

## INSPECTION REPORT

### **WESTON FAVELL UPPER SCHOOL**

Northampton

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 122075

Headteacher: Mr J Howard

Reporting inspector: John Godwood  
18242

Dates of inspection: 4 – 8 November 2002

Inspection number: 249835

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:         | 13 – 18                         |
| Gender of pupils:            | Mixed                           |
| School address:              | Booth Lane South<br>Northampton |
| Postcode:                    | NN3 3EZ                         |
| Telephone number:            | 01604 402121                    |
| Fax number:                  | 01604 773211                    |
| Appropriate authority:       | The governing body              |
| Name of chair of governors:  | Mr R Entwistle                  |
| Date of previous inspection: | November 1996                   |

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

| Team members |                    |                      | Subject responsibilities  | Aspect responsibilities   |
|--------------|--------------------|----------------------|---|---|
| 18242        | John Godwood       | Registered inspector | Educational inclusion, including race equality                    | What sort of school is it?<br>How high are standards: the school's results and pupils' achievements?<br>How well are pupils taught?<br>How well is the school led and managed?<br>What should the school do to improve further? |
| 9756         | Ken Parsons        | Lay inspector        |   | How high are standards: pupils' attitudes, values and personal development?<br>How well does the school care for its pupils?<br>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?                                      |
| 10759        | Lyn Bappa          | Team inspector       | History<br>Sociology  |   |
| 2740         | Betty Barratt      | Team inspector       | Geography<br>Special educational needs                            |   |
| 23528        | Andrew Bird        | Team inspector       | Mathematics   |   |
| 13734        | Harold Davies      | Team inspector       | Business studies<br>Economics<br>Law                              |   |
| 18542        | Gerald Griffin     | Team inspector       | Design and technology<br>Information and communication technology |   |
| 31135        | Rachel Hobson      | Team inspector       | English   |   |
| 8139         | Barbara Johnstone  | Team inspector       | Music   |   |
| 1779         | David Leonard      | Team inspector       | Science   |   |
| 13054        | Michael Pennington | Team inspector       | Modern foreign languages  |   |

| Team members |                         |                | Subject responsibilities                            | Aspect responsibilities  |
|--------------|-------------------------|----------------|---|--|
| 23030        | Caroline Runyard        | Team inspector | Physical education                                  | How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils? |
| 30427        | Felicity Shuffle-Botham | Team inspector | Citizenship<br>Religious education                  |  |
| 10053        | Janet Simms             | Team inspector | Art and design<br>English as an additional language |  |

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Dorchester  
Dorset  
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33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Weston Favell Upper School is a community comprehensive school of above-average size, with 1292 students aged 13 to 18. It is a specialist technology college and is over-subscribed. One in five students come from minority ethnic backgrounds, with roughly equal numbers from black and Asian heritages and a very small number of refugees. One in ten students have English as an additional language, which is above average, but only five students are at an early stage of learning English. One in seven students are eligible for free school meals, which is average. One in four students have special educational needs, of whom 21 have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The more significant learning needs are emotional and behavioural difficulties and learning difficulties, but also include sensory impairment and physical disability. A significant number of students come from disadvantaged backgrounds; attainment on entry has declined in recent years and is well below average. The school has had difficulties in recruiting teachers, but currently has only one vacancy.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Weston Favell Upper School is an effective school that works hard to provide well for all students and encourages them to reach their full potential. GCSE results are below average, but students achieve well from their standard of attainment on entry. Most students have good attitudes but a minority become disaffected and attend poorly; these students underachieve. The school is tackling this vigorously through developments in the curriculum and improved support for students. Teaching is good and most teachers establish good relationships, though there is some variation in the standard of behaviour expected in different classes. Leadership and management are good and through very good financial management the headteacher and governors have made significant improvements to the school's buildings and facilities. The school makes extensive provision for the community. It gives good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Teaching is good and students achieve well from entry in Year 9 to GCSE.
- Standards in the sixth form are above average and students achieve well.
- There is a wide curriculum and a very good range of extra-curricular activities.
- The school values all students equally and makes good provision for personal development.
- School managers have a good understanding of the challenges facing the school and plan strategically to meet these. The school makes very good use of all available funding.
- Links with the community are very good and make a good contribution to students' learning.

#### **What could be improved**

- A minority of students lose interest in learning and their attendance is poor; too many students leave school without any qualifications.
- Teachers do not all have consistent expectations of behaviour and in a minority of lessons learning is disrupted.
- The use of assessment data to set students targets and monitor their progress is not consistently well managed in all subjects.
- Teachers do not always plan sufficiently for the full range of ability in each class and some students therefore make less progress than they might.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1996 and since then it has made a good improvement. Standards in Year 9 tests and GCSE examinations have been maintained, though the attainment of students on entry has dropped. Teaching has improved; there is now much less unsatisfactory teaching and more good teaching. Teachers have higher expectations of students and make better use of homework to develop learning skills. Attention has been given to the progress of boys, though some teachers' planning still does not cater sufficiently for the full ability range in each class. The use of data to monitor students' progress has improved and is still being developed, and there is much more monitoring of departments by senior managers. Greater attention is now given to spiritual development. The school has also made many improvements to its facilities and the management of staff. It has made some promising curriculum developments in response to the change in intake.

## 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 |
|                    | 1999          | 2000 | 2001 | 2001            |
| GCSE examinations  | C             | D    | D    | D               |
| A-levels/AS-levels | C             | B    | B    |                 |

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

Standards in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were below average but indicated good progress in relation to students' attainment on entry to the school. Results in English were significantly higher than in mathematics or science and reached the national average. Standards have remained steady over recent years, though the attainment of students on entry has declined.

GCSE results in 2001 were below average and below similar schools. Results in 2002 remained similar except that the average point score declined because students took fewer examinations. Over recent years the school's results have not kept up with the national improvement. Girls have done significantly better than boys. Most students made satisfactory progress in Years 10 and 11, but a significant minority of lower-attaining students, especially boys, underachieved. The proportion of students who left with no qualifications was well above average and was affected by some students' poor attendance. The school did not meet its GCSE target in 2002. The target for 2003 is challenging but is realistic because standards have recently improved in science and design and technology. In the sixth form, A-level results in 2001 were above average and were maintained in 2002. Students made good progress from GCSE to A level.

For current students, standards at the end of Year 9 are below average overall. Standards are higher than this in English, art, music and physical education, but lower in modern foreign languages. At the end of Year 11, standards are also below average overall, though students reach average standards in design and technology, history and physical education and above average standards in art, drama and music. Students' achievement is good in Year 9, satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and good in the sixth form.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

| Aspect                                 | Comment   |
|--|---|
| Attitudes to the school                | Satisfactory. Most are keen to learn when well taught, but a minority become disaffected, which affects their progress towards GCSE.          |
| Behaviour, in and out of classrooms    | Satisfactory. It is good in most lessons, but a small number of lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour. Behaviour is sensible around school. |
| Personal development and relationships | Good. Many students relate well to others, understand others' points of view and can take responsibility.                                     |
| Attendance                             | Unsatisfactory. Attendance is below average and affects the achievement of a significant minority.  |

The school is aware that improving the attitudes and attendance of a significant minority is a high priority if it is to raise standards and is taking appropriate action. Attendance has improved in Year 9.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

| Teaching of pupils: | Year 9 | Years 10 – 11 | Years 12 – 13 |
|---------------------|--------|---------------|---------------|
| Quality of teaching | Good   | Good          | Good          |

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

Throughout Years 9 to 11, teaching is good in English and satisfactory in mathematics. Literacy and numeracy are also supported satisfactorily in the work of other subjects. In science, teaching is good in Year 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is at least satisfactory in all other subjects and is good in design and technology, history, geography, music, art and physical education. It is very good in drama, and in music in Years 10 and 11.

Teachers give clear explanations and reinforce learning through good use of questions, careful marking and satisfactory use of homework. Often, however, they do not develop students' thinking sufficiently through discussion. In most lessons, teachers manage students well, though the expectations of behaviour are not the same in all classes.

Teachers meet the needs of all students satisfactorily through planning appropriately for each class. However, in some subjects they do not plan sufficiently for the full ability range within the class, which slows the progress of students with special educational needs. Gifted and talented students make good progress. Most students learn well in response to good teaching but some have difficulty organising their GCSE coursework; several subjects have recently improved their support for this.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

| Aspect  | Comment   |
|---|---|
| The quality and range of the curriculum             | Good. The curriculum is broad and prepares students well. New courses are beginning to improve attendance and attitudes.  |
| Provision for pupils with special educational needs | Satisfactory. There is good specialist support and satisfactory support in most lessons. Some classes need more support from teaching assistants. There are good plans for improving the provision. |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Provision for pupils with English as an additional language                                 | Satisfactory. Students make good progress through effective specialist support. Teachers do not have enough information on their needs, but there are plans in place to improve this.  |
| Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | Good. There is satisfactory provision for spiritual development and good provision for moral, social and cultural development. Personal development is well supported through opportunities to take responsibility and the school's emphasis on accepting all equally. |
| How well the school cares for its pupils  | Good. There are very good procedures to promote attendance and satisfactory procedures to promote good behaviour.  |

The school has satisfactory links with parents and responds well to parents' concerns. Parents' meetings give clear information on progress but reports are not helpful because each subject page varies somewhat in format and content.

The school aims to include all students. It has made adjustments to the curriculum to reduce underachievement and ensure that all fulfil their potential. Students' work is assessed well but in some subjects the information is not used well to set targets and monitor progress.

There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, which are particularly strong in drama, sport, design and technology, English and science.

#### **HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED**

| <b>Aspect</b>  | <b>Comment</b>   |
|--|--|
| Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff | Good. The headteacher provides a clear educational direction, based on explicit values. Planning is thorough and focused on the right priorities to raise students' achievement. |
| How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities             | Very good. Governors know the school very well and are fully involved in planning and monitoring.  |
| The school's evaluation of its performance                       | Good. Examination results and the quality of teaching are monitored regularly, but performance data is not well communicated to all staff.                                       |
| The strategic use of resources                                   | Very good. The school raises much additional funding and makes very good use of its funding to improve facilities and increase opportunities.                                    |

There is a good match between staff qualifications and their subjects. The accommodation is good, and has been much improved through the school's own enterprise. Learning resources are adequate, with many computers but a shortage of books in some sixth form subjects.

The headteacher is well supported by the senior management team. They do much evaluation and have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The links between the senior management team and departments are under development and are improving. They do not ensure, however, that all departments work consistently in managing behaviour, tracking students' progress and monitoring the quality of classroom work. The school applies the principles of best value well.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

| What pleases parents most   | What parents would like to see improved   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The school expects children to work hard and achieve their best.</li><li>• They feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.</li><li>• Children make good progress in school.</li><li>• Children like school.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some do not feel well informed about how their children are getting on.</li><li>• Some do not feel that the school works closely with parents.</li><li>• Some believe that behaviour is not good.</li><li>• Some parents think there should be more homework.</li></ul> |

Inspectors agreed with parents' positive views, though the disaffection and poor attendance of some students slows their progress in Years 10 and 11. In investigating parents' concerns, inspectors found that the school is quick to respond to parents' concerns but reports are not as helpful as they should be. Behaviour is satisfactory overall and good in most lessons, but the expectations of behaviour are not the same in all classes and some lessons are disrupted. Homework is satisfactory and is used well to extend learning in many subjects.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM**

The sixth form is larger than average, with 236 students. Courses are offered in a wide range of AS and A-level courses, as well as a small number of intermediate GNVQ courses. There are more female students than males. About two in five students stay on from Year 11. Numbers vary, but are relatively stable. A small number of students from other schools also attend the sixth form. One in twelve students is eligible for free school meals. The sixth form has an open access policy and admits all students who can benefit from the courses offered. Attainment on entry is below average for A-level courses. Twenty-nine students have special educational needs. The more significant needs are physical disability and learning difficulties.

**HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS**

Weston Favell Upper School has a good sixth form, which is cost-effective. A-level results are above average and students make good progress from GCSE to A level. These standards have been consistently maintained in recent years. Teaching is good: most teachers are well qualified, explain clearly and support students well. The sixth form is well led. The sixth form meets the needs of students well because it offers a wide range of courses, good guidance and very good opportunities for personal development.

**Strengths**

- A-level standards are above average and students achieve well.
- Teaching is good in almost all subjects.
- Students receive good support and guidance and have very good opportunities for personal development.
- There is a very broad curriculum that provides a good match to students' aspirations.
- Students are enthusiastic and their good attitudes help them to make good progress.

**What could be improved**

- Some subjects do not have their own teaching room or enough learning resources.
- While marking is good, in some subjects assessment information is not used enough to set individual targets and monitor students' progress.

*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     | <b>Good.</b> Results are consistently well above average and students achieve well. Teaching is good and students' progress is assessed carefully.  |
| Chemistry       | <b>Satisfactory.</b> Students achieve well in Year 13 but the wide range of ability in Year 12 is not fully catered for. Teachers have good subject knowledge but students have too few opportunities to do research. |

| Curriculum area                                | Overall judgement about provision, with comment  |
|--|--|
| Business Studies                               | <b>Good.</b> Results are above average. Teaching is good and students achieve well. They are well motivated and develop independent learning skills but need more links with local businesses.                                     |
| Economics                                      | <b>Good.</b> Standards have risen and are above average. Teaching is good, with high expectations, and students achieve well. Students learn independently but need to improve their essay writing skills.                         |
| Information and communication technology (ICT) | <b>Satisfactory and improving.</b> This is a very popular subject. Standards are below average but students achieve well. Teaching is satisfactory and teachers' very good subject knowledge promotes learning.                    |
| Physical education                             | <b>Very good.</b> Students achieve very well. They have good attitudes and learn independently. Teaching is good with some excellent features. The subject does not have its own classroom.  |
| Art and design                                 | <b>Good.</b> Students often exceed their predicted grades. Teaching is good in a range of media and students can develop their individual strengths. The department lacks ICT equipment.   |
| History  | <b>Very good.</b> Teaching is very good, with good subject knowledge and high expectations. Students respond positively and achieve very well, reaching above average standards. History is a very popular subject.                |
| Law  | <b>Good.</b> Standards are above average. The course is well taught, partly by videoconference. Students are enthusiastic and achieve well. The subject does not have its own teaching room.                                       |
| Psychology                                     | <b>Satisfactory.</b> Results are average at A level and improving at AS level. Students achieve well in Year 13 and make satisfactory progress in Year 12. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall.                         |
| Sociology                                      | <b>Satisfactory.</b> Standards are average in Year 13, but have dropped because there is no permanent specialist teacher. The school provides adequate support and progress is satisfactory, but there are concerns over staffing. |
| English  | <b>Good.</b> Results are above average, particularly in literature. Teaching is good. Students learn independently and achieve well. Assessment is not used enough to monitor progress.  |
| French   | <b>Good.</b> Results are average and students achieve well in understanding and writing. Teaching is good. Students have very little personal experience of France and standards of speaking are below average.                    |

Work in other subjects was sampled. All teaching was at least satisfactory and most was good. Teachers build carefully on students' prior knowledge. Very good lessons were seen in drama, biology and German. These lessons were very carefully planned to ensure that students worked at a high level.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

| Aspect   | Comment   |
|--|---|
| How well students are guided and supported                       | Advice and guidance are good throughout the sixth form. There is full information about courses and there are helpful induction arrangements. Most teachers give good support and assess students' work well. The use of assessment data to monitor progress and set students targets for improvement is good in some subjects but needs improvement in others. Students have regular meetings with their tutors and regular reviews of progress, in which they are fully involved. There is very good information and advice on careers and university entrance.                                   |
| Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form | Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. Planning is good, and provides equal opportunities for all students who can benefit from the courses that are offered. Sixth form performance is analysed and action taken to deal with areas of weakness. Most teachers are well qualified and most subjects well managed, though in sociology there is currently no specialist teacher, and this is affecting standards. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory, though a few subjects do not have a specialist teaching room and some lack resources, mainly for background reading. |

## 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"> <li>• There is a good range of courses that match their interests and aspirations.</li> <li>• Advice on choosing courses and the induction into the sixth form are good.</li> <li>• Teaching is good, with intellectual challenge.</li> <li>• The opportunities for independent study.</li> <li>• Marking is careful and gives clear targets for improvement.</li> <li>• They receive high quality support and guidance.</li> <li>• There are good enrichment activities, with a good balance between social and academic development.</li> <li>• There is good careers advice and an extensive careers library.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The computers in the sixth form centre are not reliable.</li> <li>• The quality of textbooks is poor in some subjects.</li> <li>• Some subjects are taught in non-specialist rooms.</li> <li>• The procedures for establishing target grades are not linked well to the quality of their work in each subject.</li> </ul> |

The inspection supported students' positive views and some of their concerns. Students have good access to computers in the learning resource centre, but there are few in the sixth form centre and some are unreliable. A few subjects are short of textbooks and some subjects do not have a sixth form teaching room. Students are set examination targets in all subjects based on GCSE grades, but in some subjects the teachers do not use assessment data to set short-term targets and monitor progress.

## 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. Students' attainment on entry to the school is well below average overall. By the end of Year 9, standards have risen, though they remain below average. Students achieve well during Year 9 because they are well taught and the majority of students respond well. A minority of students have poor attitudes to learning, but in most subjects they are well managed and make satisfactory progress. The teaching methods of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy are used to good effect in English, mathematics and science.
2. Achievement in Year 9 is good in most subjects. It is less good in modern languages, though still satisfactory, because teaching does not build sufficiently on what students have learned at middle school and because teachers concentrate more on controlling behaviour than on giving practice in oral work. Achievement is also satisfactory in geography and religious education. It is unsatisfactory in the new citizenship course because, although the course is well planned, the standard of teaching by form tutors is too variable.
3. Until this year, girls did better than boys in Year 9 tests, by a greater margin than is found nationally. This is consistent with the fact that some higher-attaining boys from the school's catchment area go to a local, partially-selective boys' school. In 2002, however, boys did better than girls in mathematics and science and, while girls still did better in English, the difference was less than that found nationally. This is partly because of measures taken to improve boys' learning and partly because in very recent years, some higher-attaining girls from the area have been recruited by a local girls' school.
4. Due to the effect of these local schools and other demographic factors, the school's catchment area has changed since the last inspection and attainment on entry has dropped. However, standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 have remained constant.
5. Standards at the end of Year 11 are also below average and achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. The standard of work seen is higher than in recent examinations because of recent improvements in the teaching and management of science and design and technology. Students' achievement is less good than in Year 9 because, although teaching is good, a small but significant minority of students lack interest in learning. In some cases this results in poor attendance, which in these years is well below average. Many higher-attaining students achieve well and in many subjects, the proportion of students gaining A\*-C grades is close to average. However, the number of students who leave with no qualifications is well above that found nationally.
6. The disaffection in Years 10 and 11 is more prevalent among boys than girls, and boys' standards are lower than girls' in many subjects. This is partly due to differences in standards on intake, but is also because some boys are less well organised, particularly in completing GCSE coursework. Some subjects – design and technology, history and physical education – have developed strategies to support boys' progress, through regular practice and a very systematic approach to coursework.
7. The school is very active in taking measures to counteract disaffection. There are now very good procedures to promote attendance, which has improved in Year 9, though not yet in Years 10 and 11. There is a reintegration programme for students with high absentee rates and new alternative courses in Years 10 and 11 to make the curriculum more relevant for disaffected students. The newly-formed Inclusive Learning Team aims to identify and support underachieving students who have learning or behavioural difficulties. These measures are well planned and have potential but some have been introduced very recently and it is too early to comment on their impact.

