writing skills. Gifted and talented linguists are identified and make good progress because they work with pupils of similar ability. The accommodation provides an excellent environment for language learning.

170. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. They are satisfactory in both languages in Years 7-9 and good in Years 10 and 11. In the lessons observed, teaching ranged from unsatisfactory to excellent. Overall, it was better in French. The small number of unsatisfactory lessons occurred mainly as a result of too much speaking by the teachers, lack of pace, and unimaginative resources. Lesson planning is usually good. However, in some lessons in Years 8 and 9, aims are not clear or sufficiently challenging, nor are they shared with the pupils. Consequently, pupils lack clear direction for their learning. Most teachers use resources well; for example in two very good Year 9 French and German lessons, pupils responded well to stimulating and colourful images. In Years 7-9, although teachers mark pupils' written work regularly, pupils do not always know the National Curriculum levels at which they are working.

171. Leadership and management are good overall. Recent difficulties, resulting in lower levels of attainment than in other subjects, have been identified and action taken to mitigate them. Administration is excellent and includes very good use of ICT. Improvement since the previous inspection is satisfactory

overall. Learning resources and departmental accommodation are now excellent and pupils' use of ICT has substantially improved. Areas identified for further development include the raising of standards at GCSE in both languages, especially in German, and more rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The attainment of pupils in Year 11 is well above average.
- Teachers have high levels of expertise.
- The quality and range of extra-curricular activities are very good
- Provision for ICT in music is very good
- Pupils are very well motivated

Areas for improvement

- The lack of continuity of provision in Year 8 adversely affects progress.
- The accommodation for music is unsatisfactory.

172. Pupils' results in GCSE examinations in 2002 were well above average. Most pupils gained A or B grades. This pattern is similar to that of the preceding three years.

173. Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 indicate that standards are average. This was reflected in standards of work in Year 9 seen during the inspection. Standards of attainment are broadly similar to those at the time of the previous inspection.

174. Pupils enter the school with below average attainment in musical skills. Overall, they make good progress in Years 7-9. In Year 7, they successfully learn to read uncomplicated staff notation, develop fluent keyboard fingering technique, and sing well. For example, in one lesson, they quickly mastered a simple three-part arrangement. Pupils in Year 8 develop keyboard and composing skills well; several higher ability pupils successfully created a bass part for a given melody, selecting a style from a range of different approaches that had been discussed in the lesson. Boys and girls achieve equally well. However, some musical skills are lost at this stage because of the interruptions to the continuity of learning created by the rota in which music and ICT lessons alternate. In Year 9, most pupils are able to use technical language to explain their understanding of musical ideas. They play simple melodies fluently, and create properly structured compositions. Pupils of higher ability perform confidently and compose pieces that are well structured and stylistically consistent. They listen well when playing together in groups, and most are able to play rhythmically and independently. Restrictions on available space for group work frequently hinder opportunities for pupils to experiment, select musical ideas and refine their work.

175. Standards of attainment are well above average in Year 11 and pupils achieve very well. Many perform to a very high standard, compose confidently in a variety of styles, and make good use of ICT as a composing medium. More able pupils use sound imaginatively, readily drawing on their understanding of musical elements to create dramatic pieces. Their understanding of conventional melodic and harmonic idioms is secure. Pupils of average ability develop ideas in an interesting way, while less able pupils follow guidelines to compose properly structured pieces. Most pupils have good aural skills and secure general musical knowledge, but, because of their lack of wider experience in music-making, less able pupils have difficulty in identifying the features of music from different periods. Their aural skills are limited.

176. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, although some have difficulty in concentrating on practical tasks and make unsatisfactory progress because of lack of support. Pupils who are gifted and talented make good progress, both as a result of the challenge of classroom work and the wide range of activities taking place out of normal school hours. Almost one pupil in ten learns to play an instrument. Of the 60 pupils successfully entered for examinations of the Associated Board of the Royal

Schools of Music in the past year, ten passed with distinction and most of the remainder passed with merit.

177. At all stages, pupils' attitudes are very good. They arrive prepared to settle to work, handle equipment responsibly, co-operate well with each other and control levels of noise in a considerate manner. Relationships with each other and with teachers are based on courtesy and mutual respect.

178. The quality of teaching in Years 7-9 is good overall, and has many excellent features. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is very good. Teachers have high levels of expertise and enthusiasm, and are highly committed to pupils' achievement. The most successful lessons have clear musical objectives, proceed at a lively pace, and include innovative methods that engage pupils' interest and maintain their participation. In one excellent singing session, Year 7 pupils developed good technique as a result of lively warm-up exercises, and the energy of the enthusiastic response was skilfully channelled into simple choreography. As a result, pupils learned to present a polished performance and gained some insight into the techniques of musical theatre. In less successful, but satisfactory, lessons there is insufficient use of questioning to ensure pupils participate fully, and too much time is devoted to unnecessarily detailed explanations.

179. The department is managed satisfactorily, and led well. Systems for monitoring the quality of teaching are in place, but assessment criteria for the work of pupils in Years 7-9 are not linked sufficiently closely to National Curriculum levels. Accommodation for music is unsatisfactory for a number of reasons: rooms are spread between two different wings and over three floors, creating difficulty for effective communication between members of staff. Although there are several practice rooms, these are cramped, inaccessible, and frequently difficult to work in because equipment is not properly stored and too much space is occupied by obsolete pieces. Resources for music are good, and provision for ICT is excellent. The music staff devote much time and energy to an extensive range of instrumental and vocal ensembles which have well-deserved reputations for the high quality of their performances. At the time of the inspection, staff were involved in rehearsing instrumentalists for the forthcoming production of 'Les Miserables', and in preparing the choir and the orchestra for a performance on the evening of Good Friday in Chester cathedral.

180. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. High standards of attainment have been sustained. Extra-curricular activities provide high quality experience for all pupils and the department has successfully developed its use of ICT.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average throughout the school.
- Teaching and learning are good; pupils achieve well.
- Pupils' attitudes, interest and behaviour are very good.
- Provision for extra-curricular activities is a very strong feature of the school's work.

Areas for improvement

- There are no opportunities for pupils to take physical education at GCSE.
- Teacher assessments in Year 9 need to be linked more closely to National Curriculum levels.
- Not enough opportunities are provided for pupils to observe and evaluate each other's work.

181. Standards in physical education are above average overall, and represent good achievement and progress throughout the school for both boys and girls. Pupils' very good attitudes and their good learning skills combine with good teaching to ensure that they learn effectively as they move through the school.

182. Formal teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 suggest that standards are very much higher than the national expectation for boys and girls at this stage. This is not entirely confirmed by inspection findings – in the work seen in Years 7-9 standards are above average, including for those pupils with special educational needs. Standards in major games and in dance are notable strengths in Years 7-9. In rugby, boys in Year 7 perform enthusiastically in building up secure basic tackling techniques. Standards in netball are above average, with girls in Year 7 showing good footwork and a growing tactical awareness as they improve their passing and receiving skills. In gymnastics, boys in Year 8 perform their sequences on apparatus with reasonable control and overall standards are average. For girls in Year 7, gymnastic standards are higher than expected in their sequence work involving twisting and turning movements. Lower attaining pupils in Year 9 are making good progress in developing their basic skills in hockey, badminton and trampolining, and their standards in these activities are average overall. Throughout Years 7-9, pupils gain an appropriate understanding of the effects of exercise on the body. They prepare well for their practical work, although more opportunity should be given for boys and girls to lead this preparation.