8. Students' achievement is satisfactory overall in Years 10 and 11. It is good in modern foreign languages, history, design and technology and GCSE physical education. It is very good in art, drama and music. It is unsatisfactory in citizenship.
9. In all subjects, students' skills in reading and writing are a little below average by the end of Year 9 and about average by the end of Year 11. The English department uses the National Literacy Strategy and makes additional provision for lower-attaining students. This is effective, but other subjects vary in their support for literacy. Students' oral skills are generally below average because they do not get enough opportunities to practise their speaking and listening skills in subjects.
10. The standard of students' numeracy on entering the school in Year 9 is well below average. The school is committed to improving numeracy through additional provision such as summer schools, booster sessions and opportunities in all subjects. Mathematics lessons provide regular practice in mental arithmetic. Students' numeracy skills are steadily improving.
11. The school analyses students' progress in terms of gender and ethnic background. Students from ethnic minorities generally achieve as well as other students, largely because they are very well integrated socially. Students of Asian origin achieve better than other students. Students with English as an additional language also achieve well. Few are at the early stages of learning English. It is only students who are often absent who underachieve. There are good systems for identifying these students and providing support.
12. Students with special educational needs achieve as well as expected. They make good progress when withdrawn in small groups for specialist teaching, when supported by teaching assistants in lessons and on the reintegration programme. Progress is also good in English, art and physical education, because of good quality teaching that takes account of their learning needs. In several subjects, however, their progress is slower than it might be because work is not sufficiently well matched to their specific learning requirements, and because they need more specialist support from teaching assistants. Where students have a Statement of Special Educational Needs, their annual reviews show good improvement in meeting their targets. Boys and girls achieve equally well.
13. Gifted and talented students make good progress, particularly in those subjects where specific provision has been arranged for them. In art, for example, students are encouraged to develop their own talents and reach high standards. Students of ICT design and write very good web pages for a given audience. In physical education, talented students gain success at county and national levels. Students' talents are also developed well in music. Gifted and talented students are challenged in mathematics by masterclasses and mathematics challenges, but many lessons and homework do not include extension work. Whole-school planning for gifted and talented students is at an early stage.
14. The school has consistently set very challenging targets for GCSE performance, but has not reached these over the last three years. The only target that has been met is the proportion gaining at least one GCSE, and this particular target is unchallenging. Recent difficulties in meeting targets have been partly due to staffing difficulties in science, which are now solved and where standards are rising. The target for 2003 is equally challenging, but the evidence of the inspection is that it is realistic.

### **Sixth form**

15. The school has an open access policy to the sixth form and attainment on entry is slightly below the national average for sixth forms. A-level results in 2001 were above the national average for both male and female students, though females did better. Results have been fairly consistent over the last few years and were similar in 2002, though they dropped a little.
16. In 2001, results were well above average in mathematics, art and history, and above average in English language, English literature, drama, sociology and general studies. Results were average

in biology, business studies and psychology. They were below average in economics and well below average in ICT, design and technology and geography.

17. For current students, standards in Year 13 are above average in English, history, art, physical education, economics, business and law. They are well above average in mathematics. Standards are average in chemistry, French and psychology. They are below average in ICT and sociology.
18. Students achieve well in the sixth form and make more progress from GCSE to A level than is normally the case. This is primarily because of good teaching and their own good attitudes. They also receive good support and guidance from their tutors. In most subjects teachers use their good subject knowledge to give students clear explanations and motivate them to apply themselves well. Students gain a good grasp of principles and concepts, though in some subjects, such as art, business and economics, their analytical abilities are less strong.
19. Achievement is good in most subjects. It is very good in history and physical education. In sociology, it is satisfactory, though standards have dropped over the last year. This is because the school has been unable to recruit a qualified teacher. It has employed a temporary, untrained teacher, who has a qualification in the subject but little experience of teaching at this level. Senior managers are closely monitoring the situation and provide adequate support.
20. In almost all subjects, students are well motivated. They participate well, think for themselves and are able to study independently. These are important factors in their good achievement. In sociology, students do not have enough discussion of ideas and lose some interest as a result. The difference between male and female students' achievement is much less marked than in Years 10 and 11. Females do better in mathematics, but in many subjects there is no difference.
21. Only a small proportion of students leave without completing their AS, A2 or GNVQ courses: five per cent in the last school year compared with ten per cent nationally. However, one in five AS students decided to leave at the end of Year 12 because their AS results were not good enough to allow them to continue with A2 courses. Almost all these students achieved one or more AS levels, though their results were well below average. This is in part a consequence of the sixth form admission policy, which aims to admit all students for whom it is able to offer appropriate courses. In the current Year 12, students are achieving well in most subjects, but in chemistry and sociology, a few find the work very difficult. In French and psychology also, students' progress is less good in Year 12 than in Year 13.
22. As a technology college, the school set targets in mathematics, science and technology for the numbers of students taking the subjects and their results. It has met some of these targets and failed to meet others. It has met most of its targets in mathematics, which is a popular subject in the sixth form. Standards are rising in science and targets have been met in the main school, but the uptake and results in the sixth form have not reached expectations. Achievement is good in design and technology and targets have been met for GCSE and A level, but not in Year 9. Provision in ICT has been recently improved. Achievement is satisfactory, but targets for A level have not been met.
23. Students gain a sound basis in the key skills of communication, application of number and ICT through specific courses that support their other studies.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

24. Most students like coming to school, though some lack enthusiasm and a minority are disaffected. Overall, students' attitudes to school are satisfactory. Most are prepared to participate well in lessons and this makes a positive contribution to their learning. In lessons that have a fast pace and which provide stimulating learning, they contribute well and are keen to learn. Many students take advantage of the good range of lunchtime and after-school clubs on offer. For a significant minority, their lack of interest is reflected in relatively high levels of absence and lateness, which has an adverse effect on their own learning. When negative attitudes translate into disruptive behaviour in a small minority of lessons, then it can affect the learning of an entire class.

25. Behaviour is satisfactory overall. Attitudes and behaviour are good or better in most lessons, but they are unsatisfactory in some. Most teachers manage students well and do not have to spend too much time maintaining order. For example, in a history lesson on World War 1, the teacher had clear expectations – “pens down and arms crossed to show you’re listening” – and students responded positively, clearly enjoying the lesson. By contrast, in one French lesson, students were noisy from the start, disregarding the teacher’s calls for order, and were still talking after ten minutes.
26. Good behaviour is encouraged by good teaching that maintains their interest, but certain subjects which students do not value pose a particular challenge for teachers. The personal, health and social education (PHASE) lessons, where some students believe they know more about issues such as drugs than their teachers, and religious education, which some students resent having to study for a GCSE short course, can both create particular difficulties, even for good teachers.
27. The school buildings also pose their own challenges in terms of congested corridors and stairwells. Students respond very well, behaving sensibly and safely in difficult circumstances. Wet lunchtimes also see students treating each other well in what could be trying circumstances. No bullying or harassment was seen during the inspection. Both parents and students recognise that there are some incidents, which are relatively rare and not major; they share a confidence that the school deals effectively with incidents brought to its attention. In the last school year there were 39 fixed-term exclusions and one permanent exclusion: broadly in line with national averages. The proportion of black students excluded was below average. The reasons for the exclusions are recorded and were justified.
28. Students’ personal development is good as a result of the school’s good provision for moral, social and cultural development. The school has a large number of personable and mature young people whom it is a pleasure to meet. Many have an unforced confidence that enables them to relate well to each other and to adults. This applies to students of all levels of attainment. They understand the impact of their actions on others. In a design and technology lesson, for example, when making perspex notebook holders, they shared resources well and were prepared to help each other to get it right. There are opportunities to take initiative and students know that they themselves can organise things, rather than wait for teachers to do so. Examples of these are charity events or the Year 11 ‘prom’. Students understand, as one expressed it, that, “if you give teachers respect you can build a good relationship with them” – they know it is a two-way process.
29. Students are often encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning. In a Year 11 mathematics lesson, for example, the teacher explicitly told the students what they needed to be able to do to get an A or A\* in their GCSE examination. Students in all years are prepared to do the little jobs – sorting out textbooks, collecting in books, clearing up after a practical session – that help ensure that lessons run efficiently. Particularly impressive is the near-military precision with which students stack their chairs after assembly in the school hall. The school council is actively involved in decision making and the school has sought the views of all students on a number of issues in the past year.
30. Relationships are good. Form tutors know their students well. This contributes to mutual respect and a partnership in learning. Students’ relationships with other teachers also reflect the relative stability of the teaching staff in the school. The heads of year encourage good relationships and students value their role. They stay with their year group as it progresses through the school, allowing them to get to know the students and to provide a stable influence in the lives of those students who need additional support.
31. Most students respect each other and understand the impact of their actions on others, with little friction evident. In group or paired work, they co-operate and share resources, respecting each other’s views. Low and high-attaining students work constructively together with no student excluded from the group. Boys and girls usually work together unselfconsciously. One example of this was a Year 10 drama lesson, where inspirational teaching enabled the students to improvise a

powerful drama about alleged rape – a potentially embarrassing topic. All those involved showed confidence in the group. Another example is the way that students supported their Muslim friends who were fasting during Ramadan.

32. Attendance is below average. A significant minority of students join the school with a history of poor attendance. The school makes considerable efforts to improve attendance, but it is a difficult task to change the attitudes of parents and students. The measures are having a positive effect, and attendance in Year 9 is better than in previous years. This improvement is particularly marked for students from ethnic minorities, many of whom have better attendance than white students. The school has also been successful in restricting holidays taken in term time. However, in the last school year, about 190 students in Years 9 to 11 had more than 20% absence. This level of non-attendance clearly affects the progress of these students. There is no room for complacency and the school needs to maintain its efforts to ensure that its attendance rates continue to approach the national norm and do not slide back to the previous poor levels. Students' punctuality in the morning is also unsatisfactory. There is a ragged start to the school day, with numerous students arriving during registration periods, although most are in school by the start of the first lesson.
33. The general standards of students' attitudes, behaviour and attendance have remained unchanged since the last inspection.

### **Sixth form**

34. Sixth form students have positive attitudes to learning and to other activities. They are happy and contented. They participate keenly in most lessons, demonstrating a clear interest in understanding new concepts. In almost all lessons, most show sustained concentration and a willingness to persevere even when tasks are difficult.
35. Students' behaviour is good. Within the sixth form area, despite the somewhat limited facilities, there is a friendly atmosphere. Year 12 and Year 13 students mix well together. Students are relaxed and confident and willing to talk, with little prompting, about the subjects they are studying and what they have learnt.
36. Personal development is good. This is reflected in lessons and in the wider life of the sixth form. For example, in a Year 13 mathematics lesson, students showed considerable interest in problem solving, sustaining concentration and persevering when they encountered difficulties. This positive approach helps them to make progress in their studies. Many take advantage of the opportunities to broaden their experience by participating in extra-curricular activities. Students participate in community service: for example, some help in school with Year 9 physical education lessons, others help in local middle schools, or in the youth club. The sixth form committee organises social events and is active in supporting charities. A particularly enjoyable occasion is the Christmas party organised for the elderly.
37. Relationships are good, both amongst the students themselves and with their teachers and tutors. Students show respect for the views of others and participate maturely in debate. In lessons this creates an atmosphere in which they help and learn from each other. Attendance is satisfactory.

### **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

38. Teaching is good throughout the school and in the sixth form. During the inspection, almost all teaching was satisfactory or better and two lessons out of every three were good or better. One in four were very good or better and a few were excellent.
39. In the main school, teaching is good in English, design and technology, history, geography, music, art and physical education. It is satisfactory in mathematics, modern languages, ICT, religious education and citizenship. In science it is good in Year 9, but satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is very good in drama and in music in Years 10 and 11.

40. Teachers typically have good subject knowledge. They use this to give clear explanations and reinforce learning through questions. In a Year 11 science lesson, for example, students were fully engaged in learning about radioactivity because the teacher explained it clearly, with occasional humour, and made it relevant to students' own experiences. The level of challenge is good in most lessons and teachers' expectations of what students can achieve have improved since the last inspection. They are consistently high in physical education, design and technology and drama; in most other subjects they are high in the majority of lessons. In science, however, there is less challenge in the lower-attaining GCSE sets and in modern languages there are lower expectations of students' speaking than of their writing.
41. Management of behaviour is generally good. However, teachers' expectations of behaviour vary and a minority of students are reluctant to learn and difficult to manage. In subjects where management is consistently good, all students respond well, but where management is weaker, there is some disruption. In the few lessons where teaching was unsatisfactory, it was often because students' behaviour was not managed well enough to engage them in the lesson. In physical education lessons there is a very consistent code of conduct and behaviour is very good. Management is also strong in English and drama. However in mathematics, citizenship, modern languages and some other subjects behaviour varies from class to class.
42. Students' effort has an impact on their learning. Many work hard, but a minority, especially in Years 10 and 11 lose interest. Their effort is good in art, drama, physical education and very good in GCSE music. Students work well in groups in design and technology though a few are sometimes inattentive. In religious education, mathematics and science, some students, especially boys in Years 10 and 11, fail to complete written work. Geography lessons are well managed and attitudes are generally positive, even though students are not avid learners. Relationships are good in most lessons and support learning but, in almost one lesson in ten in Years 9 to 11, learning was slowed to some extent by students' attitudes or behaviour. In a minority of ICT lessons, there is a lack of challenge and some students waste time on irrelevant use of the Internet.
43. Teachers plan lessons carefully and in some cases use a variety of stimulating methods. In a very good Year 11 mathematics lesson, for example, students understood metric and imperial units of volume through using bottles, cartons and a bucket. They then worked in pairs on a card game to reinforce what they had learned. In many lessons, however, there are not enough opportunities to develop thinking through structured discussion. In geography, for example, there is a strong emphasis on students' working hard but, as a result, lessons lack investigations and oral work. In mathematics, art and physical education, students do not get enough chances to explain their own understanding. English, mathematics and science teachers make some use of the methods from the National Strategy to involve students actively and improve literacy and numeracy skills. However, in modern languages, an emphasis on maintaining control limits the amount of speaking and listening that students do.
44. Students are placed in two bands by ability and, in some subjects, the classes within each band are organised according to attainment in the subject. Teachers plan appropriately to match the ability level of each class. However, several subjects need to plan more carefully for the range of ability within each class. ICT lessons are well planned in this respect, with appropriate individual activities and in art, teachers cope well with students' varied talents. Physical education lessons also challenge all students and, in a GCSE class, for example, students of all abilities made good progress because the teacher's questions were well chosen to make each student think hard. However, there is not enough planning for individuals in mathematics, science, geography, modern languages or religious education. As a result, the teaching and learning of students who have special educational needs is satisfactory rather than good.
45. Students with special educational needs are well taught, however, in the specialist lessons provided by the Inclusive Learning Department. Students who are on the reintegration programme are taught in small classes and are well supported by teaching that is sensitive and challenging and boosts their confidence through building on strengths. High expectations are set for achievement. In subject lessons, teaching is most successful when students are challenged, but

supported by appropriate activities. This was evident in a Year 10 English lesson on scanning and skimming skills, where students achieved well because of well-established routines. Students have individual education plans but these are not clear enough to help teachers in their planning and they are being revised by the newly appointed special needs co-ordinator. In some lessons, learning support assistants are used well to support individuals, but there are not enough of them to meet all the needs.

46. Students with English as an additional language receive some withdrawal support as well as in-class support from learning support assistants. This is effective and they generally make good progress. The arrangements for supporting these students are being revised and training is planned so that all teachers can meet their language needs in lessons. At present, many teachers do not know enough about students' needs to give them sufficient help. In science and religious education, for example, language difficulties hold up some students' learning.
47. Marking is generally good and gives students helpful advice on how to improve their work. This is particularly so in English, science, art, history, geography, physical education and design and technology. In music and drama, students are further supported through evaluating their own work. However, marking is not especially helpful in mathematics, it is inconsistent in modern languages and too tolerant of poor quality work in religious education. The use of assessment to monitor progress and set students targets is very good in physical education, but weak in science, geography and ICT.
48. Homework is satisfactory and is good in some subjects. It is set regularly, though not all teachers keep to the homework timetable. The setting and marking of homework are particularly strong in art, and there are good links between homework and classwork in GCSE physical education. Homework also makes a good contribution to students' learning in English, science and history, as well as in GCSE modern languages. Homework in mathematics is appropriate, but does not always challenge the highest-attaining students. Students generally believe that homework is appropriate and challenging, and that it is marked well.
49. Teachers give satisfactory support to students' literacy, though there is not a consistent approach in all subjects. Within English, students' skills are improving through teachers' use of the National Literacy Strategy. Art teachers actively promote writing skills and use students' literacy logs very well to reinforce their knowledge of technical vocabulary. In religious education and history, too, there is good support for literacy. Other subjects, such as mathematics and science, however, do not correct grammar and spelling mistakes regularly enough.
50. There are satisfactory strategies for the teaching of numeracy. Mathematics lessons include regular practice in mental skills using the National Numeracy Strategy. In addition, many subjects have their own numeracy policy and plan opportunities to develop students' numerical skills. This occurs in science, geography, physical education, geography and art. In geography, for example, Year 10 students produce accurate graphs of the river discharge of the Thames at different times of the year. In science, students apply their algebraic skills to scientific formulae. In physical education, Year 9 students use measurement when studying health-related fitness.
51. The school has a large number of computers, but the extent to which they are used to support the learning of subjects varies. The English department has good access to computers and uses them regularly. Use of ICT is also planned in mathematics, though its regular use is at an early stage. Music makes good use of computers for composition and performance, but their use is rare in art because the department does not have scanners and printers. In science, also, the necessary equipment has not been available until recently. There is not enough use of ICT in geography or design and technology, but computers are used for research and presentation in history and, in modern languages, they help boys' motivation.
52. The option courses in Years 10 and 11 include a GCSE in business studies and a GNVQ in leisure and tourism. Two lessons were observed in each subject; all the teaching was good or better. In a Year 10 business studies lesson, students used the example of a real loaf of bread to learn about the factors of production. The teacher planned the lesson carefully and used very good

questioning to lead students to understand from their own experience the necessity of land, labour, capital and an entrepreneur. In a leisure and tourism lesson, the teacher used his good management skills to develop students' ability to find information for themselves and increase their knowledge of major British sporting venues, such as Aintree and Goodwood.

### **Sixth form**

53. Teaching is good in the sixth form. It is good in most of the subjects that were inspected and is very good in history. It is satisfactory in ICT. It is also satisfactory in sociology and psychology: both subjects that are taught by teachers who have expertise in their subjects but are not trained teachers.
54. Sixth form teachers typically have very good subject knowledge and use this to give clear explanations. They are also enthusiastic about their subjects, which enhances students' motivation. Modern language teachers are excellent linguists. Lessons are generally well planned and in chemistry, for example, questioning is used well to consolidate learning before moving on.
55. Students' achievement is supported through high expectations in most subjects. Students are encouraged to be independent learners through the activities they are given in business, economics and physical education. However, too much time is spent taking notes in chemistry and physical education. In law, sociology and psychology, students do not have enough opportunities to discuss their own understanding of the concepts. In Year 12 French lessons, the foreign language is not spoken enough and in some GNVQ ICT lessons, there is a lack of challenge.
56. Students' very good attitudes and enthusiasm for learning make a strong contribution. They are ready to participate and think for themselves. In many subjects they show a mature approach to work. Students from all backgrounds learn equally well. Only in Year 12 GNVQ ICT lessons is there poor motivation and background chatter. In sociology, students become less motivated when the teaching includes too much lecturing.
57. Very good relationships between students and teachers are an important factor in the learning of all subjects. Art teachers provide very good support and are able to give students individual attention. In chemistry, however, not enough attention is given to the wide range of ability in the Year 12 class.
58. The quality of assessment and feedback is generally very good, though it is not consistently so in all subjects. Marking is regular and gives students helpful comments on how to improve in mathematics, chemistry, physical education, art, English, psychology and French. In business and economics, assessment is very good, but students need more comments on their work, as they do in ICT. In English, ICT and psychology, assessment data is not used enough to track students' progress and, in chemistry, students are not given enough short-term targets.
59. Several subjects lack resources and the opportunity for students to widen their study. There is a shortage of books in sociology and psychology. Students of law and business need wider contacts with the practical applications of their studies. Mathematics and history do not have enough books for background reading and students of French are limited by a lack of contact with France. Art lacks ICT equipment for creative use.