183. The school does not provide GCSE courses in either physical education or dance in years 10 and 11. In the work seen in whole-school physical education, standards are above average overall. Major games continue to be strengths as pupils consolidate and extend their work in earlier years. This was the case in football where boys in Year 11 showed well above average skills in improving their ball control and passing. Girls taking the Junior Sports Leader Award were also notably successful in developing co-operation and leadership skills as they created and rehearsed their group dance routines. In Year 11, girls' work on fitness and aerobics, and boys' badminton, whilst average overall, were notable for the very positive levels of commitment and effort in each.

184. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in physical education. They are co-operative and very well behaved. Most are enthusiastic, have positive levels of interest in the subject, and participate fully in lessons. As a result, both boys and girls develop good learning skills that are enhanced by their commitment, physical effort, and willingness to accept responsibility.

185. The quality of teaching and the learning that it promotes are good throughout Years 7-11. Important strengths of teaching are the very good relationships and management of pupils, linked with high expectations that combine to create a purposeful atmosphere for learning in lessons. Teachers have good specialist knowledge of the activities they teach; as a result, pupils quickly learn correct techniques and improve their knowledge and understanding. This was clearly so in Year 11 football where boys made very rapid progress in improving their ball control and their awareness of the importance of moving towards the ball early to make space for themselves. In the most effective lessons, teachers establish clear learning objectives that they share with the pupils, and regularly review progress against them. This approach was successful both for Year 7 boys in improving their tackling in rugby, and with Year 7 girls in developing their gymnastic sequences. Areas for development in teaching include more opportunities for developing pupils' skills of observation and evaluation, and also ensuring a closer match of work to pupils' needs. Whilst teachers' planning is generally good, more emphasis should be given to the work required by pupils of differing abilities – a clearer illustration is needed of the tasks and resources required for both the higher and lower attaining pupils in classes.

186. Leadership and management are good. National Curriculum requirements are met in Years 7-9, and opportunities for choice and specialisation in Years 10-11 are having a positive impact on participation rates. Assessment procedures are secure, although they require closer links and alignment to National Curriculum levels in Years 7-9. A regular approach to monitoring teaching and learning would help in this process, and promote continued improvement by sharing the good range of successful teaching that currently exists.

187. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards in teaching and learning are stronger now. Although no examination opportunities have been introduced in Years 10 and 11, A level physical education in the sixth form has developed well. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities

has been sustained and is a very strong feature – these are popular and very well supported by boys and girls, and are helping to raise standards. They are providing very good opportunities for many pupils to achieve high standards both individually and in their teams at local, regional and national levels.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good. Teachers are enthusiastic and show a high level of commitment.
- Good results are achieved at GCSE.
- The subject makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not always follow up on work that pupils have missed or left incomplete.

188. Pupils enter the school with average levels of attainment in religious education. By the end of Year 9, teachers' assessments and evidence from the inspection indicate that the standard of work is above average, which represents good achievement. GCSE results have risen steadily over the last three years and in 2002 were well above the national average at grades A*-C. In 2001 and 2002, all pupils entered achieved a grade which shows that pupils are achieving well. Girls consistently perform better than boys, which reflects the national picture. Overall standards of work in Year 11, measured against the individual requirements of the various courses, are above average.

189. By Year 9, pupils develop knowledge and understanding about the growth of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. They make informed comparisons between the teaching of different faiths and between different branches of the Christian Church. Pupils satisfactorily develop evaluative skills and can back up their judgements with sound reasoning. Lower attaining pupils make equally good progress. Whilst their work is less thorough and skills are less well developed, they produce sensitive and thoughtful work.

190. In Year 11, some pupils follow the full GCSE course. Their work is above average and shows a good level of understanding, especially in relation to the teachings of Christianity compared to other world faiths. Lower attaining pupils tend to leave work unfinished and give evaluations that are superficial. Some pupils place too much reliance on sticking photocopied sheets into their books rather than completing their own notes. All other Year 11 pupils are following a very short religious education course as part of their PSHE syllabus. The standard of their work, in relation to the requirements of the shortened course, is above average. 100 pupils will take the Certificate level entry examination in order to achieve an extra qualification. This is a pilot scheme being tried for the first time this year. A further group of Year 11 students is studying in an after-school class in order to sit the GCSE short course examination.

191. Overall, pupils achieve well throughout the school. Good teaching, good relationships between teachers and pupils and generally very good behaviour in lessons all contribute well to good progress. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language achieve well. Gifted and talented pupils are encouraged to explore topics more deeply through more open-ended questions and by being given the opportunity for independent research. Credit is always given for unexpected answers.

192. Pupils' attitudes to their work are positive and their behaviour in lessons is generally very good. Many pupils take care and pride in their books and make sure the presentation of their work is of a high standard. Other pupils are too easily satisfied with brief notes and sometimes leave homework incomplete, which lowers their levels of attainment.

193. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers are well-qualified specialists with good knowledge of their subject. There are many strengths, such as the focus on developing pupils' literacy skills, and the academic emphasis on Biblical research. The subject makes a significant contribution to

pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, in a unit of work in Year 7, pupils produced sensitive and thoughtful answers on their hopes for the future. During the inspection pupils were discussing the implications for society of issues such as euthanasia, crime, capital punishment, marriage and divorce. Teachers have high expectations and teach with commitment, enthusiasm and humour. Pupils are encouraged to go beyond simple answers and to explore issues deeply. Tasks are designed to be interesting and, in addition to a wide variety of textbooks, pupils use newspaper articles, magazines, videos and the internet for research. Homework is set regularly and marked with positive comments whenever possible. However, there is not enough follow-up when pupils have missed sections of work or left tasks incomplete.

194. The department is very well led and managed. Pupils' performance is carefully monitored. There have been interruptions to teaching programmes for nearly two years because of serious staff illness but the disruption caused has been kept to a minimum. A good learning environment is created with large classrooms filled with books, fresh flowers and plants and open minds. The department is constantly striving to improve, and is well aware of its own strengths and weaknesses. Lesson planning is good, though occasionally time is not managed effectively, especially in the single lessons. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

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

195. In the inspection, thirteen subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

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	12	83		50		40.8	
Statistics	1	0		0		-	
Biology	34	91		50		39.1	
Chemistry	22	91		41		37.3	
Physics	36	89		53		39.7	
Environmental Science	12	100		42		36.7	
Design and Technology	35	100		63		48.0	
Business Studies	24	96		46		41.3	
Economics	13	92		46		40.8	
Information & Communication Technology	17	100		59		44.1	
Physical Education	15	80		7		24.7	
Art	28	93		57		42.9	
Music	2	100		50		50.0	
Theatre Studies	7	86		71		41.4	
Performance Studies	14	100		64		46.4	
Geography	25	100		56		46.4	
History	31	100		74		50.7	
Religious Studies	9	89		11		28.9	
Government and Politics	10	90		60		47.0	
Sociology	19	95		42		40.5	
Psychology	52	87		33		35.0	
English Language	34	94		24		33.8	
English Literature	32	100		41		42.5	
French	7	100		57		42.9	
German	5	80		40		40.0	
General Studies	61	64		10		20.8	

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	33	97		61		95.8	
Biology	27	96		52		83.7	
Chemistry	20	90		50		82.0	
Physics	17	100		77		101.2	
Environmental Science	3	100		33		73.3	
Design and Technology	15	100		47		84.0	
Business Studies	19	100		21		68.4	
Economics	12	100		58		88.3	
Information & Communication Technology	15	93		27		68.0	
Physical Education	9	100		44		80.0	
Art	30	100		47		88.0	
Music	3	100		67		93.3	
Drama	8	100		50		87.5	
Performance Studies	6	100		83		103.3	
Geography	9	100		56		97.8	
History	17	100		41		84.7	
Religious Studies	3	100		33		80.0	
Government and Politics	3	100		33		73.3	
Sociology	16	100		38		78.8	
Psychology	33	100		49		87.9	
English Language	20	100		55		93.0	
English Literature	28	100		50		87.1	
French	1	100		0		80.0	
German	4	50		0		30.0	
General Studies	19	100		37		83.2	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

196. The main focus was on mathematics, biology and chemistry but lessons were also sampled in physics and environmental science. In physics, teaching was very good. It enabled Year 13 students to make very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of the equations associated with simple harmonic motion. In 2001, the results in environmental science were well above average and similar results were obtained in 2002. In both years all the candidates passed the examination with at least a third achieving higher grades A and B. Current standards in Year 13 are well above average. Students work independently in response to very good teaching and clear guidance.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average in Year 13.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students' attitudes are very good.

Areas for improvement

- The range of teaching and learning styles could be extended.

197. In 2002, students' results in A level examinations were similar to those of the previous year when they were well above the national average. Over half the students gained the higher grades A and B. Almost all students complete the AS/A level courses once they have embarked on them.

198. Standards of work in Year 13 are well above average and represent very good achievement. Some particularly good work was observed in a statistics class with students showing great depth of understanding in forming hypotheses, and analysis and interpretation of data. Computers are used very effectively to collect data from international sources as well as in analysing and presenting the results. Standards in pure mathematics, mechanics and decision mathematics are above average. Students are good at using and applying their knowledge of algebra and calculus and can select the appropriate mathematical process to solve problems in mechanics and statistics. Their ability to recall concepts and skills studied in Year 12 and actively discuss the derivation and proof of new concepts is very good. Written work in Year 13 is of a high standard. It is presented well and is very thorough with all methods clearly shown.

199. Students in Year 12 achieve well. Their work meets the criteria for A-E grades at AS level and much of the work is of a standard equivalent to the higher grades. All students are confident with topics such as calculus and show a good grasp of integration methods and their application. In general, students have a good understanding of algebraic techniques and can apply them to solve more complex problems in pure mathematics. More able students understand division of polynomials and quickly mastered the remainder theorem. In some lessons students were able to demonstrate their confidence to the class by working through examination questions on the whiteboard and engaging in rigorous discussion about their methods. Most lessons are well paced for the majority of students.

200. Overall teaching is very good and enables all students to learn very quickly. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Organisation and management are very good and ensure that the courses are covered in sufficient depth and that students are able to practise and revise thoroughly. In some lessons students studying single and double mathematics A-levels are taught together. They have different levels of ability in mathematics but teachers plan well so that all students progress at a rate that builds progressively on their knowledge and confidence. Provision could be improved through the use of a wider range of teaching and learning styles, including more independent learning, which would help the more able students to make even faster progress. Teachers' questioning of students in class is very good; it moves students on and assists teachers in the planning of subsequent lessons. Students are prepared thoroughly for examinations because they learn techniques that are flexible and can be adapted to new situations. Teachers show a very good knowledge of their students' capabilities, which is reflected in the high quality of individual support in lessons. Marking is very good and often includes detailed advice showing students how to improve their work.

201. Students are highly motivated and enjoy this subject citing the challenge and satisfaction of solving complex problems, more independent study and the practical aspects of topics such as statistics as being most enjoyable. They appreciate the experience of the teaching staff and their good relationships with

them. Both in class and in the approach to homework students display a mature attitude and produce extensive amounts of work. They are aware of their own shortcomings and act on advice given in both class and homework. Students are supportive of their peers and are willing to try out their ideas in front of the whole class, confidently discussing alternative approaches.

202. The course structure is well organised to ensure that all elements of the syllabus are covered in depth whilst allowing plenty of time for consolidation and revision. Assessment procedures are good and are used well to keep students' informed of their progress on a regular basis throughout the sixth form. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. High standards have been maintained.

Biology

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

Strengths

- Teaching is very good and facilitates very good learning.
- Standards are well above average in Year 13.
- Students are highly motivated.

Areas for improvement

- More use could be made of ICT in lessons.
- Fieldwork is underdeveloped.
- Some larger resources need to be replaced.

203. The GCE A level results in biology in 2001 were well above average. All students achieved a pass and the proportion of students achieving the higher grade passes was well above average. In 2002, similar results were achieved. The AS results in 2001 were well above average; all students achieved a pass grade and an above average proportion achieved the higher grades. In 2002, all students achieved grades A-E at AS level, half of them at the higher grades. Retention rates are high

204. Evidence from the inspection indicates that standards of work in Year 13 are well above average. Students achieve very well in relation to their GCSE results in response to very good teaching. They display good knowledge, for example, of infectious diseases and the body's defence mechanisms. Students make presentations to other students, demonstrating confidence and the ability to express themselves with clarity and to respond to questioning. In Year 12, students discuss the techniques of cloning and the issues related to it with a sense of maturity and consideration of the ethics involved. They are competent in the handling of microscopes and the preparation of slides. Overall, students are successfully building on work covered at GCSE level.

205. Teaching in biology is very good overall, enabling students to learn very well. Teachers have very good subject knowledge so that they are able to give clear explanations of facts. Their enthusiasm for the subject is infectious. Lessons are well planned, have a brisk pace and include a variety of teaching and learning styles to maintain students' interest. Reviews at the end of lessons help to consolidate learning and students are encouraged to share ideas and help each other. They are often set topics to research for themselves, which helps to develop their independent learning skills. This is helped by the provision of a good departmental library and scientific journals. Teachers' expectations are high and they question students frequently during lessons to establish and reinforce knowledge and understanding. There are pleasant working relationships between teachers and students during lessons so students feel able to ask questions if they need to. More use could be made of ICT in lessons and little practical fieldwork takes place, but the department hopes to develop both of these areas. Written work in students' folders is well organised and the topic notes are very comprehensive. Marking is thorough and appropriately annotated, giving clear guidance to students on areas for improvement. Assessment takes place through regular testing during and at the end of work modules, and targets are regularly reviewed so students are always aware of their progress. Students who are considered to be underachieving are counselled well to discuss

their progress. Homework is set and marked on a regular basis and is used to reinforce work covered in lessons, often comprising past examination questions.