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

60. The curriculum meets the needs of the students well and has improved since the last inspection. It makes a good contribution to the standards achieved and prepares students well for further education and adult life. For those students who are reluctant to come to school, the recently introduced alternative curriculum is beginning to have a positive impact on attendance and learning.
61. The range of subjects is appropriately broad in Year 9. Dance, drama and personal, health and social education are taught in addition to subjects of the National Curriculum. French is taught to all but a few students, who are appropriately selected for extra literacy support. Higher-attaining students also study German, but are then unable to take dance and drama.
62. The curriculum for Years 10 and 11 is good. All students follow a broad and balanced range of subjects that includes a core of English, mathematics, science and design and technology. They also take physical education and short GCSE courses in religious education and ICT. There is a wide range of GCSE options, including history, geography, physical education, business studies, music, art and child development. GNVQs are offered in leisure and tourism and ICT.
63. The curriculum meets statutory requirements for the National Curriculum and religious education. However, there are some minor weaknesses in the curriculum for Years 10 and 11. Geography lacks opportunities for investigative work and field trips, and this limits students' ability to attain the highest grades. There are no vocational courses in science and some lower-attaining students underachieve because they do not see the relevance of what they are taught. In religious education there is insufficient use of visits or visitors to stimulate students' interest.
64. The alternative curriculum, for students who are often absent or have learning and behavioural difficulties, has been carefully planned. It includes a range of schemes for individual needs. Some students have additional help with literacy in place of a modern language and some science. Others follow a work-related curriculum, taking core subjects in school and courses such as building or hair dressing at the local college. European Social Fund money has been used for a service that collects persistently non-attending students from home for exploratory visits to local industry, businesses and theatres, in an effort to motivate and stimulate an interest. Results are promising in some cases, where students are now fully reintegrated into education. For others there has been less success and the school recognises the need to develop other schemes. A learning support centre has been established in the school, where disaffected students begin with one-to-one contact with teachers and learning support assistants. They gradually progress to small classes and are finally included in normal classes where appropriate. The success rate here is considerable and is closely monitored by the school. This close monitoring is not yet fully extended to all schemes.
65. Provision for students with special educational needs is satisfactory and currently undergoing significant improvement. The plans are designed to meet the school's aim of ensuring educational and social inclusion. Students receive support in developing specific literacy skills through a well-organised programme of withdrawal from lessons. Good use is made of computers to increase their motivation and support learning. Students with English as an additional language follow the full curriculum, except where they drop modern languages for additional help with English. Teachers who have concerns about students can request, and usually get, additional support in lessons.
66. Provision for gifted and talented students is at an early stage of development. A co-ordinator has recently been appointed and schemes are being developed. Students who have been identified by departments such as art, music, ICT and physical education are making good progress.
67. The school provides good support for equal opportunities. It aims to include all students and ensure that all achieve their full potential. This is reflected in the admission policy for the main school and the sixth form. The school building has been improved so that students who are physically disabled can attend lessons in all subjects. There is a race equality policy and any

racist incidents are properly recorded. The school analyses students' progress and identifies where any group is underachieving. This analysis is at an early stage and is not regularly reported to staff and governors in a format that is easy to understand. There is some underachievement of boys, particularly in GCSE courses. This is linked in some cases to disaffection or poor attendance and is also linked to organisation of coursework. There is no significant underachievement of students from ethnic minorities. The school is effective in promoting race equality.

68. The school knows where there is underachievement and the school improvement plan is focused on improving the achievement of all these groups, through adjustments to the curriculum, improving attendance, reducing disaffection and improving the monitoring of progress. Targets are set for all groups of students.
69. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities, which are particularly strong in drama, sport, design and technology, English and science. Drama productions are popular. In design and technology, money was raised to build model cars that were subsequently raced at Silverstone. History and modern languages organise visits abroad, but there are generally too few opportunities for language exchanges. Students can attend 'booster' classes in science and there are homework clubs in many subjects. There are breakfast clubs and twilight sessions in music and art to enable students to study both GCSEs. The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is popular at bronze and silver levels.
70. There is a good range of sporting activities. Students enjoy team and individual success at local, county and national levels in trampolining, football, basketball and athletics. There are holiday sport programmes and students are encouraged to join local sports clubs. Students enjoy the new fitness suite and inter-form competitions.
71. A particular strength of the curriculum is the Year 9 book week. Students research and write their own stories and then invite middle school pupils to the school to hear them. They are assisted through workshops with well-known authors. Written work is of a high standard, both in content and design, and students benefit from working in teams, meeting deadlines, reading to children and improving their ICT skills. Another innovation is 'techno week'. The timetable is suspended for a week and all students are involved in projects and visits to further their technical skills. These range from inventing new chocolate dishes after a visit to Cadbury world and a mini-Olympics triathlon where biomechanics are explored. The English department organises a team to video all projects and then creates a technical magazine. Students are enthusiastic about both these events.
72. The local community makes a good contribution to students' learning; and conversely the school makes an excellent contribution to the community. There is a massive list of community courses run by the school. The excellent sports facilities are used by school and community and were supported by funding from local businesses. Business also supports the school with work experience placements, whilst various local organisations support a mentoring programme and the Young Enterprise scheme. Links with local religious groups, however, are very limited.
73. The school has satisfactory links with its partner schools and colleges. There are holiday clubs and very successful summer schools for middle school pupils, which give them the chance to get to know the school and their new teachers. The transfer of pupils' assessment records is not reliable, but is being improved. The school has three advanced skills teachers who visit the middle schools and give advice and support for teaching and resources. However, there are not close links between subject departments and middle schools to develop continuity in teaching. Organised meetings are generally poorly attended. There are good links with the local further education and higher education colleges. Students are aware of the choices available to them and attend taster sessions for A-level subjects. Teachers attend joint training activities with college staff.
74. Satisfactory provision is made for the development of literacy. This is partly through English lessons and through the support given in other subjects. In addition, English teachers arrange paired reading sessions in which sixth form students help younger students, a booster day in the

Easter holiday and Saturday morning sessions. All these are helpful in bolstering lower-attaining students' literacy skills.

75. The school's numeracy policy supports a consistent approach to teaching numeracy in all subjects. Teachers have been trained and are supported by the mathematics department. Mathematics lessons promote mental skills. There is a mathematics summer school for students before they join the school and 'catch-up' lessons for students with weak skills are planned. Masterclasses and a mathematics challenge provide opportunities for extending the gifted and talented students.
76. The personal, health and social education (PHASE) programme is broad and balanced. It is very well planned and encompasses health education, including sex and drug education, environmental issues, careers guidance and citizenship. It is taught by form tutors. The co-ordinator has prepared detailed materials and has provided some training for tutors. However, the quality of teaching is not consistent, indicating that despite the good programme, further training and additional monitoring of teaching and learning needs to be undertaken.
77. Careers education is very well planned and forms part of the PHASE programme. It covers a wide range of skills, including students' knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses. Very good advice and guidance is provided by the school's careers co-ordinator and there is very effective liaison with the local Connexions careers adviser. The work experience programme in Year 10 is well organised, with good co-operation from many local businesses. The careers library in the learning resource centre provides up-to-date information on courses, universities and employment. There are links with Northampton College to provide vocational courses for students who need them. In the sixth form, Young Enterprise provides valuable experience of the functions of business.
78. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good overall. The school's aims support this aspect of students' personal development. Since the last inspection staff have received training and have identified opportunities within their subjects to develop these aspects. In a small number of subjects further work is needed to ensure that opportunities are not missed.
79. Provision for students' spiritual development is satisfactory, though this is the weakest of the four areas. In religious education, students consider wonders of the world and stories of creation. The school provides opportunities for Muslim students to pray and fast during Ramadan. Art lessons encourage students to recognise their own talent and music promotes creativity and appreciation of the expressive nature of music. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship, though some assemblies provide opportunities for individual reflection, leading to self-awareness and respect for others. There is a thought for the day but many tutors fail to make use of this. Some subjects could do more to assist spiritual development. Science could explore different beliefs about evolution, for example, and some English lessons could do more to bring out the spiritual dimension of poetry.
80. Provision for moral development is good. Most teachers set a good example and expect students to behave considerately. The school aims to develop honesty and fairness and students are made aware of the difference between right and wrong. They are expected to show respect for each other and for accepted codes of behaviour. The PHASE programme raises awareness of rights and responsibilities, crime and punishment, freedom and prejudice. Moral issues are considered in history, English and religious education, including slavery, evil and suffering and the sanctity of life. Students' awareness of the needs of the less fortunate is developed through charitable fund-raising events.
81. The ethos and daily activities of the school provide a secure environment where relationships are largely founded on mutual respect and co-operation. Provision for the development of social skills is good. The school provides opportunities for students to show initiative and accept responsibility. These include the school council and the sixth form committee, as well as many activities in forms, clubs and sport. Sixth form students help younger students with reading difficulties and provide information for Year 11 students on life in the sixth form. Students are given the opportunity

to work collaboratively in many subjects, developing teamwork skills and learning to value the contribution of others. Friendships and social skills are covered in the PHASE programme. Social interaction is also promoted through extra-curricular activities and on residential and day visits. Year 9 students take part in team-building activities and Year 10 students go on work experience.

82. There is good provision to help students develop an understanding of their own and other cultures. They visit places of cultural interest and are involved in musical and drama productions. Art displays around the school are of high quality and stimulate students' interest. Past cultures are studied in history and, in art, students study and reflect upon artistic traditions and styles from around the world. Geography also contributes to cultural awareness through the study of countries and their way of life. Year 9 students have lessons on mathematics across the world. Different cultures are explored in physical education, including South American and Maori music and dance. Religious education covers the importance of worship and sacred writings to different faiths. The school is successful in preparing students for life in a multi-cultural society.

### **Sixth form**

83. The sixth form offers a very good range of AS and A-level courses, as well as intermediate GNVQ courses in leisure and tourism, business and ICT. All students follow general studies, which includes religious education and can be accredited to AS or A level. All students also study key skills to Level 2 in ICT, communication and application of number. This can be extended to Level 3.
84. The sixth form is popular and has responded well to local needs. The curriculum offers very few vocational courses because the school is situated close to Northampton College, which offers a wide programme. Impartial advice is given to students so that their best interests are met. However, intermediate GNVQ courses are run at the school for those students who do not yet feel ready to enter a college environment.
85. The school is keen to take advantage of opportunities to broaden students' chances. It is developing closer links with other Northampton schools and colleges, for example, to make more sixth form courses available. Another innovation is that A-level law is taught partly by distance learning using videoconference. The success of the sixth form is demonstrated by the considerable number of students who stay on and the number of students from other schools who join the sixth form.
86. As part of its technology college plan, the school has established A-level courses in design and technology and ICT, as well as in ICT key skills. It has not been possible to start planned courses in food and textiles because of staff shortages and a lack of applications from students.
87. The accredited programme of community service is an important part of the sixth form curriculum. Students are encouraged to be independent and show initiative. They help in younger students' lessons and assist with Year 9 literacy and Year 11 ICT. They organise their own and lower school sports competitions. Some take part in the Community Sports Leader Award. They are encouraged to raise funds for charity and run their own social functions, such as the sixth form ball and trips for ice-skating and ten-pin bowling. In the wider community, parties are organised for old age pensioners and clubs for children with special needs. Students who take part in Young Enterprise are very enthusiastic and gain good experience of developing a business.
88. The curriculum is also enriched by trips to theatres and art exhibitions as well as trips abroad. Students are encouraged to find work placements that support their career aspirations. Weekly tutorials support students in their work. Life in the sixth form helps students to become confident and mature individuals.

### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

89. The school provides a caring environment in which students feel safe and valued, allowing them to concentrate on learning. Procedures for child protection and welfare are good. The Inclusion Team

is responsible for overseeing students' care and consists of the heads of year and the Inclusive Learning Team. The Inclusion Team Leader, who is responsible for child protection, has recently been appointed and has not yet received training. However, he liaises with social services and attends case conferences as required. Staff are aware of their child protection responsibilities and proper records are kept. There is good provision within the PHASE programme to help students take responsibility for their own safety. Health and safety procedures are in place, including departmental risk assessments. Governors monitor health and safety regularly. There are appropriate procedures to ensure safety on school trips but formal risk assessments are not carried out and need to be implemented.

90. All teachers are active in the pastoral care of their students. This starts even before they join the school, with the summer schools enabling new students to get to know the school. The senior management team and all teachers make considerable efforts to support the welfare of individual students. One example of this is the sensitive arrangement for students' fasting during Ramadan. Students believe that the staff are approachable and will do their best to give help if it is needed. The Inclusion Team supports other staff in helping students who have behavioural difficulties. The school is effective in helping students become mature and responsible individuals, assisting them to face the challenges in their everyday lives. Mentors from the school and the local community are available to help students experiencing particular problems. For example, during the inspection week the headteacher arranged for two students in a major domestic crisis to receive much needed support through the local Rotary Club.
91. The school has very good procedures to monitor and support attendance. Problems with attendance are quickly identified using the computerised data collection system, although the electronic monitoring of attendance in each lesson is on hold because of technical problems. The school follows up absences quickly by contacting parents by telephone on the first day. An educational welfare officer is partly funded from the school budget and an assistant is being appointed to extend the provision. The school has been very firm about students taking holidays in term-time, and these have been much reduced. Students also report that truancy has been much reduced by additional site security measures that prevent students from truanting after attending registration. The reintegration programme has been designed for students with poor attendance and is potentially a good provision.
92. There are sound procedures to monitor and promote good behaviour. The school has a clear set of rules backed up by a comprehensive system of rewards and sanctions, which are well known to students. They particularly value the reward of a school trip for good attendance or receiving several commendations. For those misbehaving, there are effective systems of detentions, report cards and internal exclusion. The school's approach is based on a system of positive behaviour management, on which the staff have received considerable training. However, its implementation throughout the school on a uniform basis – a key factor in the success of such a system – is not total. Some teachers or even departments are not consistent with others' approach. Hence students are faced with varying expectations and less accomplished teachers do not have a clear line to hold. For example, in geography two teachers teach some classes at different times, with different expectations of how students should behave. In addition, discipline in a school this size inevitably relies on good liaison between subject departments delivering lessons and the pastoral teams. Although the Inclusion Team is effective in dealing with significant problems, the interface between the various teams is less effective when it comes to more day-to-day misbehaviour, resulting in some departments taking more responsibility than others. There is no formal call-out system to aid teachers in classroom management. A clearer definition of responsibilities and more consistent implementation would improve the current systems. Procedures for dealing with oppressive behaviour are good. Students believe the school will help them and are usually prepared to approach somebody when problems occur.
93. Assessment is satisfactory overall. There are good procedures for assessing students' work in each subject. Assessments are regular and standardised. They meet National Curriculum and examination board requirements. However, the extent to which the records are used to monitor each student's progress and to set them targets for improvement varies from subject to subject. Assessment results are used effectively to monitor students' progress in English, art, design and

technology and history; and particularly well in physical education. The data is not used enough to support students' progress through target setting and monitoring, however, in mathematics, science, geography, ICT or religious education.

94. Data is collected when students enter the school, at the end of modules and at the end of Years 9 and 11. This is held centrally by the school, and is used to set students a target in each subject, which helps to raise their achievement. However, the assessment records have not been given to teachers in a format that they can easily use to help students make progress. The school has recently conducted a major review of assessment and has planned significant improvements that are currently being introduced.
95. Tutors also monitor each student's progress in relation to their targets. However, to date, this has been unsatisfactory because the targets have not been accurately matched to students' potential. In addition, most staff are uncertain about how to use the information to guide students. Following the review, it is planned that tutors will work closely with each student on ways of exceeding a minimum target and reaching a higher one, based on past and current performance. Although these changes are too recent to have had a significant impact, teachers and tutors have a greater understanding of the use of data in helping students achieve their full potential.
96. Examination results are analysed in order to see where improvements are needed in the curriculum. This has led to new courses to re-integrate disaffected students, changes to the curriculum for underachieving boys, and booster classes in literacy and numeracy. Assessment data is also used to place students in the appropriate class, and to provide support for students learning English as an additional language.
97. The needs of students with special educational needs are identified appropriately in order to provide suitably for them. Each student has an individual education plan. These are currently being reviewed in the light of the new Code of Practice and to provide a more secure basis for monitoring students' progress. The annual reviews of Statements of Special Educational Needs meet statutory requirements and are well attended by students, parents and representatives of external agencies. The objectives set in statements are met in practice.
98. Assessment of students with English as an additional language is prompt and effective. Locally agreed systems of tracking what students can and can't do in English are used to show students' progress. Any underachievement is identified early and appropriate action is taken.

## **Sixth form**

### **Assessment**

99. The arrangements for assessing students' attainment and progress are good, helping them to achieve well. Teachers have a good understanding of the courses they teach and procedures follow the requirements of the relevant awarding body. Assessment is regular and thorough and enables students to form an accurate picture of their attainment and progress. They are aware of examination criteria and in most subjects receive good guidance on how to improve: many teachers diagnose students' learning needs well and address specific weaknesses in their feedback. Students appreciate the support they receive.
100. Procedures for monitoring students' progress and taking appropriate action are good in some subjects, but undeveloped in others. In mathematics, business studies, economics and law, students' progress towards their targets is regularly checked and they know where they stand. In English and psychology, however, assessment records are not used enough to monitor progress and deal with any underachievement. Similarly in chemistry, the data is not used to set short-term targets and, in ICT, the monitoring of progress is weak because teachers do not have data on students' past performance.
101. The reason for this inconsistency between subjects is that teachers do not always receive the data they need, or enough guidance on how to use it. Tutors are also expected to monitor

students' progress across all their subjects, but do not always have the information on subject performance on which to base their guidance. Neither the quality of subject-specific guidance offered by teachers nor the monitoring of progress by tutors is yet uniformly good. As a result, there is a gap between students' knowledge of their current standards and targets, and their awareness of how, realistically, to reach them. The school is aware of this weakness and is taking steps to rectify it.

102. The use of assessment data to amend the curriculum is satisfactory overall. However, there is still some inconsistency between and within departments in understanding and using assessment to plan appropriately for individual students, especially in Year 12. In science, for example, there is insufficient account taken of the wide range of ability in the AS groups, and higher-attaining students are not always fully challenged.

### ***Advice, support and guidance***

103. Advice, support and guidance are good and are appreciated by students. They find the induction at the beginning of Years 12 and 13 to be comprehensive and helpful. They receive information about the courses and have sample lessons in the subjects that they have chosen to study. While still in Year 11, potential sixth form students have the opportunity to talk to Year 13 students. A three-day induction course before starting the sixth form helps them to settle quickly. Tutors meet students daily and know them well. Most teachers give good advice within their subjects and the sixth form team, led by the head of sixth form, is accessible and provides effective support. In addition to daily form time, students have weekly tutorials with their tutors in Year 12 with the head of sixth form and his senior team in Year 13. Regular reviews are carried out of academic and personal development. Students are involved in monitoring their own progress, working with staff to set targets. The sixth form Intranet is an effective way for students to be aware of sixth form life and will soon enable students and their teachers to monitor their progress.
104. Guidance on careers and university application is very good and is provided through daily form time and weekly tutorial sessions. Students receive good, impartial advice that is effective in guiding them towards courses and careers. There is a good range of up-to-date careers literature and university prospectuses in the learning resource centre. The careers co-ordinator provides very good advice and guidance, backed by the tutors and the head and deputy head of the sixth form. Good guidance is also given on university entrance and the completion of application forms. Students appreciate the quality of advice.

### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

105. Most parents are broadly satisfied with the school. Some are very pleased with all aspects, though there are others who have some concerns. Most parents believe that their children like school, that the teaching is good and that their children work hard and make good progress. They think the school helps children to become mature. Virtually all would be comfortable approaching the school with a suggestion or a problem. However, one in four parents believe that the school does not work closely enough with them or give them enough information about their child's progress. One in five parents think that some lessons are disrupted by poor behaviour and a similar number do not think that children get the right amount of homework. The school's own recent survey gave similar results. The school has the confidence of the majority of parents, including those from minority ethnic communities.
106. The school has satisfactory links with parents. It is keen to promote good links and one of the aims of the community provision is to increase parents' involvement in education. The school is quick to involve parents if a student has problems conforming to the school's expectations, and this partnership is often productive in providing support. About half of parents typically attend parents' evenings; they are happy with them and feel that they get honest information about their children's strengths and weaknesses. Much information for parents is good – notably the weekly newsletters, the prospectus and the governors' report – but the annual report of student's progress is not as helpful as it should be. It provides adequate information about progress, but each subject page has a somewhat different format and content. Some of the targets given are too superficial,

such as “to continue working hard”. The printout that accompanies these departmental sheets is also not easy for parents to interpret. The school is in the process of reviewing and improving the reports.