206. Students learn very well and make good progress in lessons because they are mature and highly motivated. Many of them intend to continue with biologically related studies when they leave school. They respond well in lessons and rise to challenges, as shown during question and answer sessions, and are keen to contribute to class discussions. They work co-operatively together in both theory and practical lessons, helping each other and sharing ideas in a mature and sensible way.

207. Leadership and management of the department are good and the high standards seen during the previous inspection have been maintained. There is a good team spirit within the department and members of staff support each other and share information and expertise, meeting regularly to discuss departmental issues and review progress. There is a commitment to the continued achievement of very good examination results. Resources are satisfactory but some of the larger equipment needs to be replaced. The department receives good technical support.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- Results at A level are above average.
- Teaching and learning are good.
- Relationships between students and teachers are very good. They have a positive effect on learning.

Areas for improvement

- More use could be made of ICT.
- A wider range of teaching strategies could be used.
- More opportunities could be provided for students' independent learning.

208. Students' results in A level chemistry in 2001 were above average. Results in 2002 were similar. Over the past four years results have fluctuated with each cohort of students but have usually been above average. Results in AS chemistry in 2001 were average. Results declined slightly in 2002.

209. Standards of work are average in Year 12 and above average in Year 13. They are achieved as a result of consistently good teaching and represent good achievement across the age range. Students' very positive attitudes also contribute significantly to the above average standards. In Year 12, students make a satisfactory start to their study of chemistry and they gain skills and knowledge at an appropriate rate. Their knowledge and understanding of inorganic, physical and organic chemistry are average overall. For example, they can explain in detail the difference between oxidation and reduction. They can use the concept of oxidation state correctly to work out the formula of compounds such as nitric(V) acid and sulphuric(VI) acid. The level of understanding of important concepts and the application of theories gains momentum in Year 13, for instance, when students complete complex calculations to evaluate the enthalpy and entropy of various common reactions. They make good use of these calculated values to determine the feasibility of important industrial processes. Students' practical and investigative skills improve systematically throughout the sixth form due to the very good emphasis placed on these skills in the planning. A good example was students' accurate analysis of the iron content of lawn sand, and the reasons given for the difference between their results and published data.

210. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and understanding. Clear explanations of theories enable students to make good progress in their studies, such as when the concept of equilibrium was explained to students in a format they could readily understand. Students quickly assimilated the facts and made immediate use of them in their own work. Relationships

between students and teachers are good, which help to boost students' confidence. They willingly contribute to discussion and are not afraid to have their contributions used as a basis for moving the lesson on. Good evidence was observed of students being confident enough to make their own predictions. The main weakness in teaching is that only a limited range of teaching strategies is used. This sometimes leads to students being rather passive learners. Year 13 students feel that independent learning opportunities are limited because they cannot retain their AS textbooks for reference.

211. Students have a very mature attitude to their work. Written work is of a good standard and often better. Students have very positive views of chemistry and value the extra help and advice they receive when they find individual topics difficult.

212. Teamwork in the department is good. However, the good practice could be shared more to raise standards further. Assessment is good. It accurately reflects students' attainment although more use could be made of questions that diagnose areas of weakness in students' attainment. Although ICT is used in chemistry it needs to be more firmly embedded in the department's schemes of work. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. It is illustrated by the good standards of attainment and the good retention rates in the AS and A level courses.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology is the only course offered in this curriculum area. It was a focus subject in the inspection.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- Students mostly achieve better results than expected in relation to their GCSE results.
- Students have very positive attitudes.
- Teaching is consistently good.

Areas for improvement

- There are insufficient CAD/CAM facilities for students to include this fully in their work.
- There is no provision for students who want to continue their work in food and textiles into the sixth form.

213. In 2001, the A level results in design and technology were average after mostly being well above average in previous years. This resulted from the poor motivation of a very small number of students. The results in product design in 2002 were better. AS results in 2001 were above average and, in 2002, were much higher. They were amongst the best in the school. Male and female students did equally well. Nearly all students achieved better results than predicted by their GCSE results. Most students complete the course.

214. Overall, the standards of work of current students are above average. Year 13 students are maintaining the very high standards they achieved last year. Standards in Year 12 are above average. In both year groups, students are achieving well in relation to their GCSE results. Students' design folders show thorough research and well-developed ideas. Students often work well with external sources, for instance, a writing implement is being developed to assist a child with cerebral palsy. Students have very good drawing and modelling skills that they use well to evaluate ideas and develop products. They discriminate appropriately in their use of ICT for presentation, analysis and drawing. Most are confident in

the use of both bitmap and 3D computer drawing programs. Final products are executed to a high standard, using a wide range of materials and techniques. For example, a lighting project for a local restaurant involves both aluminium casting and computer controlled milling of acrylic, although the latter has to be carried out at another school due to lack of facilities in the department.

215. Teaching and learning are good overall. A particular strength is the individual discussions with students about their design work, which ensure that they learn well and develop independently. Teachers have a good range of specialist knowledge. The marking of students' work is thorough. A standard format is used that ensures students are aware of the criteria and learn how to improve. Theory lessons are well planned and usually well illustrated with examples. Students are assigned to individual teachers who monitor their work closely, thus ensuring that they make good progress. There is good provision for students to extend their work outside lessons and visits, for instance to the Design Museum, enhance their experience.

216. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject and have mostly chosen to study it because they enjoyed their GCSE course. Some are planning to make a career in an aspect of design and technology. They work well independently on their projects and engage in mature discussions, both individually and in whole class lessons, about theoretical aspects of the subject. They present their work well.

217. Examination results are critically analysed in order to identify ways to improve standards. Good improvement has been made since the previous inspection. The number of students taking the subject has increased. Students are making much better use of computers but there is insufficient provision for the numbers now taking the subject. In particular, the provision in the resistant materials area is inadequate and there are no facilities for computer-aided manufacture in three dimensions. The environment for working in resistant materials is out-dated, in poor decorative order and is inappropriate for designing. There is no provision for those students who wish to continue working in textiles or food technology in the sixth form.

BUSINESS

Business studies and economics are offered in this curriculum area. Business studies was the focus subject in the inspection. No lessons were sampled in economics. In 2001, the results at AS and A level were well above average. Students' performance was similar in 2002.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average and the students' achievement is very good.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- The subject is very well led and managed.
- Students have very good attitudes to their study.

Areas for improvement

- External links with business need to be extended.
- Not enough use is made of ICT.

218. Students' results at GCE A level were well above average in 2001, and had been so for two of the previous three years. Results in 2002 were of a similar standard to those in 2001. The standards of work of the present Years 12 and 13 students are well above average and represent very good achievement in view of their average attainment on entry to the sixth form. The students' strengths are

their very good subject knowledge and ability to apply it to business situations, their very good analytical skills and the high quality of their oral and written communication. For example, some perfectly structured, very well written business reports laid out strategies for increasing profitability based on thorough studies of absenteeism and staff turnover, product diversification and financial viability. These were very convincing. Relative weaknesses lie in lower attaining students' reluctance to make judgements, insufficient gathering of information and occasional errors in spelling and punctuation.

219. Learning is very good. The students are enthusiastic, confident and quick learners who read around their subject and have their own very effective methods of note-taking. Their prompt, accurate and articulate answers to questions on, for example, employment law and supply and demand, show very good retention and efficient recall of previous learning and assured communication skills. Problem-solving is very good and students' work is supported by very good research and independent thinking. The students are very productive. They work well in groups and at a good pace, sustaining concentration for long periods of time. In a demanding lesson on fixed and floating exchange rates, some excellent spontaneous discussions took place at a very technically competent level, which included a consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of adopting the euro. The students' literacy and numeracy skills are very good, and students with special educational needs, for example, dyslexia, make equally good progress. Students have very good self-knowledge of their own learning and work towards ambitious targets. Retention and attendance rates are very good.

220. Teaching is very good overall. Teachers have high expectations of their students, set a brisk pace and exercise firm but sensitive classroom management, which earns the students' respect and creates an excellent climate for learning. The teachers' very good subject knowledge, expertise and knowledge of their students enable them to plan lessons skilfully so that all the time available is used for active, independent learning. The teaching is challenging. Teachers give substantial and testing homework, which is planned to cater for students at all ability levels. Their work is marked rigorously with detailed and lengthy guidance notes to help them improve their performance and raise standards. ICT is used well in teaching to enhance students' learning but it needs to be used on a more regular basis. Better access to computers is needed within the subject area. Teachers' links with business in the community need to be extended to broaden students' experiences.

221. Leadership and management are very good and provide clear educational direction and vision. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Monitoring of teaching and learning, assessment and homework are all very effective. Information of students' prior attainment is used well to set ambitious but achievable targets. The department reviews its provision carefully and shares good practice to sustain the very high standards. Resources are good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology is the only course offered in this curriculum area. It was a focus subject in the inspection.

Information and communication technology

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

Strengths

- Standards of work are above average.
- Students find the course attractive and are studying it in increasing numbers.
- Students' coursework is good.
- Students have good attitudes and achieve well.

Areas for improvement

- The standard of students' work in the their units could be raised to that of the coursework, particularly in Year 13.

- The quality of marking could be improved.
- More opportunities could be provided for students to study the use of ICT in outside organisations.

222. The GCE A level examination results in 2001 were well above the national average. All six candidates achieved a grade C or better. In 2002, from an entry of 15, the overall results were not as good as the previous year. However, all but one student gained grades and four students obtained a grade A or B. These results were broadly similar to those in their other subjects and were as expected considering the students' GCSE grades. AS-level examination results for the last three years have been good. In 2002, 17 Year 12 students took the examination; all passed with 10 obtaining a grade A or B. 14 of these students are continuing with the A2-level course. Very few students who start the course fail to finish it. There is no significant difference between the results of male and female students or those from different ethnic backgrounds in either the A level or AS examination although more males than females choose to study the subject.

223. Standards of work of current students are above average in Year 13 and achievement is good. However, students' coursework is better than that on their theory units. Some good coursework was observed in both Year 12 and 13. For example, a good testing strategy was being developed to detect errors in students' solutions to the initial problem. Test plans included dealing with typical, extreme and erroneous data. More advanced students developed good procedures for testing input, output and program functions. This work could have been further improved by a greater emphasis on end-user testing. Students' knowledge and understanding of how organisations use ICT was not as well developed. Not all the factors relating to a Management Information System were fully understood.

224. Students are enthusiastic and have very positive attitudes. They arrive punctually, prepared to work in their lessons. In particular, they enjoy working individually on computers. They willingly help other students who are experiencing problems. They have easy access to computers in non-taught time and they make good use of this facility to extend and enhance their learning. They use the internet well to research information.

225. Overall, teaching is good and this is the main reason why students do well. The teaching of both Year 12 and Year 13 A level and AS level ICT is shared by experienced teachers, which works well. They have good subject knowledge, lessons are well planned and students are provided with appropriate handouts and a relevant textbook which provide a good resource base for examination revision. Teachers enjoy good relationships with their students who then have the confidence to ask questions, which help them learn. On occasions, the teaching of theoretical units does not capture the students' full attention; it is too prescriptive and does not give the students an opportunity to express their own ideas. However, when the students are working individually on their coursework teachers intervene very effectively to extend their thinking and keep them on task. Students respond well and make good progress. Marking of students' work, although regular, does not always give clear pointers for further improvement.

226. There are clear schemes of work, external data is well analysed and individual students are set appropriate targets. Good resources are used effectively. Since the previous report the department has expanded considerably and there has been good improvement in both teaching and standards. However, although there are many facilities in school to aid students' learning, there are insufficient opportunities for them to visit outside organisations where ICT is being used. Such visits would help students considerably in understanding the use of ICT in a variety of contexts. Currently students not taking ICT as an A or AS level course do not have access to an ICT Key Skills course which would extend their skills and help them with their work in other subjects.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education is the only course offered in this curriculum area. It was a focus subject in the inspection.

Physical education

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good, and students achieve well as a result.
- Assessment procedures and the monitoring of students' progress are very good.
- Relationships and support for students are very good.
- Students' personal performance portfolios are of a high standard.

Areas for improvement

- The subject needs a specific base for theoretical work.
- The subject lacks a foundation course for advanced level work because pupils cannot study physical education at GCSE.
- There are not enough opportunities for physical recreation within the sixth form curriculum.

227. Since the previous inspection, the school has successfully consolidated the introduction of physical education as an examination subject in the sixth form. Improvement is good. The A level course is popular and has recruited well, especially in the present Year 12. Students' course completion rates are good, although not all continue from AS to A level.

228. Results in examinations have fluctuated considerably. In 2001, A level results were well below average; six of the seven candidates successfully gained A-E grades but none gained the higher A-B grades. Some did not do as well as expected and overall achievement was unsatisfactory. The most recent 2002 results at A level showed substantial improvement – all nine students passed, including four with A-B grades. For these students achievement was satisfactory, with most achieving the expected grade. Results at AS level taken at the end of Year 12 show less variation. In 2001, results were well above average with all students successfully completing the course, and half gaining A-B grades. Those for 2002 declined somewhat from this high standard. Significantly, in both 2001 and 2002, many of these Year 12 students did better than expected. The AS level results represent good achievement and very creditable success, particularly given the relatively modest GCSE results of some who opted for the course.

229. The standards of work seen during the inspection in both Years 12 and 13 are above average. Students demonstrate generally good knowledge and understanding of the subject principles, particularly where links are made with associated practical experience. This was illustrated well in a successful Year 13 lesson where students were investigating the factors affecting strength, and the differing training methods and energy systems required for various activities. In all the lessons seen, well-planned lesson structures and activities focused purposefully on developing students' knowledge and understanding. Good progress was made when they were directly engaged in the learning process, as in a very good Year 12 lesson on the respiratory system where students worked together in pairs in analysing gaseous exchange and the mechanics of breathing.

230. Teaching is good overall and ensures that students learn well. Subject knowledge is very strong and teachers use this, together with their good understanding of the course specifications, to prepare students well for the examinations. Expectations are high and relationships are very good. Students appreciate this, and the support that they get from their teachers in providing clear guidance, whilst ensuring that they develop responsibility for their own learning. Students are both intellectually challenged by the work and supported well in their areas of uncertainty. Their progress is monitored well, and they respond very positively and work hard. Their motivation and commitment to the course can be seen most clearly in the very high quality of their personal performance portfolios. This high standard reflects also their capacity for independent research, to use ICT and other media to find and extract information, and

to develop their own notes. This is generally consistent across the course, although work in skill acquisition and the psychology of sport is not as notable as, for example, that in contemporary studies or exercise physiology. The regular use of homework and structured tests supports standards well. Assessment is very good, with clear, helpful marking that guides students towards improvement in their work.