107. Parents are very pleased with the homework diary. This provides a good way for them to keep track of homework and also to communicate with form tutors. Diaries are used well by students and staff, and most are signed regularly by the form tutor and the parent. There is an active parents’ association that meets three times a term to discuss ways of supporting their young people and the school. Most parents have signed the home-school agreement. The parent governors make a strong contribution to the governing body, although very few other parents attend the governors’ annual parents’ meeting. Many parents contribute to their children’s learning at home, assisted by the information in their child’s homework diary. Sessions have been organised for parents on literacy and future ones are planned on aspects of the curriculum. Overall, parents’ involvement with the school is satisfactory.
108. Very few parents commented specifically on sixth form provision. Those parents at the parents’ meeting who had offspring in the sixth form were generally happy with it. They felt that students have a good balance between work and leisure; that they are given freedom, but that there is somebody there for them.
109. Students’ views about the sixth form and their experiences are positive. They appreciate the wide range of courses that the school offers and the guidance they receive in choosing courses to suit their interests and career aspirations. They find the sixth form induction programme to be thorough and informative.
110. Students believe that the quality of teaching is good and they are confident that teachers help them to make the best possible progress. Relationships between the students themselves and with their teachers are good. Their work is marked up-to-date and assessed using examination criteria. Students are aware of how well they are doing and what to do to improve. Targets are set and progress is monitored in relation to them. They do not like the new target setting procedures because they do not feel personally involved. They find that there are insufficient textbooks in some subject areas and books that are out of date. They value opportunities to use the Internet for research purposes but find that their access to working computers is unreliable.
111. Students appreciate their career advice, which is supported by an extensive careers library. They value the regular tutorial programme, which is used to monitor their progress and keep them on task. They find the activities and enrichment courses to be of good quality. They appreciate the opportunities to help them become more responsible such as paired reading, community placements and fund-raising for charity. The sixth form committee promotes many functions and students believe there is a good balance of social and academic activities.

#### **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

112. The leadership and management of the headteacher and senior management team are good. The headteacher sets a clear educational direction that is firmly based on the principle of equal opportunities and the aim of enabling all students to realise their full potential. He is well supported by the deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers. There is a well-defined vision for school improvement that is supported by good quality strategic planning. The senior team has been very successful in raising additional funding to make improvements to the school’s facilities and curriculum. Current planning identifies the right priorities to raise standards and includes innovative solutions to the challenges that the school faces. These include an imminent reorganisation into an 11-18 school, which is beginning to place considerable demands on the time of governors and senior staff.
113. The school has been a specialist technology college since 1997 and is in the second phase of its funding. Its technology college aim has been to enhance provision and standards in mathematics, science, design and technology and ICT. It also aims to provide technology support for other local schools and the community.

114. The governing body provides very good support in setting a strategic direction and overseeing the work of the school. Governors have a good range of expertise and know the school well. They meet regularly and spend additional days in long-term and medium-term planning. They visit departments in turn, and each month a 'governor of the month' visits the school to attend meetings, lessons and activities and reports back. Individual governors are also linked to specific aspects of the curriculum such as literacy, numeracy and special educational needs. Governors have an accurate knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Through their committees, governors monitor the school's performance and expenditure and ask critical questions.
115. There are good systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's work. Many aspects of the school's work are regularly monitored and planning is based on a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The arrangements for monitoring the work of departments are based on linking each department with one member of the senior staff. Monitoring is regular and planned and activities are reported to the headteacher. It results in good support for departments. However, the systems are still developing and are not yet systematic enough to ensure that all departments are consistent in the way they manage students' behaviour, carry out assessments and do their own internal monitoring.
116. Most departments are well led, though there is some variation in quality and some inconsistency in the way that departments work. Management is very good in history and physical education. It is good in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, ICT, music, art and citizenship. Management is satisfactory in geography. It is unsatisfactory in religious education because teachers do not have enough guidance. The responsibility for co-ordinating the use of ICT in subjects is not clearly defined.
117. The school has much data on students' performance and through analysis of this data, the senior management team has accurately evaluated the progress made by different groups of students and identified priorities for improvement. However, the results of the analysis are not adequately communicated to governors and teachers in a way that they can easily understand and use to improve the curricular provision.
118. The school has faced increasing difficulties over recent years in recruiting and retaining teachers. It has responded well to recruitment difficulties through advertising locally, nationally and online and by training unqualified graduates on the graduate training programme. This has required a significant investment of staff time but has resulted in improved staffing in science and English. The match between staff qualifications and the curriculum is good. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and are well qualified.
119. There are good arrangements for the induction of new staff, though there is too much variation in the quality of support that new teachers receive in different departments. Newly qualified teachers are invited to the school for three weeks before taking up their post in order to become familiar with the school. Once in post, they receive very good support and advice from the advanced skills teacher who oversees their progress. Support from departmental mentors is more varied, but is good in most cases. Newly qualified teachers do not have enough opportunities to observe other teachers at work and see little of the senior management team.
120. The school's programme for staff development is based on a clear rationale that investment in staff leads to higher standards of students' achievement. It aims to develop the skills of teaching and non-teaching staff. The Learning Team consists of a deputy head, three advanced skills teachers and the head of ICT and is responsible for identifying and fulfilling training needs as well as coaching individual teachers in teaching skill. Technology college funding has supported the appointment of the advanced skills teachers. These teachers have made a very valuable contribution in raising standards, providing support for other teachers and in outreach work with other schools. There has been regular staff training in the use of ICT in teaching.

121. Performance management is very well organised. All teachers have regular performance management meetings and agree objectives that are linked with the priorities of the school improvement plan. Their lessons are observed and they receive feedback. Performance management is therefore linked to school improvement and staff development. There is a parallel process for non-teaching staff, who also receive training and are observed carrying out their tasks. The school is a certified Investor in People.
122. The school has created the Inclusion Team in response to the perceived need to include all students and deal with all the causes of underachievement. The Inclusion Team incorporates responsibility for special educational needs, behaviour and attendance as well as students from ethnic minorities and those who have English as an additional language. It includes the heads of year and senior tutors, as well as the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) and her staff.
123. Provision for students with special educational needs is very well led and managed. The SENCO, who is also the head of the Inclusive Learning Department, is recently appointed and has achieved a great deal in a short time. She is well qualified and experienced is very well supported by a deputy headteacher, who provides a link with the senior management team and who shares her clear vision for improvement.
124. Additional teaching assistants have been appointed, and those in post are well deployed and supported along with specialist teaching staff. Good progress has also been made in reviewing students' Statements of Special Education Needs, their individual education plans, and the procedures for monitoring progress. Liaison with parents and external agencies is being improved, and students are more involved in their own reviews. Links with subject departments are being developed, and include training for all teachers on the new Code of Practice. The SENCO is also keen to work closely with Inclusion Team. There has been a significant improvement in learning resources and computers and in the quality of accommodation to provide a welcoming learning environment that is valued by students.
125. Developments in special educational needs are promising but it is too early to judge their impact. Priority now should be given to ensuring that classroom support is available where needed and to reviewing individual education plans to help teachers plan for individual needs. The development of closer links between the Inclusion Team and Inclusive Learning Team is also important in linking pastoral and learning responsibilities and addressing issues such as behaviour.
126. Provision for students with English as an additional language is also in transition. The intention is to give primary responsibility for students' support to all subject teachers. There are plans to provide training and to improve the information that teachers have on students' language needs. The accommodation is good and provides, for example, a dedicated place for Islamic students at lunchtimes during Ramadan. There is a good level of resources.
127. The school is very efficiently administered. The administration manager is a member of the leadership team and oversees all the non-teaching staff. There is a clear management structure for the non-teaching staff; each person has a line manager and a training plan, and is involved in performance management. Technician support is satisfactory in design and technology and good in ICT. Science technicians give teachers excellent support, but do not have enough time to prepare all equipment thoroughly.
128. Good use is made of new technology for administrative purposes. The school maintains an extensive database of students' records. The Intranet provides much information for students and staff and is available in the learning resource centre and on other school computers. It is planned that staff will use this to maintain students' assessment records and that students will be able to check their own progress online. ICT is used extensively for finance so that, for example, the school manages its own payroll system. Attendance is also tracked using computers, though a system using a computer in every classroom is on hold due to software difficulties.

129. Financial resources are managed very well. The bursar maintains good systems of financial control and provides the headteacher and governors with appropriate reports. Financial planning is closely linked to the school's priorities through the school improvement plan. Expenditure is monitored carefully and there is only a minimal carry forward each year. The headteacher makes very good use of the principles of local financial management. Through bids and sponsorship the school has raised some £1.5 million additional funding to improve the school buildings and facilities. Maximum use is made of all the school's funding. For example, the school builds its own computers at a fraction of the commercial cost. By using 'design and build' methods it has also erected new buildings at lower than normal costs. The school manages its own catering, cleaning and payroll services in order to get the best value for money. Specific grants are used for the correct purposes and are properly monitored. The technology college funding in particular has been spent appropriately to the benefit of the school and the local community. By consulting with parents and students, comparing its performance with other schools, challenging itself over the services it provides and competing for best value, the school makes good use of the principles of best value. The school's expenditure per student is higher than average, but given the amount of additional funding it raises through its own enterprise and students' good achievement, it gives good value for money.
130. Accommodation is good. The school has a secure site that is enhanced by attractive grounds and a high quality of display. All subject areas are accessible to students with a physical disability. Many improvements have been made since the last inspection. The learning resource centre has been developed at the heart of the school, with books and computers for student use. It is an attractive area, with very good display, which is open before and after school. The new science block has enhanced science provision and laboratories are now a useful size for practical work. Five new computer suites have greatly improved the provision for ICT. A new administration block has been built and the additional Falcon suite provides a very good social space for the school and the community. The sports centre, opened just before the last inspection, has a very good fitness suite and sports hall. Building plans are still being developed and there is a continuing review of facilities.
131. The school has used technology college funding to make major improvements to its facilities. In addition to the improved science laboratories, design and technology facilities have been refurbished. The number of computers is well above the national average and the school has a network that links all the computers.
132. Some congestion in narrow corridors has been alleviated by the removal of old offices, with the result that access routes have been widened. In some areas however, stairs and corridors are still too narrow for the number of students moving between lessons. There are no designated classrooms for GCSE physical education, which means that theory lessons are taught around the school. In some areas of the school, rooms are too small and the décor is drab, for example in English and modern foreign languages, and the drama studio is in need of updating.
133. Learning resources are satisfactory. The school is planning ways of making the computers more available to students. The learning resource centre is well equipped with books and computers. English has its own suite of computers, but mathematics and physical education do not have enough access and in art there is a lack of scanners, printers and digital cameras. Most subjects have enough textbooks, although there are not enough in science. In food technology, there is insufficient cold storage space for food. Students of religious education have few objects from religious traditions to bring the subject to life.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Leadership and management***

134. Leadership and management of the sixth form are good. The governors and senior management team have a clear strategy for developing the sixth form. The aim is to provide equal opportunities for all students who can benefit from the courses that are offered. The sixth form offers a wide range of AS and A-level courses that meet most students' aspirations, but very few vocational courses, because Northampton College is adjacent to the school site and offers a wide range of such courses. There are plans to co-operate more closely with Northampton College and other local schools in order to provide jointly a wider range of academic and vocational courses and hence improve further the match to students' needs.
135. The head of sixth form is an assistant headteacher and is responsible for day-to-day management. The sixth form is well run: students are given good support and guidance and have developed good work habits and enthusiasm for study. There is a well-written sixth form development plan that focuses on monitoring students' progress, improving their personal development and monitoring the quality of teaching.
136. Most subjects are well staffed with qualified teachers. Where the school has had difficulties in recruitment it has used innovative approaches. In law, for example, Year 13 students follow a distance-learning course, using videoconference. Students are provided additional support in the school. This method has worked well and students make good progress. In science, there are no specialist physicists, but two science teachers are retraining in physics. The school has been unable to recruit qualified teachers in psychology or sociology. Psychology is taught successfully by an untrained psychology specialist, who is starting the graduate training programme next term. Sociology is also taught by an untrained teacher, who has some expertise in the subject, but has not previously taught at this level.
137. The school is active in providing support for the untrained teachers. The management of psychology is satisfactory because the psychology teacher receives support from the local university and the school, though line management within the humanities faculty is weak. The sociology teacher receives good support in teaching from the head of sixth form and there are signs of improvement in students' provision. However, the school is aware that this is not currently a satisfactory situation, which needs to be kept under very close review. Most other sixth form subjects are well managed by the relevant head of department.

### ***Resources***

138. The sixth form is cost effective. The headteacher maintains a careful check that the balance of expenditure between the sixth form and the main school is appropriate. The school challenges itself on what courses it should run and applied the principles of best value well.
139. The accommodation for the sixth form is satisfactory. The sixth form centre provides good social and study areas for students and offices for sixth form tutors. Most lessons are taught in the main school. There are good facilities for science and sport, and French has its own sixth form study room. However, several sixth form subjects do not have adequate teaching rooms. Law and physical education have no specific teaching rooms and are taught in rooms around the school. Business is based in a temporary classroom but is also taught in a variety of other rooms. As a result, students of these subjects do not benefit from readily available resources or display areas. Sixth form mathematics is also taught in rooms outside the mathematics area.
140. Resources are satisfactory in most subjects, but there are some important shortages. In mathematics and chemistry, for example, not every student in Year 12 has a textbook each, which restricts the work that can be set at home. History, psychology, sociology and mathematics need additional books for students to use in background reading and research. In physical education, however, teachers have developed excellent supporting materials. Economics

and business studies also have good resources, but business students would benefit from improved links with local industry.

141. Students are concerned that there should be more computers in the sixth form centre, because the ones there are old and unreliable. They have access to the computers in the learning resource centre, though not at all times. Students make effective use of ICT in business studies, economics, physical education, English and French. They use the school's Intranet in sociology and videoconferencing equipment is used to good effect in the law course. However, in psychology, students do not use ICT sufficiently for research and there is little use of computers in mathematics, chemistry or history. Art students cannot develop their creative use of ICT because of a lack of suitable equipment.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

142. In its planning, the school has already identified many of the necessary priorities. In order to raise standards further the governors and senior management team should:

- (1) Raise standards in GCSE examinations by:
  - improving the interest in learning of those who are currently disaffected;\*
  - improving attendance;\*
  - giving boys in particular more guidance over completing coursework;\*
  - reducing the number of students who leave school without any qualifications.  
(Paragraphs 5, 6, 7, 32, 42, 64, 67)
- (2) Ensure that lessons are not disrupted by poor behaviour by:
  - establishing consistent expectations of behaviour in all lessons;
  - improving communication between heads of department and the Inclusion Team;
  - providing teachers with additional support as necessary.  
(Paragraphs 25, 41, 92, 125)
- (3) Improve the use of assessment data to set students targets and monitor their progress by:
  - ensuring that all teachers have the information on their classes;
  - providing training in how to use assessment data;
  - ensuring that parents' reports include comparable information for each subject and constructive targets.\*  
(Paragraphs 47, 93, 94, 95, 106, 117)
- (4) Ensure that teaching challenges all students appropriately by:
  - improving the level of planning for students of varying ability within each class.\*
  - increasing the opportunities to develop thinking through structured discussion.  
(Paragraphs 44, 174, 178, 199, 217)

### Sixth form

- (1) Improve the level of learning resources by:
  - ensuring all subjects have enough textbooks, research materials and resources;
  - giving every subject a base where resources are made available to students;
  - ensuring that sixth form students have adequate access to computers.  
(Paragraphs 59, 110, 139, 140, 141)
- (2) Ensure that all teachers use assessment information effectively to:
  - monitor students' progress in relation to their individual targets;
  - identify students who are underachieving and take remedial action;
  - plan appropriately for the full range of ability in each class.  
(Paragraphs 57, 58, 100, 101, 102)

In addition to the above issues for action, the school should consider:

- ensuring that students with special educational needs have adequate additional support in lessons;\*  
(Paragraphs 45, 125)
- increasing the use that subjects make of ICT in lessons by improving access and co-ordination;  
(Paragraphs 51, 133, 141)
- improving the consistency with which the work of departments is managed and monitored.  
(Paragraphs 115, 116)

### Sixth form

- ensuring that where subjects are taught by unqualified teachers, they are given adequate support.  
(Paragraphs 19, 136, 137, 314, 319)

*\*These issues are already included in the school's planning.*

## COMMUNITY LINKS

143. The school has very good links with the community. By opening its facilities for community use and providing courses, the school makes an excellent contribution to the community. Conversely, the local community makes a good contribution to students' learning.
144. The school's sports facilities are used by the community outside school hours as the Sports Plus Centre. In addition the learning resource centre, computers and other facilities are made available for courses as the Plus Point centre. In all, some 3,000 adults frequent the school each week.
145. Sports Plus offers an extensive sporting programme of fitness courses and recreational activities. These include rugby, trampolining and yoga as well as use of the gym. There are also about 35 evening and weekend courses under the Plus Point banner. Some are assessed and others are recreational. Most courses are in computing skills.
146. The Plus Point centre is developing activities to target minority groups, such as the disabled and the elderly. Ethnic minority groups in particular make use of the catering and meeting facilities. The school is used for festivals such as Diwali. In addition, the British Para Olympic team has used the school for training.
147. Local businesses support the school well in the personal, health and social education programme and by providing work experience opportunities. Local organisations provide mentors for students in Years 10 and 11 and support the Young Enterprise scheme in the sixth form. However, while the premises are used by church groups at the weekend, there are very few links between the religious education department and local religious groups.
148. Links are also established with local schools. Several schools use the sporting facilities, including the swimming pool. Technology college funding is used to provide equipment for community use and to support other schools. There are 'booster classes' in literacy and numeracy for middle school pupils and summer schools for students before they move to the upper school. These have been very successful in motivating students and familiarising them with the school. Advanced skills teachers visit partner middle schools to support the teaching of technology subjects.
149. Community provision is well led and managed. It is a fundamental part of the school's mission to be a community school, with the twin aims of providing opportunities for lifelong learning and of improving the achievement of students in the school, through better links with parents and improved facilities. The school aims to be fully comprehensive and admit any student from the local area. The governing body sets the strategic direction for community provision, and priorities for development are linked to the school improvement plan. There is a community committee and two governors sit on the Sports Plus steering committee.
150. The school's administration manager is responsible for the day-to-day administration of the community provision. This is done very efficiently and ensures that any difficulties arising from joint use are minimised.
151. The school has raised significant funding to extend its community provision. Sporting and other courses are self-financing and receive no subsidy from the school. However, the school's facilities have benefited from the joint use. The sports facilities in particular are a very valuable asset, to which local businesses contributed £400,000 as matched funding for a lottery bid. The school has raised in total over £1.4 million additional funding through bids and donations.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

|  |              |     |
|--|--------------|-----|
| Number of lessons observed   | Years 9 – 11 | 145 |
|  | Sixth form   | 71  |
| Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils |              | 83  |

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

|  | Excellent | Very good | Good | Satisfactory | Unsatisfactory | Poor | Very Poor |
|--|-----------|-----------|------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|
|--|-----------|-----------|------|--------------|----------------|------|-----------|

#### Years 9 – 11

|            |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |
|------------|---|----|----|----|---|---|---|
| Number     | 4 | 30 | 57 | 48 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| Percentage | 3 | 21 | 39 | 33 | 3 | 1 | 0 |

#### Sixth form

|            |   |    |    |    |   |   |   |
|------------|---|----|----|----|---|---|---|
| Number     | 2 | 17 | 33 | 18 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Percentage | 3 | 24 | 46 | 25 | 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

|   | Years 9 – 11 | Sixth form |
|---|--------------|------------|
| Number of pupils on the school's roll                                 | 1056         | 236        |
| Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals | 176          |            |

#### Special educational needs

|   | Years 9 – 11 | Sixth form |
|---|--------------|------------|
| Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs       | 21           | 1          |
| Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register | 359          | 29         |

#### English as an additional language

|   | No of pupils |
|---|--------------|
| Number of pupils with English as an additional language | 125          |

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

|  | No of pupils |
|--|--------------|
| Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission | 30           |
| Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving           | 46           |

**Attendance**

**Authorised absence**

|                           | %    |
|---------------------------|------|
| School data               | 12.9 |
| National comparative data | 8.1  |