231. There is a clear focus on improving standards in the sixth form. Resources for the course are generally good, especially those developed using the school's intranet system. However, the lack of a dedicated classroom base for academic work is a major disadvantage, as is the absence of a foundation GCSE physical education course in Years 10-11 to support the A level course. The absence of recreational opportunity within the curriculum for sixth form students is also disappointing, although extra-curricular provision is strong, and many of the students also provide valuable support for younger pupils in their physical education lessons.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

There are no courses at advanced level in this curriculum area.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

232. The focus subjects in the inspection were art and design and music. Theatre studies and performance studies were also sampled. Two lessons were sampled in theatre studies, in which standards were above average. In one, students worked well together to interpret a scene from the Threepenny Opera for an audience using Brechtian techniques. All students showed good vocal and stage awareness. In the other lesson, students produced high-quality ensemble work, which showed a very good knowledge of physical theatre. They used this knowledge well to produce very effective presentations illustrating the abuse of power. Teaching and learning were very good in both lessons. In performance studies, results are well above average at both A level and AS level. Standards of work are very high, and high levels of subject expertise were seen in the teaching. Two lessons were sampled. In one, teaching and learning were excellent, producing very high levels of commitment and concentration. As a result, students' working dance was imaginative and expressive, and of a very high standard. In the other, teaching and learning were good, and both males and females were very well motivated. This produced very strong group interaction in the choreography, which was very co-operative and imaginative.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good; students achieve very well.
- Teachers create a confident and positive learning environment in lessons.
- High quality individual advice is a strong feature of the teaching.
- Sketchbooks are used very effectively to support students' learning.

Areas for improvement

- A small number of students do not make enough use of their private study time.

233. In the A level examinations in 2001, results were well above average, though they declined in 2002. In recent years results have usually been well above average. In the AS examinations in 2001, results were above average, and were sustained at a similar level in 2002. Almost all students who start courses in art and design finish them, and retention is very good.

234. Standards are well above average in Year 12. Students are achieving very well, taking into account their prior attainment. They make very good gains in their skills, knowledge and understanding in this subject. They learn to make beautiful collograph prints, which explore subtle variations in texture and surface, with crisp lines contrasting with softer muted colours. Their paintings from still life are bold and vigorous, and show a confidence in using broad brushwork and high contrasts of light and shade. These are further developed into wire sculptures, which imaginatively balance line and tone in three dimensions. Students also create rich study sheets, based on visits to art galleries, which make very effective links between their own work and the artwork they have seen.

235. Standards are also well above average in Year 13. Students' achievement is very good. They continue to make very strong progress in their work. The highest attaining students create exquisite textiles pieces, based on first-hand study of the landscape of Tuscany. These skilfully use fabrics and threads to conjure up the textures and colours of the Italian countryside. They also draw confidently from natural forms such as seashells, using rich tones on textured paper to express complex forms. Sketchbooks are used very vigorously, to draw, paint and develop ideas, and this supports students' learning very effectively. Students also experiment freely with a very wide variety of materials, such as inks, card, wood, metallic sheeting and wire and paper. This produces a richness of diversity in their work. However, a small number of students do not always make good use of their private study time, and they do not produce enough work to fully develop their skills and ideas in the subject.

236. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers give very high quality individual advice, and lessons are active and purposeful. For example, in a lesson where students were working on individual ideas, the teacher listened very carefully to the students' own ideas and discussed them fully before giving advice and encouragement. This meant that students took a high level of responsibility for their own work and tried hard to improve their standards. It created a focused and purposeful atmosphere, and very good levels of engagement with the materials and ideas. As a result, learning was very good.. Relationships between teachers and students are very good. This produces a confident and positive learning atmosphere in lessons, which further promotes the very good learning seen.

237. Students' attitudes are very good overall. They appreciate the individual advice they receive, and the wide variety of materials and processes which they use. As a result, they try very hard in their lessons, and this helps to reinforce their very good learning.

238. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good. Well above average standards have been maintained, and the quality of teaching and learning is consistently very good.

Music

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good and students achieve well.
- The range of enrichment activities is extensive.
- Students are highly committed to learning, and to participation in a wide range of musical activities.

Areas for improvement

- The curriculum could be adapted to meet more closely, as far as is possible, the needs and capabilities of the students taking the course.

239. Examination results at A level in 2001 were average. They were higher in 2002. Over the past four years results have been above average, with most students obtaining A or B grades. However, numbers entered are small. Students taking the AS examinations in 2001 and 2002 obtained grades in the

A to C range, but again numbers entered were low. Most students continue their studies from AS to A level. There is no difference between the attainment of male and female students.

240. Overall standards of work in Year 13 are average. Students achieve well from the starting point at GCSE. Standards of performing in Years 12 and 13 are very high, frequently at a level beyond the requirements of the examination. Interpretations are stylish and communication is effective. Students participate in a broad range of music-making; they play with spontaneity and panache, but demand high standards of themselves, and are always concerned to present a polished performance. Most students have secure composing techniques; they make very good use of the department's recently acquired, high quality ICT equipment, confidently exploring and selecting from the vast variety of sound sources, and using scoring and editing facilities to refine their work. They are creative and independent, developing ideas and structures derived from the characteristic features of their chosen genre. Students in the A level class, relating their compositions to their instrumental experience, had studied the techniques of writing for horn in works by Mozart and Richard Strauss, and organ toccatas of J S Bach and Louis Vierne. The results were evocative of these genres but had the integrity of individual expression. However, students have not yet developed the musical judgement which will help them to refine the development of ideas so that their work has structural unity and coherence.

241. Although all students in Year 12 studied GCSE and obtained very high grades, the breadth of their previous experience has not been sufficient to provide them with a confident approach to the challenge of the intellectual demands of AS and A-level courses. Few had experience of taking part in major orchestral or choral performances, or of attending concerts of major works. Nevertheless they are making good progress in developing secure scholarship and research skills because teaching is good. Members of staff have high levels of expertise and share their enthusiasm for the subject with great conviction. They know students' strengths and weaknesses, and are intensely committed to supporting their development as musicians and scholars. Overall, teaching is good. Lessons have clear objectives and challenging content so students develop perceptive analytical skills and think creatively as composers. As a result of the teacher's skilful questioning technique, students in Year 12 discovered the complexities of Elgar's writing for chorus in 'The Dream of Gerontius', and were able to identify different devices and relate these to the dramatic demands of Cardinal Newman's poetry.

242. Students are well motivated, highly enthusiastic about all their music-making, and deeply appreciative of the commitment shown them by all members of the music department. Numbers taking the subject have until recently been low, but currently are significantly larger. Fewer male than female students study music at this stage.