**Unauthorised absence**

|                           | %   |
|---------------------------|-----|
| School data               | 0.6 |
| National comparative data | 1.1 |

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

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

| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
|  | 2001 | 161  | 191   | 352   |

| <b>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</b> |          | <b>English</b> | <b>Mathematics</b> | <b>Science</b> |
|--|----------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above    | Boys     | 48             | 91                 | 86             |
|  | Girls    | 103            | 123                | 111            |
|  | Total    | 151            | 214                | 197            |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above  | School   | 43 (47)        | 61 (58)            | 56 (48)        |
|  | National | 64 (63)        | 66 (65)            | 66 (59)        |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above  | School   | 16 (18)        | 34 (34)            | 20 (19)        |
|  | National | 31 (28)        | 43 (42)            | 34 (30)        |

| <b>Teachers' Assessments</b>                |          | <b>English</b> | <b>Mathematics</b> | <b>Science</b> |
|---|----------|----------------|--------------------|----------------|
| Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above   | Boys     | 66             | 96                 | 81             |
|   | Girls    | 125            | 135                | 109            |
|   | Total    | 191            | 231                | 190            |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above | School   | 55 (59)        | 65 (64)            | 54 (45)        |
|   | National | 65 (64)        | 68 (66)            | 64 (62)        |
| Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above | School   | 25 (26)        | 30 (37)            | 23 (16)        |
|   | National | 31 (31)        | 42 (39)            | 33 (29)        |

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

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

|  |      |      |       |       |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|
| Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|  | 2001 | 161  | 178   | 339   |

| 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     | 43                       | 127                   | 144                   |
|   | Girls    | 83                       | 165                   | 170                   |
|   | Total    | 126                      | 292                   | 314                   |
| Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified | School   | 37 (36)                  | 86 (85)               | 93 (88)               |
|   | National | 48 (47)                  | 91 (91)               | 96 (96)               |

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

| GCSE results                  |          | GCSE point score |
|-------------------------------|----------|------------------|
| Average point score per pupil | School   | 33.6 (33.9)      |
|                               | National | 39.0 (38.4)      |

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

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

|   |      |      |       |       |
|---|------|------|-------|-------|
| Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations | Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|   | 2001 | 32   | 80    | 112   |

|          |                                   | For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations |             |             |
|----------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------|-------------|
|          |                                   | Male   | Female      | All         |
| School   | Number of candidates              | 32   | 80          | 112         |
|          | Average point score per candidate | 15.6 (16.3)  | 18.7 (17.4) | 17.8 (17)   |
| National | Average point score per candidate | 16.9 (17.1)  | 18 (18)     | 17.5 (17.6) |

|          |                                   | For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations |        |      | For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations |        |      |
|----------|-----------------------------------|--|--------|------|---|--------|------|
|          |                                   | Male   | Female | All  | Male  | Female | All  |
| School   | Number of candidates              | 32   | 79     | 111  | 0   | 3      | 3    |
|          | Average point score per candidate | 15.6   | 18.6   | 17.7 | n/a   | 10     | 10   |
| National | Average point score per candidate | 16.9   | 17.9   | 17.4 | 9.8   | 11.4   | 10.6 |

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

**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                                     | 993                  | 33                                | 1                              |
| White – Irish                                       |                      |                                   |                                |
| White – any other White background                  | 36                   |                                   |                                |
| Mixed – White and Black Caribbean                   | 6                    |                                   |                                |
| Mixed – White and Black African                     | 13                   |                                   |                                |
| Mixed – White and Asian                             |                      |                                   |                                |
| Mixed – any other mixed background                  |                      |                                   |                                |
| Asian or Asian British - Indian                     | 69                   |                                   |                                |
| Asian or Asian British - Pakistani                  | 19                   |                                   |                                |
| Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi                | 14                   |                                   |                                |
| Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background |                      |                                   |                                |
| Black or Black British – Caribbean                  |                      | 3                                 |                                |
| Black or Black British – African                    |                      |                                   |                                |
| Black or Black British – any other Black background | 63                   | 3                                 |                                |
| Chinese   | 18                   |                                   |                                |
| Any other ethnic group                              | 26                   |                                   |                                |
| No ethnic group recorded                            | 35                   |                                   |                                |

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

**Teachers and classes**

**Financial information**

**Qualified teachers and classes: Years 9 – 13**

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Total number of qualified teachers (FTE) | 78.6 |
| Number of pupils per qualified teacher   | 16.2 |

**Education support staff: Years 9 – 13**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Total number of education support staff | 22  |
| Total aggregate hours worked per week   | 693 |

**Deployment of teachers: Years 9 – 13**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes | 76 |
|---|----|

**Average teaching group size: Years 9 – 13**

|             |      |
|-------------|------|
| Key Stage 3 | 23.9 |
| Key Stage 4 | 22.4 |

|                |        |
|----------------|--------|
| Financial year | 2001-2 |
|----------------|--------|

|  | £         |
|--|-----------|
| Total income                               | 4,274,680 |
| Total expenditure                          | 4,264,793 |
| Expenditure per pupil                      | 3,324     |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | 12,063    |
| Balance carried forward to next year       | 21,950    |

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

**Recruitment of teachers**

|  |      |
|--|------|
| Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years     | 36.9 |
| Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years | 34.7 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)  | 1   |
| Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)                           | 1.4 |
| Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE) | 1   |

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

|                                   |      |
|-----------------------------------|------|
| Number of questionnaires sent out | 1292 |
| Number of questionnaires returned | 319  |

### Percentage of responses in each category

|  | Strongly agree | Tend to agree | Tend to disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know |
|--|----------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|------------|
| My child likes school.   | 33             | 58            | 5                | 3                 | 1          |
| My child is making good progress in school.  | 30             | 61            | 5                | 1                 | 3          |
| Behaviour in the school is good.   | 21             | 49            | 13               | 5                 | 12         |
| My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.                              | 23             | 54            | 15               | 5                 | 3          |
| The teaching is good.  | 20             | 62            | 7                | 3                 | 9          |
| I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.                          | 17             | 48            | 22               | 8                 | 5          |
| I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. | 34             | 54            | 6                | 2                 | 3          |
| The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.              | 45             | 48            | 3                | 1                 | 3          |
| The school works closely with parents.   | 18             | 47            | 21               | 5                 | 8          |
| The school is well led and managed.  | 23             | 48            | 8                | 5                 | 15         |
| The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.                      | 25             | 57            | 8                | 3                 | 6          |
| The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.            | 28             | 47            | 10               | 2                 | 13         |

### Other issues raised by parents

In the parents' meeting, parents were pleased with the summer schools, which had left their children highly motivated. They liked the homework diaries but some felt there should be a bit more homework. They felt there was a good partnership with teachers and were impressed with the speed of response if they contacted the school with a concern. They were happy with parents' evenings, but a few parents found the reports confusing to read. Parents of sixth form students were generally happy with the sixth form.

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

**ENGLISH**

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

**Strengths**

- Students in Year 9 achieve well.
- Teaching is good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and manage behaviour well.
- Students learn the skills of literary analysis from Year 9, and develop these skills well.

**Areas for improvement**

- Standards in GCSE English could be at least in line with the national average.
- Audio-visual resources are not used enough to enliven lessons.
- The use of assessment data to track individual students' progress could be further developed.

152. Results in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2002 were average and above those of similar schools. They were better than in mathematics and science. This was a significant improvement since 2001, though there has been a fluctuating trend over the last three years. When students come into the school their attainment is well below average, and they achieve well in Year 9. The attainment gap between boys and girls is a little wider than that found nationally, with girls outperforming boys.

153. GCSE results in 2001 were average, and better than in similar schools. Results declined in 2002 because a significant number of students did not take the final examination. In some cases their attendance was poor, while others did not complete coursework. Results have fluctuated over the last three years. Girls achieve better results than boys, and the gap is wider than it is nationally. English literature results in 2001 were a little below average, but rose significantly in 2002. When compared with students' prior attainment, these results in both English and literature represent satisfactory achievement for those who are entered for the examinations.

154. Standards of work seen in Year 9 confirm the National Curriculum test results in 2002, and are almost in line with the national average. Higher-attaining students write in a lively and engaging fashion. Their spelling, punctuation and grammar are generally accurate and they show a perceptive understanding of why writers choose to use particular effects. Lower-attaining students tend to write short pieces, lacking descriptive detail and with grammatical and spelling mistakes. They can, however, express their ideas clearly and comment on literary pieces in a straightforward way. Higher-attaining students can express their ideas orally quite confidently in informal situations. Lower-attaining students often lack confidence in expressing their views in depth and tend to use quite a restricted range of vocabulary – although they can at times use surprising expressions. One student in a lower-attaining Year 9 group described a spooky house as 'malodorous'. Most students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress during Year 9.

155. By the time students take their GCSEs, standards are a little below those found nationally. Students' achievement is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. The highest-attaining students analyse persuasive writing competently, and comment perceptively on literature that they read. They write accurately and use different styles appropriately for different purposes. Middle and lower-attaining students also analyse texts, although in less depth, and their writing is less developed. Lower-attaining students tend to make basic errors in punctuating, paragraphing and spelling. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, along with others. Students from all ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well.

156. Teaching and learning throughout the school are good. Achievement is satisfactory, rather than good, in Years 10 and 11, because a significant minority of students attend erratically, and others fail to meet coursework deadlines. Whilst the majority of students have good attitudes and enjoy

the subject, there is a minority whose attitudes are rather casual. Two out of every three lessons seen were good, or occasionally excellent. Teachers have a very good command of the subject, which they use to challenge students to relate the use of language to writers' intentions. In two Year 9 lessons, the teachers' knowledge of poetry (in one case, Stephen Spender's poem 'My Parents Told Me' and, in the other, a poem using colourful metaphors) led students to think carefully about how the poets achieved their effects. Students develop a good understanding of literary criticism, because teachers explain clearly the techniques of literary analysis, and, similarly, language skills are well taught. In one excellent lesson, a Year 10 lower-attaining group worked to their maximum practising the skills of skimming and scanning. The teacher's expertise in timing, pace, encouraging and praising and in planning a range of activities, brought out the best in the students, who contributed as well as they possibly could. Teachers manage students' behaviour well. All work plans for Year 9 have been rewritten to incorporate the National Literacy Strategy, and there are planned opportunities to use computers in all years.

157. Teachers mark students' work thoroughly, recognising good work and giving helpful development points. Results of assessments are used to monitor how individuals and groups of students achieve. National Curriculum levels are used to assess Year 9 students. Year 10 and 11 students usually know the GCSE grade they are aiming for, their current performance level, and targets for improvement.
158. Accommodation for English lessons is satisfactory. The department is fortunate in its office accommodation, but some classrooms are in poor decorative order, despite teachers' best efforts to cheer them up with displays. Access to computers is good, but there are few overhead projectors, and television monitors are not large enough for full classes. A greater range of resources would enrich learning.
159. The department is well led and managed. The head of department has a well thought-out approach to determining how well students are doing and identifying areas for improvement. She uses test and examination data to pinpoint underachievement, although there is room to develop this and individual student tracking and target setting, further. She has prioritised the issue of boys' underachievement for staff development, and has organised small group withdrawal support to help poor attenders catch up with coursework. The National Literacy Strategy has been enthusiastically embraced. There are systems to monitor teaching, and teachers get appropriate feedback. This process is having a positive effect on learning and achievement. Teachers are mutually supportive and work well as a team.
160. The department has made good improvement since the last inspection. Results at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE have risen and achievement in English literature is particularly good. Teaching has improved considerably. Assessment has developed well and teachers have adopted curriculum developments positively.
161. Whilst teachers of English play the major role in teaching literacy, most subjects make a contribution by displaying subject vocabulary, and some departments stress the differences in writing for different purposes. Practice is not consistent across the school, however, and students could make even greater progress if teachers were more systematic in the teaching of literacy. Science and mathematics, for example, fail to correct grammatical and spelling mistakes enough. On the other hand, teachers of religious education and physical education stress technical vocabulary and give good support for writing. In several subjects, students do not have enough opportunities to develop their oral skills through structured discussion. The English department provides very good additional support for students who need it, such as the paired reading scheme with sixth formers, the booster day at Easter and Saturday morning sessions.

## **Drama**

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

#### Strengths

- Students achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good: teachers have high expectations of what students can do and how they will behave.
- The department is very well led and managed.

#### Area for improvement

- Reports to parents of Year 9 students do not clearly show what they can do and what they need to do to improve.

162. GCSE results in 2001 were average, and boys' results were above average. Results improved further in 2002. These results represent very good achievement, as most students come to the school with very limited experiences of drama.
163. Standards of work in Year 9 are below average. Only students in lower-attaining classes take drama, and many of them have not done the subject before. The course concentrates on teaching them to work well together, initially with the emphasis on listening and working in groups. After the first half term, students start to learn about certain dramatic conventions and techniques, such as how to use freeze frames and slow motion.
164. In Years 10 and 11, students acquire a good knowledge and understanding of dramatic conventions and good performance skills. By Year 11, they can portray a character and sustain a role convincingly, using movement, voice and gesture, with a good awareness of audience. They achieve very well.
165. Teaching is very good. Teachers have high expectations of what students will achieve and insist on high standards, including good behaviour and listening. They have very good specialist subject knowledge, and maintain a brisk pace. In a Year 9 lesson, where the class was portraying 'evil clones', the teacher very effectively maintained a high degree of challenge so that students worked well in groups and made very good progress. The great majority of students have positive attitudes. They enjoy drama and are keen to learn. In a Year 11 lesson, for example, students were working towards a performance to be assessed for GCSE. The teacher's high quality feedback helped them to see what they had done well and how they could improve further. The department encourages self-evaluation, and students are taught to consider their own and others' work, always respecting what others have done. Teachers assess Years 10 and 11 well in relation to GCSE criteria. However, comments about Year 9 students on reports to parents are too generalised, and it is not clear what the attainment grades mean.
166. Drama is taught in a specialist room which provides an adequate space for practical work, but is in poor decorative order. The school hall has some basic technical equipment, but productions would be enhanced by more up-to-date facilities.
167. The head of department provides very good leadership and management. Drama is popular among students who take it, and makes a very good contribution to extra-curricular activities.

## MATHEMATICS

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

#### Strengths

- Teachers have good subject knowledge.
- There are good relationships between teachers and students.
- There are good procedures for assessment.
- Leadership and management are good.

Areas for improvement

- Teaching methods lack variety.
- There are not enough opportunities for students to explain their own understanding of ideas.
- Marking does not include enough comments to help students improve.
- Assessment data is not used sufficiently to monitor students' progress.

168. Results in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 2002 were below average. They were better than those of science but not as good as in English. Boys performed better than girls. Students made good progress in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. Results have varied year by year, though the overall trend shows a slight improvement.
169. GCSE A\*-C results in 2001 were broadly average and in line with those of similar schools. A high proportion of students achieved a graded result in mathematics. Girls performed better than boys and did significantly better than in their other subjects. Results declined slightly in 2002. GCSE results in mathematics are not as good as in English but are better than in science. Students' achievement in GCSE is satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the end of Year 9.
170. The standard of work seen in Year 9 is below average overall, though some students reach above average standards. The work of these students is well organised, with many worked examples and a concern for accuracy. Work matches course requirements and students can convey mathematical information in a variety of ways. For example, higher-attaining students, solving a linear programming problem as part of a 'maths across the world' research project, tested a hypothesis by using simultaneous equations and graphs. Higher-attaining students have good numerical skills. Average-attaining students have less confidence in their mental computation and have difficulty, for example, estimating and calculating the volume of cuboids. The standard of lower-attaining students' numerical skills is weak, but is improving through regular practice sessions at the start of lessons and through application during lessons. The work of some lower attainers is undermined, however, by poor presentation and by poor quality work going unchallenged. Some written exercises, for example, are very brief and show little working. Overall, achievement is good for Year 9 students, including those with English as an additional language. The achievement of students with special educational needs is satisfactory. Their learning improves when supported by a learning support assistant, but there are some lessons where they need support and it is unavailable.
171. The standard of work seen in Years 10 and 11 is similar to the 2002 GCSE results and is slightly below average overall. Some higher-attaining students reach above average standards. For example, higher-attaining students in Year 10 can identify the graphs of quadratic, cubic, and other algebraic functions. In Year 11, higher-attaining students can plot and use the graphs of trigonometrical functions. They have good computational skills, estimating and establishing hypotheses, recording written work accurately with a care for appearance and layout. Average-attaining students make steady progress in algebra, though some are uncertain how to substitute numerical values into more complex algebraic expressions. They practise examples, but only in the best lessons do they have enough opportunities to develop their thinking about the concepts. Lower-attaining students can convert between metric and imperial measures. In a very good Year 11 lesson, for example, they used bottles, cartons and a bucket to understand the relation between litres and pints. When completing coursework, students have good support with their writing. In other lessons, average and lower-attaining students have limited opportunities for writing about mathematics and mainly complete mathematical exercises. Poor work, such as inaccurate algebra or diagrams that are not labelled, sometimes goes unchallenged and students do not do enough corrections to learn from their errors. Overall, students' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory, including those with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language.
172. Students' numeracy skills are developed through mental 'warm-up' sessions at the start of mathematics lessons in all year groups. Many other subjects also make a satisfactory contribution to numeracy. Students produce accurate graphs in geography, for example, and apply algebraic formulae in science. Physical education lessons give particularly good opportunities to

develop numeracy through measuring fitness. The use of ICT to support learning of mathematics is at an early stage, but is included in the revised programme of work starting in Year 9.

173. Teaching is satisfactory and often good. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and use this to plan effectively and give students clear explanations that they understand. Teachers have high expectations of what is to be covered, but sometimes move on too quickly, so that students do not get enough practice of skills or opportunities to consolidate their learning. Relationships between teachers and students are good, and as a result, students generally have good attitudes and behave well. Learning is promoted through regular homework of an appropriate standard. There are well-organised procedures for assessing students' attainment. Work is regularly marked, but students do not get enough comments that help them to overcome specific misunderstandings or to improve their spelling. Good use is made of learning support assistants, who address the specific needs of individuals enabling them to make similar progress as their peers.
174. Where teaching is less strong, the management of behaviour is not sufficiently consistent and some students lose motivation. Teaching methods do not give students enough opportunities to explain their own understanding of concepts and discuss these in a structured way. As a result students lack confidence in their ability. The methods that teachers use are also somewhat restricted by the small size of some rooms. Teachers do not always plan enough short activities to help lower-attaining students improve their concentration. Where classes contain a range of ability, not enough work is planned to extend the gifted and talented students and support those with difficulties. This is particularly the case in homework. Not enough lessons include an opportunity at the end for students to reflect on what they have learned.
175. Leadership and management of the department are good. Issues raised in the previous inspection have been addressed. The department works well together and teachers are committed to raising standards. The head of department is well informed and provides a clear educational direction. Departmental planning is thorough and detailed. There are good procedures for monitoring department work and evaluating performance in mathematics. Students' attainment is assessed regularly and accurately, but assessment data is not used consistently to inform students of the progress they are making and what to do to improve. Resources that are available are used well, although the regular use of computers by students as an aid to learning is at an early stage. There are not enough mathematics books in the learning resources centre, particularly for lower-attaining students.

## SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is **satisfactory and improving**.

### Strengths

- GCSE results are improving.
- Teaching is good in Year 9; students achieve well in response to interesting and varied work.
- Marking is very good and shows students how to improve.
- The department is well led and initiatives are beginning to benefit students.

### Areas for improvement

- Teaching in Years 10 and 11 does not always engage students' interest, particularly boys.
- Key words are not well enough used to help students recall and explain their work.
- Assessment is not used effectively to help students reach their target grades.

176. The results of National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were well below average in 2002, but students made satisfactory progress through Year 9 in relation to prior attainment in their middle schools. Results dipped because staff changes adversely affected students' performance. In previous years, girls' results were usually better than those of boys, but in 2002 this was reversed. When students enter the school at the beginning of Year 9 standards are well below average. They achieve well in lessons and, as a result, standards are higher by the end of the year, though still below average. For example, most need prompting from the teacher before making predictions

based on scientific knowledge about factors that affect the growth of yeast. Standards are higher than those suggested by the most recent National Curriculum tests because current Year 9 students have been unaffected by staff changes and are beginning to benefit from the new national strategy for science teaching.