243. Students are well supported by careful assessment of their progress on a day-to-day basis, by detailed, constructive comment on their written work, and by regular marking against examination criteria. They benefit from the quality of individual advice they are given, and are well informed about their achievement. The department's provision for gifted and talented students is very good; all students are actively involved in the wide range of instrumental and vocal ensembles which rehearse daily, and several show initiative by organising and rehearsing small ensembles which contribute on an occasional basis to the daily school assembly.

244. There is an enriching programme of concerts and other musical events that take place regularly, both in the school and in the local area. Foreign tours are undertaken annually. Accommodation for music is unsatisfactory; the scattered location of rooms makes communication difficult, and suitable spaces for individual practice are rarely available because of the large numbers of instrumental lessons being taught.

245. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Good levels of achievement have been maintained, and numbers taking the subject are increasing. However, the department needs to take more account of students' particular strengths and interests when planning the course for each group.

HUMANITIES

246. The focus subjects were history, religious studies and psychology, but government and politics, geography and sociology were also sampled. In geography, A level results have been consistently well above average for over six years. All the students entered have passed the examination, over half attaining the higher grades A and B. The teaching observed was very good, providing the students with challenge and opportunities for independent research. Examination results in government and politics over recent years have been consistently high and in the most recent AS examinations the vast majority of candidates obtained A grades. In the inspection, one lesson in Year 13 was observed. Teaching and learning were very good and the students reached high standards. They were very well prepared for the lesson and all were able to provide accurate analyses of each other's presentations, which evaluated aspects of the effectiveness of functions performed by legislatures. Very good questioning extracted further explanations from students, which pushed them to a deeper and more secure understanding. Examination results are above average in sociology. Teaching is very good. Students achieve good standards in relation to their abilities and share ideas maturely. They participate in class discussion confidently and in both oral and written work show familiarity with the vocabulary of sociology. Their written work is conscientiously completed and it is informed by research. Key issues in methodology are well covered combining both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to find out about the subject matter from all angles. Provision is very good

History

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average in Year 13 and results are improving.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students have very positive attitudes to learning and are very well prepared for lessons.

Areas for improvement

- There is some inconsistency in the extent to which the best features of the marking of students' work are applied.

247. The 2002 GCE A level examination results improved in comparison with 2001 when they were above average. Female students' performance was much better than that of male students and their results were well above average when compared with female students nationally. The AS results in 2001 were below average but improved significantly in 2002. Course completion rates are excellent

248. Evidence from the inspection indicates that standards of work are well above average in Year 13. Students achieve very well in relation to the predictions based on their GCSE and AS results. The highest attaining students in Year 13 write maturely and at length in their essays and make effective use of their knowledge of the work of prominent historians when discussing issues such as the relationship between King and Parliament during the Reformation. Other students write to good length but their arguments are not always well supported by factual detail. The course work of the higher and average attaining students is impressive. Their writing is extremely detailed, shows a sure command of the factual information, which is very effectively organised, and uses an appropriate and wide range of sources of information. Students evaluate the process of their investigations well. The quality of writing owes much to the time spent in teaching students to construct effective essays and the emphasis that the teachers place on accurate spelling and the quality of sentence construction and paragraphing when they mark and assess the work. The positive effects of this are recognised and appreciated by students. Students in Year 12

have made good progress in coming to terms with demands of working at this level. Their command and use of factual information in essays have developed well but they tend not to analyse in sufficient depth to reach the highest levels of attainment. For example, their knowledge and understanding of relevant events are used well in discussing sources of information concerning Henry VIII's relationship with the nobility but they do not thoroughly assess their reliability. Some students find the subject more difficult than anticipated, in particular in dealing with the thematic approach required in their study of European history coupled with the demands made on them by independent learning methods. Differences in standards reached by female and male students are not currently significant.

249. Teaching and learning are very good overall. In the lessons observed, the teaching was consistently good or very good and there are very distinct strengths, which combine to ensure that students are able to reach or maintain well above average standards. This judgement was confirmed by an analysis of a representative sample of students' work where the same strengths were evident. The quality of marking is impressive overall but there is some minor inconsistency between teachers in the extent to which the best features of the marking are applied. Students are generally given very clear indications of how they can improve their standards. The highest attaining students are not allowed to rest on their laurels but are pushed to do even better. The use of the subject specification assessment criteria to form the focus of the feedback to students enables them to gain a very clear idea of the extent of their mastery of the skills being assessed and the students themselves appreciate the value of this in enabling them to improve. Teachers have established very good relationships with the students. This enables learning to take place in a relaxed atmosphere, which, nevertheless, has an academic rigour. It places a high priority on the students learning for themselves and ensures that they come to lessons well prepared to take part in discussion and debate. It also means that students are not afraid to challenge the teacher and each other as well as test ideas and opinions. This prepares them very well for future learning in higher education. Teachers' own specialist subject knowledge is very secure and is used well in sharp questioning and authoritative explanations. In the best lessons it is also used very well to broaden the students' horizons. In a lesson on the downfall of Cardinal Wolsey, the teacher made pertinent comparisons with current political events and used a well-chosen Shakespearean quotation to cause students to reflect on human frailty. Occasionally, teachers devote too much attention to the most demanding students, but, in the main, they ensure that all students contribute to the learning. In the best lessons there is definitely no hiding place!

250. Students have generally positive attitudes to the subject although the emphasis placed on independent learning in a subject requiring the development of wide and detailed factual knowledge proves difficult for a minority. Most manage this aspect of their learning well and appreciate that it prepares them for the demands of higher education. In the main, students enjoy the learning in their AS and A level history courses and feel very well supported by their teachers. Their performance in examinations is very thoroughly analysed and the information obtained used well in action to maintain standards and improve the quality of the provision. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

Religious studies

Overall, the quality of provision in religious studies is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Students learn to think independently.

Areas for improvement

- Students need more opportunities to practise examination style questions.
- There are not enough textbooks for the advanced level courses.

251. In 2001, results in the A level examinations were well above average. The number of students entered for the 2002 examination was small. All were successful in achieving a grade, although a smaller

proportion achieved the higher grades. The results in the AS examination in 2002 were satisfactory. Nearly all the students achieved a pass. More female students than males take the subject and, in general, they perform better than their male peers. Retention rates are good.

252. Evidence from the inspection indicates that standards of work are above average in Years 12 and 13 and that students achieve well. In Year 12, they debate the philosophical and theological concepts they have studied and reach their own evaluations. They are articulate and confident in their use of specialist vocabulary. The work in their files is thorough, with short focused notes and good analysis and comparisons. Students in Year 13 have produced some very good work on the science versus religion debate and in their Biblical work have grasped the fundamental principles of Gospel analysis. Their work in preparation for the synoptic paper is proving to be a challenge but progress is made in every lesson. During the inspection the students were discussing the concept of the soul and considering how Christianity flourished in the rich climate of philosophical ideas in the Graeco-Roman world. They use ICT skills effectively to help them to research and present their work.

253. Most students are enthusiastic about the subject. They are open to new ideas and are keen to learn. They argue in a good-natured way, for instance, about the conflicting requirements of proof and faith and are willing to listen to the ideas of others with respect. They are well informed about their progress and well supported by their teachers. Their very good attitudes and behaviour contribute to the good standards that are achieved.

254. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is good. The students are provided with clear guidelines of what is required and given deadlines for work well in advance. They are encouraged to think for themselves and to think laterally. A good variety of teaching techniques is used which includes paired work, presentations, diagrams and flow charts. The internet is used for research as well as textbooks, though more textbooks would be beneficial. Teachers use every opportunity to make the subject relevant to the life and experience of the students and to anchor philosophical concepts in everyday reality. Most teachers have high expectations and offer plenty of challenge. Early practice in examination-style answers would help to build students' confidence.

255. Teachers work well together and are committed to their students' progress. Planning is very good. The monitoring of teaching and learning is rigorous and satisfactory action has been taken to tackle the perceived underachievement caused by serious staff illness last year. There is a sound system for tracking students' progress and setting targets. Improvement since the previous inspection is good.

Psychology

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

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good. As a result, students achieve very well.
- The trend in examination results is consistently good.
- Students are industrious and have positive attitudes to learning.

Areas for improvement

- Students are not as good at analysing situations as they are in describing them.

256. Evidence from the inspection indicates that standards of work are well above average in Year 13. These standards are reached because the teaching is very good. It shows a clear understanding of the subject curriculum and accurate knowledge of psychology leading to clear learning objectives and teaching points. Students' achievement at the end of Years 12 and 13 is very good. Results at grades A to E are consistently well above average. Teaching methods and organisation meet the needs of all

students. For example, male and female students of all abilities are challenged and inspired to make imaginative contributions to lessons and to try out new initiatives. Retention rates are excellent.

257. In Year 12, students gain much new knowledge. They are developing a personal interest in the subject and an appreciation of how to analyse the strengths and weaknesses in their own work. The ablest students recognise the importance and relevance of their tasks and understand not only what to do, but, also, why they are doing it. They understand how the build up of work helps them to progress. Examination results at AS level in 2001, at the end of Year 12, were above average. The majority of students gained A to E grades. In 2002, the proportion of A and B grades fell slightly. Females outperformed male students. Students learn for themselves and know how to find things out. Most students can work independently and know when and how to seek help.

258. Year 13 students have a mature approach to the work. They see the purpose of their learning and know how to improve specific aspects of the work. Examination results at A level in 2001 exceeded the national average. Females outperformed male students. In 2002, students' performances improved in that there was a higher proportion of the top grades. The performance of male students was better than that of female students. All students were successful in gaining a grade. Clear targets for improvement are defined and reinforced for all students. Students have a clear view of what a good piece of work will look like. From Year 12 through to Year 13 students understand how the subject is developing and they have a growing awareness of its distinctive nature. For the majority there is sustained concentration, enjoyment, commitment and confidence. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, students examined the difficult psychological explanations of depression. They successfully studied the diagnosis and symptoms of clinical depression by using and applying their prior knowledge. In general, students are better at describing situations than in analysing them. They improve in the latter as their understanding of the subject progresses.

259. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers demonstrate explanations that are clear, accurate and at the right level for students. Learning constantly builds on prior attainment. In Year 13, teachers make clear links with work undertaken in Year 12. Good, subject specific questioning helps students to understand and question for themselves. All teachers are interested and knowledgeable about the subject. They pitch the aims of lessons at appropriate points for students of all abilities. Lessons have a good pace and there is a good variety of independent activity that is compatible with students' experience, for example, when a Year 13 lesson on eating disorders examined media reports on anorexia. Role-play was used well and without inhibition in a Year 12 class where students were used to illustrate the changes in society's thinking about areas related to stress. This was followed by a lively discussion which included an effective evaluation of the learning by the students themselves. Teaching is very positive in encouraging and supporting students who themselves contribute well. However, there are a few who are too passive. The enrichment activities in the subject could be extended to raise students' appreciation of the breadth of opportunities in psychology. There are only a small number of visits to outside agencies and services and few visiting speakers.

260. The quality of leadership and management is very good. There is a clear educational direction for the subject. The teachers are subject specialists and use their expertise well. Teachers work well together in order to raise standards. The progress of the students is very well monitored with appropriate targets set for improvement which are indicated by constructive comments and accurate marking added to students' work. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. Standards have been maintained and schemes of work have been revised to include tasks which more closely match students' abilities and needs.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

261. The focus subject was English language. Lessons were sampled in English literature, French and German. In English literature, two lessons were seen. Standards were above average. In Year 12 students studying 'The Country Wife' worked well in pairs to share ideas about the play's comic elements,

but some lacked the vocabulary to be able to explain them precisely. In Year 13, students studying Blake's poetry were able to identify the technical features of the times, although they tended to participate mechanically, rather than joyfully. Overall, teaching, learning and progress are good. One lesson in each of French and German was sampled in Year 13. In these lessons students made very good progress in reading and writing skills due to the high language level of the texts they were studying. Teachers' subject knowledge is well used to motivate students. They develop ICT skills very well and their attitudes to language learning are excellent. In both languages examination results of the past few years have been above average

English language

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

Strengths

- Standards are well above average.
- Students' achievement is very good.
- Teaching and learning are very good. Students are well prepared for examinations.
- Students' enthusiasm and positive attitudes contribute well to their learning and achievement.

Areas for improvement

There are no significant areas for improvement.

262. Performance at advanced level has risen steadily over the past three years. Results were above the national average in 2001. They improved further in 2002 but national averages are not available for comparison. Male students regularly attain standards well above the national average. Standards at AS were well above average in 2001, but there was a decline in 2002. Retention rates are high.

263. Standards are well above average in Year 13. By this stage most students show a very good grasp of linguistic concepts and terminology. Their investigations are thorough and perceptive and they are presented in a scholarly and professional manner. Students are well aware of the importance of reading texts carefully to determine their audience and purpose before beginning their analyses; and there is excellent evidence of their individual research using the library and the internet. Information gained from the world-wide web is evaluated before being used and carefully chosen references and quotations always support written argument. Students make good use of linguistic frameworks in their analyses, and they express their interpretations confidently, independently and fluently. The quality of discussion in lessons is very high because students are encouraged to explain and justify their arguments and to challenge each other. In a Year 12 lesson, students had to decide, by examining the writer's structure, vocabulary and style, whether an article about model railways was a serious or satirical piece of writing. They used talk maturely as an effective learning tool which helped them to develop, refine, extend and justify their opinions.

264. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and examination experience; therefore, students receive very good advice on how to prepare for examinations. Lessons are well planned and a wide range of stimulating tasks provided: for example, after careful discussion and analysis of estate agents' sales literature, a Year 13 class rewrote Jane Austen's description of Northanger Abbey as if they were advertising a prestigious country house. In their commentary, they then carefully explained and evaluated their writing, using the appropriate linguistic terms, thus showing both their understanding of the genre they were studying and their editing skills. Students' learning is helped considerably by their enthusiasm for the subject, and their very good relationships with their teachers and each other. This means that there is always a strong and purposeful work ethos in the classroom. Very good marking by teachers also helps students' learning. Comments

are always positive, clearly indicate how well students are performing against expectations and give very useful advice on how work can be improved.

265. The sixth form teachers work well together: they constantly review their teaching methods, develop and share resources and set challenging targets for both students and themselves. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. The regular use of ICT is an integral part of the course.