177. GCSE results at the end of Year 11 dipped in 2001 and were well below average, representing unsatisfactory progress for these students in relation to their National Curriculum test results two years earlier. Results improved in 2002, and almost all students in the year gained a GCSE grade. Girls do significantly better than boys at this stage. Science results were lower than those in English and mathematics. In lessons, standards are still below average by the end of Year 11, and are similar to the 2002 GCSE examinations. Students' achievement is satisfactory at this stage and they make satisfactory progress through Years 10 and 11. Achievement is less good than in Year 9 because lessons with lower sets often do not appropriately challenge all students; many, and particularly boys, lose concentration because they do not see the relevance of the content. Students are often held back by their inability to recall and explain earlier work.
178. The overall progress of students with special educational needs and those learning to speak English is similar to that of other students. However, individuals are not always well supported because teachers' planning does not take enough account of their needs, and appropriate strategies for helping them are not readily available.
179. Students' literacy skills are below average. While teachers emphasise keywords, they do not always reinforce their meanings clearly enough; as a result, lower-attaining students often have difficulty in explaining their work, as was the case in Year 11 when students confused the meanings of 'reflection' and 'refraction'. Students have good opportunities to develop numerical skills, for example manipulating simple numbers in calculating pressure. However, their ICT skills are not well developed because suitable equipment has been unavailable until recently. Students carry out practical work carefully with due regard for the safety of others. Their investigative skills are well developed from an early stage, for example when testing predictions about the relative reactivities of metals.
180. Teaching and learning are good in Year 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Overall, nearly half the lessons seen were good, and occasionally very good; all the others were satisfactory. Key features of good and very good teaching are capturing students' interest at the start, high expectations of good behaviour and work rate, and clear explanations. In one very good lesson the teacher engaged students' interest by asking about applications of radioactivity to show how it is relevant to them. As a result, their learning was very good because they concentrated well and quickly understood differences between types of radiation. Although some of the students in this low-attaining group were potentially disruptive, they knew and respected the teacher's high expectations.
181. The pace of lessons is often well managed, as was the case in Year 9 when students carried out a series of activities within set time slots to investigate the relationship between force and pressure. In some other lessons, particularly with lower-attaining groups in Years 10 and 11, the work is too abstract for students to assimilate easily and the objectives are not easily reviewed at the ends of lessons. This was the case in Year 11 when 'trends in the halogen group' was being studied. The boys in particular lost concentration when they were unable to see that they were making progress; as a result, their poor behaviour disrupted the work of other students and learning was not as good as it should have been. A significant number of students in Years 10 and 11 leave too much work unfinished, either because they lose interest in the work or because teachers' planning does not ensure that it is closely enough matched to their needs.
182. Teachers' day to day marking is very good; comments are usually detailed and show students how to improve, though it is not always evident that they have acted on the advice given.
183. The science department is well led and managed. The head of department has developed a good sense of teamwork and several new initiatives, such as a new approach to marking, are already benefiting students. However, assessment is not yet used well enough to set short-term targets

that show students what they need to do to reach their final target grades. The laboratory technicians provide excellent support to teachers, but have insufficient time to check equipment before it is used by students; this sometimes affects learning because students lose interest when it fails to work properly. There are too few textbooks for students to keep a book at home, which restricts the range of homework tasks that can be set, and in particular the opportunities they have to research topics independently.

184. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. GCSE results are higher now, although boys' results remain well below those of girls. Some teaching was unsatisfactory then, but no unsatisfactory teaching was seen during this inspection. The laboratory accommodation is significantly better.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Strengths

- Students achieve well, particularly in their practical work.
- Good teaching and learning give students confidence and enjoyment of the subject.
- Very good teaching in Year 11 enables students to apply their skills in an individual way.
- Teaching includes a wide range of media in which all students can find success and fulfilment.
- Students develop good tonal drawing and painting skills.

### Areas for improvement

- Students are not so good at critical and contextual work as they are in their practical work.
- More opportunities for discussion would improve students' confidence in critical analysis.
- The department lacks ICT equipment for students to use creatively.

185. Students' skills in art when they enter Year 9 are low. They achieve well and reach standards that are broadly average by the end of the year. This good progress occurs because effective teaching provides a rich experience in an interesting range of media and techniques. Students then choose from a range of GCSE options including textiles, three-dimensional work and general art. These courses provide a variety of media where all can potentially be successful and students achieve very well by the end of Year 11. GCSE results rose from average in 2001 to above average in 2002. Work seen in Year 11 indicates similarly high standards this year.

186. The department has to teach Year 9 students many skills. The curriculum covers interesting themes and is carefully designed to give students confidence in media where success is almost guaranteed. In Year 9, for example, students make paper mosaics based on artists' work from cultures as varied as Roman mosaic or the work of Antonio Gaudi. Students learn about both the technique and the cultures. Other Year 9 students learn etching techniques, using wax and oil pastels. Such opportunities enable students to progress well, particularly in their practical work. They develop particular strengths in using a good tonal range in drawing and painting. Their written work, however, is below average because their analytical ability does not match their practical work.

187. Students who go on to study GCSE continue to need direct teaching in skills to compensate for the skills they lacked when they joined the school. Teachers do this well by teaching a range of painting techniques. Students learn to use an aboriginal pointillist style, for example, and learn about the culture at the same time. Ceramics techniques such as the construction of slab plaques are very well taught. Boys in particular favour this three-dimensional option and, in Year 10, lower-attaining students make good progress to reach average standards in this technique. Good teaching about the historical context in which the technique was developed enhances their progress. Students' knowledge of the history of art and their ability to make analytical judgements are less well developed than their practical work. All students make good progress through Year 10, with lower-attaining students doing particularly well in ceramics. Girls frequently opt for textiles and reach high standards. By Year 11 students are able to apply their skills and create individually

expressive work. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is very good overall. However, despite teachers' efforts to ensure that all students succeed, some students underachieve because their attendance is irregular.

188. Teaching is good overall. Some, particularly in Year 11, is very good. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and they are particularly skilled in building students' confidence. Students find success in their artwork and therefore enjoy the subject. Teachers' encouragement and praise, good assessment procedures and careful checking that students understand lesson content, are effective in boosting students' self-esteem. This is further enhanced by very stimulating displays of students' artwork around the school. Teachers share good relationships with most students, creating a sense of fun and self-fulfilment in students of all abilities and from all backgrounds. Talented students do well. Teachers effectively manage the poor behaviour of a minority of students, particularly of boys in Year 9, so that disturbance to others' learning is minimised. Teachers check that students have understood vocabulary, contributing to basic literacy. More opportunities for discussion would help students to articulate their ideas and develop their ability to analyse art. Teachers seldom use ICT in their teaching, because the equipment required is unavailable.
189. The last report was very positive and the department's strong position has been maintained. Attainment has fallen somewhat because students' attainment on intake is relatively lower. However, the department continues to be well managed and the good quality of education has been sustained.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Students achieve well because they are well taught.
- Students' attitudes are good and they enjoy the subject.
- Assessment data is used well to raise students' attainment.

### Areas for improvement

- Students have too few opportunities to make use of ICT in their learning.
- Boys' attainment has improved but could still be higher.

190. Results in the 2001 GCSE examinations were average. Students did better in design and technology than in most of their other subjects. Results in 2002 dropped but were still above those of other subjects that students studied. Girls' results were significantly higher than those of boys.
191. Standards at the end of Year 9 are below average, which represents good achievement as students' standards on entry to the school are well below average. They use most hand and machine tools and kitchen utensils appropriately and with dexterity, though they struggle with more demanding tools or where a high degree of accuracy is required. Overall, students' making skills are average and above their designing skills. Most students grasp the idea of the design process and sequence their work correctly, but lower attainers require support from the teacher in order to do this. Students work safely and hygiene in food lessons is good.
192. By the end of Year 11, standards are average, which represents a good level of achievement for those students who follow a design and technology course. Standards have risen since the 2002 examination results because teachers have taken positive steps to ensure coursework deadlines are met. This has been particularly effective in raising boys' standards, which are now much closer to those of girls. The design work of high-attaining students is very good. Their research is thorough and carefully analysed. This analysis is not however always clearly used to guide the next part of their designing. All students have a clear understanding of batch and mass production. The design folders of a minority of boys are incomplete and not well sequenced. Low-attaining students use drawings successfully to illustrate their design ideas but accompanying notes are

often too brief. For all students practical work is generally good and items that they make are carefully finished.

193. The quality of teaching and learning are good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject. This was used well in a very good resistant materials lesson on batch production. The teacher constantly alerted students to the need to consider quality control points, which led students to become confident in evaluating their products. Teachers have high expectations that students will produce a good quantity of quality work during the lesson. In several very good food lessons, for example, students effectively prepared, cooked and evaluated complex meals within a double lesson. Teachers make very good use of assessment when planning their work. In a Year 10 graphics class, for example, students appropriately spent additional time practising freehand drawing because the teacher had judged this as a weakness. However teachers' plans do not include enough use of ICT. Students' attitudes are good but there are occasions when they are inattentive in discussions. Students work well together in small groups and enjoy the subject, particularly the practical activities. Relationships between teachers and students are good. In a Year 11 resistant materials lesson, for example, the teacher spoke to each student in the group and provided valuable feedback on individual students' project work.
194. The head of department leads and manages the subject well. Classroom work is carefully monitored and assessment data is used well to check students' progress, to improve coursework and to make improvements to the curriculum. There is a satisfactory level of resources overall, though there is insufficient food storage in the kitchens.
195. The subject has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection, as students' good achievement has been maintained.

## GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Standards are improving, especially in Years 9 and 10.
- Teaching is good and much is very good.
- The management of behaviour is very good; students are well behaved in geography lessons.
- There is good support for students' personal development.

### Areas for improvement

- GCSE results could be higher.
- There are not enough opportunities for independent investigative work, fieldwork or use of ICT.
- Assessment results are not used sufficiently to track students' progress and set targets for improvement.
- The procedures for evaluating the quality of classroom work are unsatisfactory.

196. Standards are below average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. GCSE results have been below average for most the last four years. In 2001, they improved to match the average but fell again in 2002. Students' achievement is satisfactory when compared with their earlier attainment. The work seen during the inspection shows improvement in standards in Years 9 and 10. This is because previous staffing difficulties have now been resolved. Students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language, achieve as well as other students. Boys and girls achieve equally well, though girls generally have better literacy skills.
197. Students gain a sound knowledge and understanding of geographical topics. Higher-attaining students are more secure in recalling what they have learned and explaining what it means. All learn to interpret geographical facts and make comparisons about conditions in different regions. The great majority develop a sound understanding of technical vocabulary. Where the improvement in standards is most evident, for example in a Year 10 lesson on the formation of coastal features, higher-attaining students confidently draw upon their good knowledge, understanding and skills in

volunteering observations, making links and providing clear explanations. Students use number well to do calculations, and to interpret and present statistical data. Higher-attaining students produce detailed and well-presented written work, although it sometimes lacks sufficient explanation. Their maps and diagrams are clear and accurate. The work of many average and lower-attaining students, on the other hand, is at times very brief, reflecting shallow knowledge and understanding, careless literacy skills, and poor effort and commitment. As at the time of the last inspection students get too few opportunities to carry out independent investigations or do fieldwork. They rarely use ICT to research information, analyse data or present their work.

198. Most students are positive about their work in geography though few, apart from some higher-attaining students, are avid learners. Teachers manage behaviour very well and have high expectations for students' effort. Students respond well and classroom relationships are good. This creates a good working atmosphere, which support students' personal development.
199. Teaching is good and some is very good. Learning benefits from the skilful sharing of the teachers' good subject knowledge through clear introductions, explanation and reinforcement of key points. Brisk, purposeful introductions immediately engage attention and interest, and set the pace for concentrated effort throughout the lesson. Activities are well planned and timed to support step-by-step learning; teachers check that students understand what they are doing and provide feedback on their work. Any loss of concentration is promptly and unobtrusively checked. Students learn to work accurately through a constant emphasis on the need for care in map work, measurement and use of technical vocabulary. The best teaching challenges students to contribute their ideas, and to extend their thinking. This was particularly effective in a lower ability Year 11 lesson on the economic advantages of living in Europe, helping students to understand the factors that influence economic growth. In many lessons, however, there are too few opportunities of this kind. The emphasis on working hard tends to be at the expense of opportunities to learn in depth through discussion and independent learning. Teachers do not ask enough questions that make students think, and the tasks provide too little opportunity for individual enquiry. Progress is also sometimes hindered because the tasks do not suit the full range of ability in the class. In the case of students with special educational needs, there is a lack of specialist support from teaching assistants.
200. Students' work is marked and assessed regularly. Most marking provides helpful, detailed guidance for improvement, but assessment results are not used to track their progress and set targets for improvement. The National Curriculum and GCSE syllabus requirements are covered but opportunities for fieldwork and the use of ICT to support research are very limited. As at the time of the last inspection, this hinders students' ability to reach higher levels.
201. The subject has experienced significant staffing difficulties in recent years that have led to some classes having too many changes of teacher. This has had an adverse effect on the progress made since the last inspection. The difficulties are now resolved and the department is well placed to improve standards and provision. However, departmental procedures for monitoring standards of attainment and the quality of classroom work are not sufficiently rigorous to identify areas that need improving.

## HISTORY

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

#### Strengths

- Standards are improving.
- Teaching is good, with many very good features. As a result, students learn well.
- There are very good procedures for assessing students' work.
- The monitoring of classroom work is improving the quality of lessons.
- History is a popular subject at GCSE.

#### Areas for improvement

- In a minority of lessons, the teaching does not involve all students.
- There are not many visits to sites of historical interest.

202. Standards in teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2002 were below average. The work of current students is better than this but is just below average. This represents good achievement, since students' standards on entry to the school were well below average. GCSE results were well below average in 2001, but improved significantly in 2002. For current students, standards at the end of Year 11 have improved again and are now average. Standards are higher than in recent examinations because the department has new staff and teaching has improved.

203. Students' knowledge and understanding of historical events, people and concepts are improving. The department has worked hard to improve average and below average students' writing so that they write with confidence about, for example, the relative advantages of the Domestic System compared with work in the new factories. These skills provide a good foundation for GCSE. Lower-attaining students, those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language have a sound understanding of key historical events and, when they find written expression difficult, can explain these events orally. Students of all abilities work hard to use correct historical vocabulary.

204. GCSE students plan their written work well, using specialist vocabulary appropriately. They understand the importance of structuring work clearly and including references to historical evidence. This is due to clear teaching and because good assessment shows students what they have done well and what they need to do in order to achieve a higher grade. They make good progress in lessons and achieve well throughout the course. Students with special educational needs make similar rates of progress. This was particularly evident in a Year 11 class where all the students had a history of truancy and behavioural difficulties. As a result of enthusiastic and carefully structured teaching, almost all had completed their coursework and worked hard to succeed in their lessons.

205. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall, with many very good features. This represents an improvement since the last inspection. Teachers plan lessons carefully and deliver them enthusiastically. This was evident, for example, in a lesson on the events leading to the Second World War. Students were fascinated by their study of Hitler's school report and their interest led them to work at a good pace. Questions are used effectively to motivate and to enable students to become more confident learners. Occasionally, however, a small number of uninterested students do not participate actively and are not always encouraged to do so. Teachers almost always have high expectations of their students, expecting them to think for themselves without being given all the information. Students respond well to this. The quality of relationships is a strength of the teaching; as a result, students' behaviour is very good.

206. This is a very well managed department where standards and teaching are improving. Teachers are committed to raising standards and work well as a team. There are very good procedures for assessing students' work. The department has made very good progress in all the issues identified in the last inspection. Resources are adequate, although there is scope to develop further the range of visits to places of historical interest. The department makes use of ICT to enhance learning, for example in a census database in Year 9. A particular strength of the department is the monitoring of classroom work, which is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge.
- Students have good access to computers in ICT lessons.
- The new curriculum is carefully planned and is beginning to raise attainment.

### Areas for improvement

- There is too much variation in the quality of teaching.
- Assessment procedures do not monitor students' progress effectively.
- There are not enough computer peripheral resources.

207. There have been no GCSE entries recently.

208. Standards at the end of Year 9 are below average. Students' achievement during Year 9 is satisfactory because their ICT skills are below average when they join the school. They make good progress in their communication skills, learning to use a word processor and create slide presentations. They are competent in using the Internet for research and make good progress in learning to design web-sites. High-attaining students make very good progress in understanding how to use the programming language HTML to create Internet pages. Students' ability to use a computer to control electronic devices is less strong and is well below average. Their skills in collecting data electronically and recording the results in a database are also below average. They are accurate in typing information into the computer but their use of spreadsheets to carry out calculations is weaker. Many other subjects, such as English, history and music, make good use of computers to support learning. However there are some subjects, for example geography and design and technology, where computer facilities are underused.

209. Standards by the end of Year 11 are also below average overall and students' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. Standards are rising, however, because of recent improvements to the ICT curriculum, which mean that students have more direct teaching of ICT skills. Students develop satisfactory skills in using computers to communicate and to search the Internet. Their ability to use a database is well below average, though these skills are improving. Progress is good in designing and writing Internet pages. High-attaining students make very good progress and show a very high level of skill in manipulating HTML code. Their work is thoughtfully planned for their intended audience and they are skilled in evaluating the quality of their own and others' work. Low-attaining students are proficient in the use of basic HTML: they can change background colours and the border around a table.

210. The variation in the standard reached in different aspects of the subject in all year groups is because the changes in the curriculum will take time to have a full impact. Students' understanding of important social issues arising from the use of computers is good overall and very good in the case of high-attaining students.

211. Teaching is satisfactory overall. However, the quality of teaching in individual lessons varies widely, from very good to unsatisfactory. In the best lessons teachers are very demanding and challenging. This was seen in a Year 11 lesson in which students reviewed the quality of over 100 examples of Internet pages and made notes on their findings. A lively class discussion followed in which each group reported their ideas to the rest of the class. Students learned much from this, which they then applied to the design and writing of their own pages. In a minority of weaker lessons, there is a lack of challenge. As a result, some students underachieve because they do too little work, while others spend too much time on irrelevant web sites. Discussions are a feature of ICT lessons but these are often hampered by a minority of students who chat in the background.

212. Teachers are very well qualified and, as a result, students learn accurate information and relevant skills. This was seen in a good lesson where the teacher explained the need to get permission to copy text and images from the Internet into a commercial document. Students quickly realised they could e-mail a company to seek this permission. Teachers generally plan their lessons well to ensure that each student undertakes appropriate activities to develop their individual skills and understanding. In a Year 10 GNVQ lesson on writing databases, for example, individual planning for each student ensured that all students made at least satisfactory progress. One gifted student was already writing relational databases: a skill usually found in A-level work. Students' attitudes are satisfactory. They enjoy practical work and relations are good.
213. The management of the subject is good. The planning of the new curriculum is good and ensures that all students will cover all ICT skills. Students now have a very good choice of examination courses to follow. The department has clear development plans that are driving up standards. For example, the recent investment in new computers means the school is now well resourced, although there are not enough peripheral devices, such as colour printers and scanners. This limits the extent to which students can apply their skills in other subjects such as art. The arrangements for assessing students' standard in each aspect of the subject are weak and, as a result, their progress is not sufficiently monitored.
214. Progress since the last report has been very good: the school has a very good number of computers and has implemented a curriculum to deliver all ICT skills to all students.

### MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **satisfactory** in Year 9 and **good** in Years 10 and 11.

#### Strengths

- Students make good progress to GCSE and achieve well.
- Most students are interested and attentive, and behave well.
- The curriculum and assessment in Years 10 and 11 are good. All students have access to suitable courses which support their learning and help raise standards of literacy.
- Teaching and learning have improved significantly. Almost all teaching is satisfactory and much is good. The best teaching requires students to speak the language in authentic situations.

#### Areas for improvement

- Boys underachieve more than in other schools. The poor behaviour of a small minority affects other students' learning.
- Speaking from memory is under-developed in each year.
- Early progress in Year 9 is too slow because curriculum links with Year 8 are weak and higher-attaining students do not have enough lessons.
- Teachers do not plan well enough for students with special educational needs in Year 9.
- The monitoring of students in Years 10 and 11 is based on unreliable assessment in Year 9.

215. In Year 9, students learn French as the first foreign language. German is also taken by the top third. In Years 10 and 11, most students take a modern language at GCSE – more than in similar schools. GCSE standards are a little below average. Results in French are consistently in the average range. German results were below this in 2002 and in recent years have fluctuated with the prior attainment of the students. In relation to their overall attainment on entry to the school, students achieve well and do as well in modern languages as they do in their other subjects, but the amount by which girls achieve better than boys is much greater than nationally.
216. Current standards in Year 9 are well below average. Students begin to use past tenses, and the highest attainers have a reasonable grasp of grammar. However, most writing shows confusion between tenses and a restricted range of structure. Because work habits are good, students remember vocabulary and phrase when they hear or read these in new contexts. However, many

higher attainers are unsure when they hear familiar questions phrased in an unfamiliar way. Speaking is weak, especially from memory. Few students speak willingly or pronounce correctly and reading aloud is poor. Early progress in German by the top sets is reasonable in the time available: many students make simple inflected endings after half a term. Where well taught, students with special educational needs make good progress. They learn to pronounce clearly, recognise words and phrases and write simple sentences.

217. Achievement in French in Year 9 is satisfactory. Students make progress in understanding what they read and in writing accurate sentences and short paragraphs. Their literacy improves as a result of teachers' emphasis on accurate construction and neat presentation. However achievement is not good for three reasons. First, curriculum links with Year 8 are weak, so that progress in the early months is far too slow. Second, in some lower-band classes, teaching methods and activities are designed to control behaviour – in most cases effectively – but this limits opportunities for students to hear and practise the language. Third, higher attainers do not reach expected higher levels because they do not have enough French lessons. The net result is that listening and speaking skills are under-developed. Some students with educational needs in lower-band mixed ability classes do not achieve as they should because there is insufficient planning for their individual needs.
218. Progress accelerates in Years 10 and 11, and standards in Year 11 are just below average, in line with recent GCSE results and school predictions. In each language most higher attainers are on course for grades A\* to C. Because students are conscientious they learn vocabulary and structures and apply these correctly in coursework. The more gifted link ideas and add reasons. Upper set French students are not independent but write accurately, using, for example, past tense reflexive verbs to express injury. Other higher attainers, from memory, can write what they would like to do in the future. Students learn rehearsed answers to familiar questions and are willing to speak when prompted but, in relation to other skills, speaking remains weak. Where students speak with any accuracy and confidence, it is usually based on what they have written down, but often, as a consequence, pronunciation is poor. Standards in German are higher than before because in this year group the language was only available to upper-band students. Most are accurately targeted for higher grades. Boys are more willing to pronounce properly in German than in French.
219. Achievement is good because the curriculum, setting arrangements and examination requirements provide well for all students. Setting is especially beneficial for the higher attainers, such as the dual linguists in Year 10. Spanish – now being phased out – has enriched the curriculum of a small, motivated class who have made remarkably good progress. Lower-band students, including those with special educational needs, are supported very well by controlled coursework, which ensures a good completion rate, and by appropriate examination courses. Most students, however, still do not speak French well enough. Despite their conscientiousness, they have not heard enough spoken French, or been challenged enough to work from memory. Self-belief is still low in Year 11, even in top sets.
220. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Almost all lessons seen were at least satisfactory, and some were good. The lessons observed during the inspection were not fully representative because of the absence of one experienced teacher whose standards, to judge from students' oral and written work, are high. For example, in the top German class, participles and phrases of time, manner and place are placed correctly in paragraphs describing travel in the past tense. The same students speak confidently with each other, saying what facilities there are in the town, and trying to make the correct agreements. Where lessons are good or very good they are taught predominantly through the spoken language, and have high expectations of students' own use of the language. Good planning ensures that time is maximised. Writing skills are taught well. The emphasis on consolidating grammar and accurately reproducing key phrases leads to higher standards. As a result, most students are interested, work purposefully and learn well.
221. Where aspects of teaching are unsatisfactory, there are not enough tasks to encourage students to improvise and practise the language amongst themselves. Sometimes reading and writing are introduced before speech patterns have been drilled adequately. In the few classes where teachers

need to work hard to control behaviour, teachers do not have the confidence to allow students to practise speaking between themselves. Teachers are very proficient linguists but do not insist that students, even in the top sets, communicate only in the foreign language, and the higher attainers are not challenged enough to memorise at home and work from memory in class. Marking is inconsistent and some students are not given detailed feedback on how to improve.

222. Under good management the department has made good progress since the last inspection. The sharing of practice and self-evaluation are strengths. Learning through ICT has started to motivate boys better. Residential visits to Germany make an important contribution to students' interest and oral standards. Teaching has improved through better monitoring, though this still needs to be more rigorous. The focus should now be on eliminating weaknesses in behaviour management, and on increasing the use of the spoken language. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 have been too high and more attention should be paid to national data for Year 9 so that monitoring of students in Years 10 and 11 is based on reliable assessment. Formal links with France need to be re-established.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11.
- Students make very good progress in Years 10 and 11.
- There is very good provision for instrumental lessons.

### Areas for improvement

- Very occasionally there is poor behaviour from a few students in Year 9.

223. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average. Students enter the school with variable musical skills, but they achieve well during Year 9 and become more confident as performers. The more musically able students in Year 9 make good progress. Students in Year 9 show good rhythmic skills. They listen to short extracts of music in different styles. They accurately identify the number of beats in a bar and are secure when clapping a steady pulse. Many students quickly locate notes on the keyboard and know about basic chord structures. They play well-known tunes from notation and show some fluency in performance. There are a few students however, who show less secure skills. They are unable to play a short group of notes accurately and find difficulty in reading from simple notation. Students with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language make satisfactory progress. Students who receive instrumental lessons achieve well.

224. There is a good take-up rate for the subject at GCSE level. By the end of Year 11 standards are above average, and well above average in composing. Students achieve very well. Ten students took GCSE in 2001 and all gained A\* or A grades. In 2002, eighteen students took the examination and of these fourteen gained A\*-C grades. Students in Year 11 show a good, general musical knowledge. They understand and use musical vocabulary when describing their ideas. They identify different musical styles and instrumental sounds. They are confident performers and play well in ensembles. They make very good progress in using music technology for composing. They show an ability to write for a range of instruments and understand how to improve the overall effect of their compositions.

225. Students in Year 9 generally have good attitudes toward the subject and settle down to work. However, very occasionally a few students do not respond quickly to instructions and find difficulty in concentrating. In Years 10 and 11 students' attitudes are very good. They work independently on tasks and show a committed approach in all aspects of the course.

226. Teaching and learning are good in Year 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Lessons are planned well and give students a range of practical experiences. Teachers use their own musical skills

successfully to aid students' understanding. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, students listened to a short extract of music by Mozart. The teacher asked detailed questions about the way that Mozart had written for voices and instruments. As a result of the teacher's own musical input, the students increased their understanding of the composer's style. Year 9 students use ICT programs to increase their general musical knowledge. In Years 10 and 11, there are good opportunities for students to use music technology to devise and refine their compositions. Satisfactory provision is made for promoting students' literacy skills. Key musical vocabulary is displayed on classroom walls and careful marking of students' work ensures that words are correctly spelt.

227. No extra-curricular activities were seen during the inspection due to timetable arrangements. However, there are regular rehearsals of various instrumental and vocal groups and students take part in school concerts. A very good range of instrumental lessons is provided by peripatetic staff. Over 80 students receive lessons and the school helps towards the cost. Many students have been successful in external music examinations. Twenty-one students are members of the county instrumental and vocal groups.
228. Music provides good support for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Their involvement in creative and expressive work enhances their spiritual development. Multi-cultural awareness is developed well through the study of music from around the world.
229. There is good leadership and management from the part-time head of department and another part-time teacher makes a valuable contribution to the subject. Curriculum plans cover the National Curriculum requirements. Assessment procedures are satisfactory and students are frequently involved in evaluating their own progress. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 have been too high, but the department is reviewing the procedures to improve their accuracy. The accommodation is satisfactory. There is one large teaching room and a separate computer room. However, the other teaching room and practice rooms are small and cannot be used for ensemble rehearsals. The resources are satisfactory and include keyboards and computers.
230. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The last report found students' progress to be unsatisfactory, with weaknesses in composition. The time allocated in Year 9 was too short and there were no adequate curriculum plans. Since then the standard of students' work in all year groups has improved. There has been a good improvement in teaching and in the quality of composition. The allocation of time and quality of curriculum planning are both now satisfactory.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Good planning and teaching of the GCSE course results in good achievement for most students.
- Very good management of students creates an effective learning environment.
- Very good assessment systems are used to track students' progress accurately and set targets.

### Areas for improvement

- Students need more practice in using technical vocabulary.
- Lower-attaining students need a greater range of tasks to challenge and stimulate them.
- There is not enough formal monitoring of teaching.

231. Standards at the end of Year 9 are average. Students achieve well in relation to their attainment on entry, which is below average. They know how to warm up effectively before exercise and understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle. The girls know how to use fitness machines safely but only have a basic knowledge of what is happening to their body during exercise. A minority of boys have good skills in basketball and understand offensive and defensive strategies. A few girls play football to an above average standard in the inter-form competition. Students are

generally not confident to ask or answer questions using technical vocabulary. They have a satisfactory level of fitness.

232. In Years 10 and 11, all students take a core course in physical education and some also choose to follow a GCSE. GCSE results were below average in 2001, but improved considerably in 2002. Girls gained better grades than boys, though the boys did better than in many of their other subjects.
233. Standards in the core course by Year 11 are average. Students' skills become more refined in a number of activities. In football they are able to outwit their opponent with change of pace and the more able have good control of the ball in close quarters of an opponent. Standards in badminton are mixed. A minority have a good range of shots and are able to manoeuvre their opponents around the court, sometimes using disguise in their serve. Too many, however, have a poor technique, often holding the racket incorrectly, and are slow to anticipate the shuttle. Students with special educational needs and those of less physical ability achieve well when in a competitive situation. For example, in basketball they become more dynamic and transfer newly learnt skills more effectively in the game rather than in practices. Students from ethnic minorities achieve well, particularly African and Caribbean students, who have good ball skills. Overall students achieve satisfactorily.
234. Current students on the GCSE course reach above average standards. The vast majority of students achieve well relative to their ability, especially in the theoretical aspects. The higher-attaining students have a good grasp of all modules and write fluently, using good technical vocabulary both in their notes and under test conditions. They are particularly good in their use of number in the recording of personal performance. Lower-attaining students have a poorer recall of facts in the long and short term and find it difficult to link theoretical facts to practical activities. They retain knowledge best when there is a good focus on key words and facts, but struggle when occasionally teaching is too difficult for their needs. Their achievement is satisfactory. In practical lessons the students reach high standards in activities such as trampolining. Students of all levels of ability perform their routines with precision and good control. They have limited skills in evaluating each others' performance using technical vocabulary.
235. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning is good, with some excellent features. The best teaching is in Year 9 and in most examination classes. In these lessons the teachers challenge all levels of ability with tasks that allow students to achieve at their own level. Skills are built up systematically to achieve the final activity. There are high expectations of quality of work. For example, in GCSE theory lessons, homework or tests are repeated until students reach their expected target grade. This has been particularly successful in raising the boys' standard of work. Success is always celebrated. There is an excellent code of conduct that is consistently applied in all lessons. This results in an atmosphere that is caring, safe and conducive to learning. The students always respond with enthusiasm. This is especially so in the varied extra-curricular programme, where students enjoy team and individual success at county and national levels in activities such as basketball, football, trampolining and athletics. The GCSE course is exceptionally well planned with resources effectively designed to aid teaching, learning and revision. Homework links well with class work. ICT skills are satisfactory but not yet as well developed as other aspects. In a minority of practical lessons, the routines are not clearly explained and are sometimes too complicated for lower-attaining students. This slows their progress. Tasks are not always designed to increase students' evaluative or literacy skills. There is no formal monitoring of teaching at present to address these weaknesses, though ongoing day-to-day discussions ensures good teamwork and the sharing of good ideas.
236. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. The quality of teaching has improved and standards are rising. The GCSE course has been introduced. Planning documents have been updated and ensure that students' skills are built up systematically. Boys now have a gymnastic activity in Year 9 and dance is offered as an additional course, although students who take two foreign languages are not able to participate. Dance lessons are fortnightly, and as a result students often find it difficult to remember their work from one lesson to the next.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Relationships between teachers and students promote a secure learning environment.
- Teachers treat the opinions and beliefs of their students with respect.
- Attractive subject rooms provide stimulating areas for work.
- Topics are designed to be relevant to the students.

### Areas for improvement

- Departmental management does not provide enough support for teaching.
- Students' experience of religious education is not the same in all classes.
- Students and teachers do not have enough information about students' progress.
- Not enough use is made of people and places of faith.

237. Until 2001 a small group of students entered for the full GCSE course in religious studies. More girls than boys followed the course but the number of entrants and their results fluctuated each year. Since then all students have followed a GCSE short course, and will sit the exam for the first time in 2003.

238. Standards in Year 9 are below average. Students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. Students know that there are different creation stories and can make simple comparisons between them. They identify similarities between Islamic and Christian creation accounts, for example, and know some basic features of both religions. Most students see the link between an aboriginal 'Dream Time' creation story and the people's belief in the unity of the natural world. Higher-attaining students have a basic understanding of the implications that Darwin's theory of evolution has for the Genesis account of creation, though they have not considered this in depth. Lower-attaining students record the different creation theories, but do not question them. Students' written work is limited, with little depth of analysis, but their oral responses are sometimes perceptive when teachers encourage them to develop their answers. Unfinished or missing work reduces their understanding. Students with English as an additional language make slower progress in written work as they do not get enough support for their reading and understanding.

239. Standards in Year 11 are just below average. Achievement is satisfactory overall. Students consider beliefs about life after death, but do not have a full understanding of the Christian belief of the resurrection and immortality. They investigate moral issues such as euthanasia and abortion, and higher-attaining students link this with the religious principle of the sanctity of life. Higher-attaining students have a sound grasp of the Christian attitude to medical advances such as genetic engineering. They can write at length to express their own opinions and a variety of other views. Some other students are reluctant to develop their written answers. In well-organised discussions, students understand the link between religious views of creation and mankind's responsibility for the environment. However, they do not use religious texts sufficiently to identify the religious principles behind moral issues. Most students work steadily and complete tasks set. A minority of students in Year 10 have poor self-discipline and teachers have to work hard to motivate them. Progress in these groups is affected by the behaviour of these students who demand more than their share of the teachers' attention.

240. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Teachers usually identify the key questions at the start of the lesson and revisit them at the end to enable students to see what they have learned. Relationships are very good and lead to a supportive environment for students to consider their beliefs and values. They enjoy working in groups and higher-attaining students are willing to exchange ideas and listen to others. However, not all students contribute to group work and at times teachers fail to encourage their involvement. In the best lessons teachers have high expectations of behaviour and this enables students to be actively involved. Lessons are less

successful when teachers deliver information and students do little more than re-arrange it. These lessons lack activities that involve students and as a result some lose interest. Teachers support literacy well through encouraging students to develop their vocabulary and providing good support for writing. Marking does not always give similar good support and the standard of written work accepted is too low. No use is made of visitors of different faiths or visits to places of worship to enhance students' understanding of the lives of believers and the richness of cultures around them.

241. Classes are arranged broadly by ability. Teachers plan appropriately for each class but do not plan sufficiently for the range of ability within each class. This is partly because students' assessments have not been well recorded or communicated to teachers. An improved system of assessment is currently being introduced into Year 9. Assessment on the GCSE courses is sometimes done well but is not co-ordinated across the department.
242. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Teachers work well together on an informal basis, but there is too little support for teaching. Teachers develop their own separate plans on the topics of their choice, and therefore students in each class have a different experience of religious education. This lack of co-ordination also leads to a lack of resources and the lack of visits and visitors. Insufficient attention is given to monitoring teaching and developing the subject.
243. The department shows some recent improvements and improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory overall. New staff have been appointed and the subject is now well staffed. The introduction of the GCSE short course has raised expectations for teachers and students and is a focus for development. The topics in this course are relevant and stimulating. The development plan identifies appropriate priorities, including the development of ICT, which is at present underused. The rooms are attractive and display is used to celebrate success and to create a welcoming environment.

## CITIZENSHIP

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

### Strengths

- Lesson plans include a variety of active learning methods.
- The school council enables students to take some responsibility for the running of the school.
- There is a clear system of assessment that will allow students to recognise and take responsibility for their progress.

### Areas for improvement

- The quality of experience for students is variable, as there has not been enough training for form tutors in how to teach citizenship.
- Opportunities to learn about citizenship in other subjects are missed.
- There is insufficient encouragement for students to become involved in the wider community.

244. Citizenship was introduced at the beginning of this school year. It is largely delivered as part of the school's personal, health and social education (PHASE) programme, though some other subjects also make a contribution. Students also learn about citizenship through activities outside lessons. The course is well planned but it is taught by all form tutors, who have had little training, and the quality of teaching is variable.
245. Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are below average. Achievement varies according to the quality of teaching, and the attitudes of students. It is good in some classes, but is unsatisfactory overall. Well-motivated students are keen to learn about society and are open and confident in discussion. They work well together and are prepared to consider the views of others. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, students sensibly discussed crimes and the social issues relating to them. Many students, however, find the discipline of discussion difficult and some are not prepared to listen to each other. Students are not used to orderly debate, which is one of the aims of this new course. In a lesson on the dangers of alcohol in Year 9, students responded with

interest to a quiz, but were not able to discuss their answers sensibly enough to see where they had misunderstandings.

246. Teaching is broadly satisfactory. Lessons are well planned by the citizenship co-ordinator and, in the best lessons, these are adapted by the tutor to suit the temperament of the group. In the most successful lessons, teachers manage students well and involve them actively in the lesson while maintaining a good working environment. Students gain much from these lessons. In other lessons, where the teacher does not sufficiently consider the needs of individual students or where discipline is not maintained, lessons lose pace and students lose interest. Students' attitudes are influenced by their assumption that PHASE has less value than their other subjects. Even where teachers challenge this preconception, many students fail to exert themselves intellectually.
247. Leadership is good. The course is at a very early stage and there is a clear commitment to review and improve the delivery. Teachers are well supported with lesson plans but need additional training to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistently high. The inclusion of citizenship in the PHASE course has ensured its complete delivery, but there has been no audit, so far, that could identify areas of study that are already part of the work of other departments. The development of links between citizenship and other subjects would build teachers' confidence and remove duplication.
248. Some of the best opportunities for learning about citizenship take place outside normal lessons. There are citizenship half-days, in which students benefit from an extended focus on particular aspects, and which are delivered by specialist teams. Year 9 students have an adventure challenge day, where they learn to work as a team and to rely on one another. The year and school councils provide good opportunities for students to become involved in elections and to learn about democracy. It also enables them to take some responsibility for the development of the school. A school councillor in Year 12 has become a representative to the area youth parliament and to the European youth parliament. Other opportunities for students to become active citizens are limited. They take some responsibility for the library and they raise funds for charity. Those following the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme undertake some form of service, but there is no organised community service for the majority of students.
249. A system of assessment is being introduced that will enable students to reflect on their progress and allow teachers to evaluate the course. This is well organised but is at an early stage. All classes undertake their PHASE lessons at the same time, and whilst this enables form tutors to work with their forms, it means that monitoring classroom work is difficult.

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

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

**GCE AS level courses**

| Subject     | Number entered | % gaining grades A-E |         | % gaining grades A-B |         | Average point score |         |
|-------------|----------------|----------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
|             |                | School               | England | School               | England | School              | England |
| Mathematics | 3              | 0                    | 15      | 100                  | 62      | 1.7                 | 1.5     |
| Biology     | 1              | 0                    | 2       | 100                  | 52      | 3.0                 | 0.8     |

**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            | 21             | 52                   | 43      | 100                  | 87      | 7.1                 | 5.8     |
| Chemistry              | 4              | 0                    | 43      | 100                  | 90      | 5.0                 | 5.9     |
| Biology                | 15             | 27                   | 34      | 73                   | 88      | 4.4                 | 5.3     |
| Physics                | 4              | 50                   | 40      | 100                  | 88      | 6.5                 | 5.7     |
| Design and technology  | 11             | 9                    | 30      | 91                   | 91      | 3.6                 | 5.4     |
| Business Studies       | 28             | 39                   | 32      | 93                   | 92      | 5.5                 | 5.5     |
| Economics              | 8              | 0                    | 36      | 88                   | 89      | 4.0                 | 5.5     |
| Computer studies       | 9              | 11                   | 23      | 78                   | 86      | 2.4                 | 4.6     |
| Physical education     | 3              | 0                    | 25      | 100                  | 92      | 4.0                 | 5.1     |
| Health and social care | 3              | n/a                  | n/a     | n/a                  | n/a     | 10.0                | 10.8    |
| Art and design         | 21             | 62                   | 46      | 100                  | 96      | 7.7                 | 6.6     |
| Music                  | 4              | 0                    | 35      | 100                  | 93      | 4.0                 | 5.7     |
| Drama                  | 14             | 43                   | 38      | 100                  | 99      | 7.3                 | 6.6     |
| Geography              | 9              | 11                   | 38      | 89                   | 92      | 4.0                 | 5.7     |
| History                | 13             | 62                   | 35      | 92                   | 88      | 7.4                 | 5.5     |
| Sociology              | 23             | 48                   | 35      | 91                   | 86      | 6.0                 | 5.3     |
| Psychology             | 31             | 29                   | 34      | 74                   | 87      | 4.5                 | 5.3     |
| English language       | 42             | 24                   | 30      | 100                  | 91      | 6.0                 | 5.3     |
| English literature     | 12             | 58                   | 37      | 100                  | 95      | 6.7                 | 5.9     |
| Communication studies  | 1              | 100                  | 31      | 100                  | 93      | 10.0                | 5.5     |
| French                 | 2              | 100                  | 38      | 100                  | 89      | 10.0                | 5.6     |
| German                 | 3              | 33                   | 40      | 100                  | 91      | 5.3                 | 5.8     |

|         |   |    |    |     |    |     |     |
|---------|---|----|----|-----|----|-----|-----|
| Spanish | 2 | 50 | 39 | 100 | 89 | 6.0 | 5.7 |
|---------|---|----|----|-----|----|-----|-----|

#### *Intermediate vocational qualifications*

| Qualification       | No in final year | % gaining qualification |         | % gaining merit |         | % gaining distinction |         |
|---------------------|------------------|-------------------------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------------|---------|
|                     |                  | School                  | England | School          | England | School                | England |
| Business            | 6                | 100                     | 76      |                 |         |                       |         |
| Leisure and tourism | 6                | 100                     | 76      |                 |         |                       |         |

### SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

#### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

250. The focus was on mathematics and chemistry, but biology and physics were also sampled. In biology, examination results are average, though AS results dropped in 2002. Students did as well as expected considering their GCSE results. One lesson was observed. Standards were above average and higher than in recent examination results. The lesson was very good because the teacher planned a wide range of interesting activities to engage and maintain students' interest. Learning was very good; students quickly acquired new knowledge about meiosis because they built on a firm foundation of earlier learning.

251. In physics, A-level results were above average in 2001, but dropped sharply in 2002. This followed disruption to students' work as a result of long-term staff absence. Students did less well than expected in relation to their GCSE results. One lesson was observed, which was good. Current students have been less affected by staff absence and standards were average. The teacher reviewed students' existing knowledge of specific heat capacity, helping them quickly to assimilate more advanced work.

#### Mathematics

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

##### Strengths

- A-level results are consistently well above average and students achieve well.
- Teaching is good and consequently students are highly motivated and work hard.
- Good assessment and monitoring of students' progress means that students are aware of their targets and what they need to do to achieve them.
- Leadership and management are good.

##### Areas for improvement

- There is a shortage of textbooks in Year 12 and a lack of resources to support background research.
- The accommodation is not ideal, as lessons are taught away from the mathematics suite.

252. A-level results in 2001 were well above average. All students passed and more than half achieved grades A and B. Female students performed better than male students in achieving the higher grades. Results in 2002 were similar. Students entered for A-level further mathematics in 2002 achieved the highest grades.

253. For current students standards are well above average, with some examples of outstanding work. Students achieve well in relation to their GCSE results. Students' files are very well organised and include their targets and assessment records. Students in Year 12 make effective use of past GCSE work to move on into new areas. For example, when learning calculus, students are confident in applying their knowledge of algebra to this new area of study. In Year 13, students

recall knowledge well and apply it confidently in class and in their written work. In one lesson, for example, students working independently on an algebraic exercise expanding binomial expressions were able to apply what they had learned to the related topic of partial fractions.

254. Students learn well on the AS and A-level courses because the teaching is good. In the further mathematics course, teaching is excellent. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and as a result, students are highly motivated, work hard and are prepared to think for themselves. All work is carefully planned and lessons have a clear purpose. Teachers structure lessons well, keep up a brisk pace and set challenges that are intellectually demanding and deepen understanding. A variety of teaching methods are used. In some lessons, students contribute as much as the teacher, through discussion and demonstrating their work at the whiteboard. Students make considerable efforts to understand the work they are doing, although this is hampered by a shortage of textbooks in Year 12 and a lack of background material for research. Students' work is regularly marked in relation to examination requirements and good quality comments are given on how to improve their work. Teaching is satisfactory in the key skills course on the application of number.
255. Leadership and management are good. Assessment procedures are well established and results are used regularly to monitor students' progress towards their predicted grades. Accurate and critical analysis of the department's examination performance has resulted in realistic and achievable targets for continued improvement. Planning is effective although some lessons are taught in classrooms outside the department. Despite staff turnover, effective action has been taken to maintain high standards. There is a shared commitment to build on what has already been achieved. Student numbers have increased significantly, enabling additional courses to be introduced. Teaching is monitored and this is effective in enhancing teachers' skills. Teachers share good practice and give up much of their non-contact time to support the students.

## Chemistry

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

### Strengths

- Students achieve well in Year 13 because teachers use good subject knowledge to engage their interest.
- Students build well on their existing knowledge because previous learning is reviewed before moving on.
- Marking of students' written work shows them how to improve.

### Areas for improvement

- Students' wide range of prior attainment in Year 12 is not well enough addressed.
- Assessment is not used effectively to set short-term targets.
- Students have too few opportunities to develop their research skills.

256. A-level results in 2001 were below average. In 2002, they remained similar and, in relation to their GCSE results two years earlier, students did less well than expected, largely because long-term staff absence adversely affected their performance.
257. For current students, standards in Year 13 are average. This is higher than in recent examination results because these students have been less affected by staff changes. Students achieve well because teachers ensure that they have understood previous work before building on it. In one lesson, the teacher reviewed students' existing knowledge of bonding in nitrogen compounds and most could then apply their knowledge in explaining the behaviour of nitrogen in more complex organic molecules.
258. AS-level results for Year 12 students were below average in 2001, and dropped further in 2002. In relation to their earlier GCSE results, they did less well than expected. Students enter the sixth form with wide-ranging GCSE results in science. Standards in the current Year 12 are below

average, but their achievement is satisfactory in relation to their GCSE results. About a quarter should gain very high grades at AS level, but others are finding the work difficult and are less well motivated; they may struggle to gain a pass grade. In one lesson, students in the latter group were unable to use recent learning to explain trends in ionisation energy across a period of the Periodic Table.

259. Teaching is good overall, but varies between satisfactory and very good. The principle features of good teaching are clear explanations, work well matched to students' existing knowledge so that new learning is built on a firm foundation, and strong emphasis on developing investigation skills to encourage them to think for themselves. In a Year 13 lesson about pH, the teacher captured students' interest by referring to other logarithmic scales of measurement before using well-graded questions to build their confidence. By the end of the lesson, all could calculate pH unaided and the more able could work out the proportions of solutions needed to create a buffer solution of given pH. However, in other lessons teaching does not adequately address the wide range of students' prior attainment. This was the case in Year 12 when students looked for trends in properties of elements in the halogen group. Some of the work provided insufficient challenge for higher-attaining students and the teacher lacked confidence in setting them more demanding work. Students' written work is thoroughly marked and teachers are punctilious in writing comments that show them how to improve.
260. Students learn well, particularly in Year 13, where they are attentive and keen to respond; they often explain their learning to each other. However, some written work consists of too many notes with too few checks on understanding. Development of practical skills is strongly emphasised, but there are few opportunities for students to develop research skills through extended projects or the use of ICT. Students enjoy chemistry, particularly when discussion allows interaction with their teachers and other students.
261. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Until recently teachers have not measured students' examination performance against their performance in GCSE examinations before they entered the sixth form. Although students now have clear target grades for their AS and A levels, assessment is not used effectively enough to set short-term learning targets. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

262. The school offers an A-level course in graphic products. This was sampled. It is a new A-level subject and no students have yet taken examinations. One lesson was observed, which was good. Students were set an effective activity to practise their drawing skills. Subsequently the seven students worked on their individual design briefs and made a good evaluation of a range of design ideas.

## **BUSINESS**

263. A-level courses are provided in business and economics. In addition, students are offered an intermediate GNVQ in business. These courses were inspected.

### **Business**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Teachers have very secure subject knowledge and lessons are well planned and structured.
- The subject is very well led and managed.
- Standards are above average and students achieve well in relation to predicted grades.
- Teaching is good, with high expectations of what students can achieve.
- Students are well motivated and develop independent learning skills.

#### Areas for improvement

- The accommodation does not provide a good business environment.
- There are not enough links with local businesses to provide students a wider range of resources.
- Students' knowledge of theory is stronger than their ability to analyse and evaluate real business situations.

264. A-level standards are above average for A to E grades and average for A to B grades. Students make good progress in relation to their GCSE results. Results have shown an upward trend over the last four years. AS-level results in 2002 were above average and most students achieved higher grades than in their other subjects. Results for the last two years in the intermediate GNVQ were average, with half the students gaining merits.
265. For current A-level students, standards are above average. Students' achievement is very good in Year 12 and good in Year 13. In Year 12, they make very good progress in understanding the central ideas of the subject, including business organisation and finance. Year 13 students can use mathematical techniques to analyse and compare business performance. Students steadily accumulate knowledge and build up a good body of work. They are less strong in applying their understanding of theory to analyse and evaluate situations in the real business world. There is no significant variation in the performance of students on the basis of gender or ethnic background.
266. In the intermediate GNVQ course, students achieve well. They have good computer skills, which they use for research on the Internet and to present their work. In one lesson, for example, they researched current legislation on equal opportunities in the work place. They understand the importance of good customer relations.
267. Teaching on both courses is good and much is very good. Teachers' very secure subject knowledge underpins discussions and lends clarity to explanations. Lessons are well planned and use a good range of teaching methods. Teachers have high expectations: they challenge pupils orally and in written tasks and encourage them to learn independently. In one lesson, for example, students learned to interpret balance sheets and examined how they are used to analyse a firm's financial position. Good use is made of case studies to enable students to apply theory to the real business world. Teachers mark students work regularly but in some cases do not give enough guidance on how students might improve their performance. Lessons are well paced to ensure that all students understand the work. Students' enthusiasm and their ability to think independently contribute to their good learning. In the intermediate GNVQ course, students are given appropriately challenging tasks and receive helpful tutorial support to iron out problems and ensure they meet deadlines.
268. The department is very well led. Teachers work together and review their practice to seek improvements. As a result, standards have improved. Appropriate priorities for improvement have been identified and planning documents are very well written. Assessment procedures and the monitoring of classroom work are very good. The subject makes a valuable contribution to personal development and citizenship. This is particularly true of the Young Enterprise group. Contact with local businesses to enhance the curriculum and provide a wider range of resources is an area for development, which has been recognised by the head of department. Business studies is taught in a mobile classroom, which has been well adapted by the staff, but many lessons are taught in various rooms around the school. This is not ideal for this subject because it means that students do not experience a model business environment.

#### Economics

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

#### Strengths

- AS and A-level results were above average in 2002.
- The subject is very well led and managed.
- Teaching is good.
- Students are enthusiastic and participate fully in lessons.
- Teachers have high expectations and encourage independent learning.

#### Areas for improvement

- Weaknesses in essay-writing skills limit students' progress in Year 13.

269. There was a significant upward movement in the 2002 results at both AS and A level. Over the previous four years standards were well below average for higher A and B grades, but close to the average for A to E grades. In 2002, the overall pass rate at both A level and AS level was above average, with all students achieving a grade, and the proportion of higher grades matched the national average.

270. The standard of current work compares well with examination results in 2002, continuing the upward trend. In relation to students' GCSE results, they make very good progress in Year 12 and good progress in Year 13. Progress is less good in Year 13 because of some weaknesses in essay writing and analysing and evaluating economic models. Students have a sound understanding of the effect of interest rate changes on the economy and they can assess the impact of environmental taxes on transport policy. They also have a good grasp of economic language and definitions. They are competent in statistical calculations and use economic models. There are no significant variations in achievement of male or female students or of students from different ethnic backgrounds.

271. Teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very secure subject knowledge that they use to provide students with clear guidance. They structure lessons well and explain concepts clearly and methodically. They use their expertise to underpin discussions and effectively challenge students to develop independent learning skills. In one lesson, for example, students learned to apply the model of supply and demand to labour markets. Good use is made of up-to-date data and current economic situations, such as the role of central banks. Students are vigorously challenged by the use of focused questioning and lessons are conducted at a good pace. Students are enthusiastic and keen to participate which, when combined with good teaching, enhances their learning. Marking is regular but in some cases needs to indicate more clearly how students might improve their performance. Students have access to computers in the subject base and use these well.

272. Leadership and management of economics are very good. The same group of teachers teach both business studies and economics. The assessment of students' work and the monitoring of teaching are very good and contribute to the recent rise in standards. The joint subject development plan has identified a need to develop higher-order analytical and essay writing skills, as a means to continue this upward trend.

### **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

273. The school offers intermediate GNVQ, AS and A2 and key skills courses in ICT. These courses were inspected.

#### **Information and communication technology**

Overall, the quality of provision in ICT is **satisfactory and improving**.

#### Strengths

- Teachers use their very good subject knowledge to explain clearly and plan appropriate tasks.
- Students made very good progress in the 2002 A-level examinations.
- The school's Intranet site provides very good support for learning.

#### Areas for improvement

- Students enjoy practical work but a significant minority in the GNVQ classes are poorly motivated.
- In a minority of lessons, students are not challenged enough.
- Students' attainment and progress are not monitored adequately.

274. A-level results in 2001 were below the national average and below the average for the school. In 2002 the results significantly improved and were similar to national averages for 2001. Students made very good progress in relation to their GCSE results. AS-level results were similar to those of other subjects in the school.
275. Numbers have risen this year. Around 50 students study ICT, making this one of the most popular subjects in the sixth form. It is very rare for a student not to complete the course.
276. The standard of work seen during the inspection is below average in both Year 12 and Year 13. Standards are lower than in recent examinations because ICT is now open to a wider range of ability. Attainment in AS and A2 courses is higher than in GNVQ classes but below the national average. Students achieve well.
277. Students' knowledge of theory is secure in AS and A2 classes. For example, students understand health and safety issues and the history of the development of ICT. However, their grasp of bar codes is hampered by a lack of knowledge about international commerce. Students' practical skills are below average, particularly in spreadsheets and databases. This is because they have limited previous experience of ICT. As a result, much time has to be spent learning basic database skills rather than higher order skills such as developing a front page or a technical manual. For a minority of students, progress is hampered by incomplete or missing work.
278. GNVQ students have a sound grasp of the principles of creating a good quality presentation using PowerPoint slides. They understand, for example, that slides must be clear and uncluttered. Most can add graphics and animation and one third can control the timing of their presentations.
279. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and real enthusiasm for the subject. In a GNVQ lesson, for example, the teacher clearly explained the qualities of good PowerPoint slides. This gave students the confidence to design slides for a specified audience. Lessons are well planned and students learn from a good range of appropriate tasks. In a key skills lesson, students drew on information from books, the school's Intranet and the Internet to word-process a good quality presentation. However, some lessons suffer from a lack of challenge and a significant minority of students do not complete enough work. Discussions are a feature of lessons but too often these are hampered by background chatter.
280. Students' attitudes are satisfactory. They enjoy practical work and relationships are good. However a significant minority of students, largely in GNVQ classes, are poorly motivated and some of them disrupt the work of others. Many students say they find this frustrating. Students also report that while they find oral feedback from teachers helpful, they do not get enough written comments on their work.
281. Leadership and management are good because there are clear plans to improve attainment. By introducing GNVQ the school has given many more students the opportunity to study ICT. This supports the school's inclusive policy. The school's Intranet site is a model of excellence and is beginning to have a positive impact on standards by providing students with good quality work online. Monitoring of students' progress is weak because most teachers do not have sufficient data on students' prior attainment to make accurate judgements.

282. Progress since the last report has been good. The curriculum has been broadened and standards are rising because good planning is beginning to take effect.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

283. Physical education was the focus but the intermediate GNVQ course in leisure and tourism was also sampled. In leisure and tourism, all students gained a pass in 2001, with two gaining merit grades. In 2002, none of the students gained a pass, though the results are under review by the examination board. One lesson was observed, which was satisfactory, though standards were below average. Students used evidence from a visit to a leisure centre to identify customers' needs. Learning was satisfactory because students were able to apply their experiences in their assignments. However, higher-attaining students were not encouraged to compare the requirements of different kinds of customers.

### **Physical education**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Good planning and teaching results in very good achievement for most students.
- Students are able to learn independently.
- Students have good attitudes towards the subject.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Some lessons use a narrow range of methods and do not stimulate students' response.
- There is no classroom to store resources and create a stimulating environment for the subject.

284. A-level results in 2001 were average. They remained similar 2002 and most students did better than in their other subjects.

285. Current standards in Year 13 are above average and students achieve very well in relation to their attainment on joining the course. They have a mature approach to independent learning. A particular strength is their ability to link the theory they learn to their own personal performance. For example, in studying the acquisition of skill, they have an exceptionally good understanding of the theory and are able to relate this to their personal exercise programme. They understand and use physiological formulae in measuring performance. They use technical vocabulary accurately and interpret principles intelligently in relation to their chosen activities. Students are confident in oral presentations. They do research using the Internet and other sources. ICT is used effectively for research and performance analysis.

286. Students in Year 12 also produce work that is above the expected level for AS. Their written work is of a high standard showing good research skills and use of word processing. However, a minority of lower-attaining students cut and paste rather than create their own notes. They are not so confident orally as Year 13 students, but they respond well when lessons are stimulating. Students of both years are actively involved in sport and reach high standards in cricket, athletics, swimming and martial arts.

287. Teaching is good with some excellent features. The most effective teaching includes a good range of tasks that involve students actively. In these lessons, teachers have very high expectations and students do independent research. Links are made with other parts of the course to ensure that students develop a greater understanding of the big picture. All teachers have a good knowledge of their subject and, as a result, most lessons stimulate students' interest. In a lesson on motivation, for example, the teacher used video to illustrate different types of motivation in a national rugby team. This was made relevant to students' experience through links to practical performance and current affairs and resulted in students learning rapidly about factors that affect performance levels.

In a minority of lessons, teaching relies too much on taking notes and does not demand that students think for themselves or respond actively.

288. The curriculum is popular in this school and also with students from other schools. They respond well to all aspects of examination work. There is a programme of sport for all sixth form students, though this did not take place during the inspection. Many students use the fitness suite in their own time and understand the place of exercise in a healthy lifestyle. Through the programme of community service they help in younger students' lessons and organise extra-curricular clubs. The Community Sports Leaders Award course is well taught and provides an opportunity to gain a vocational qualification. There is mutual respect between teachers and students, which creates a supportive learning environment. The teachers extend a high level of independence to the students and this mostly results in a mature and diligent approach to work. Students are appreciative of teachers' support and feel that their work improves through constructive criticism. They are astute in their observations of teachers' differing expectations and teaching styles. Leadership and management are good, though there is a need to use the monitoring of teaching to ensure that all lessons use stimulating teaching methods. The quality of teaching is somewhat restricted because there is no base classroom to store resources and create a stimulating environment for the subject.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

289. No courses are offered in health and social care.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

290. The focus was on art and design but drama and music were also sampled. In drama, examination results were above average in 2001 and students did better than in their other subjects. One lesson was observed, which was very good. Students deepened their understanding of theatrical conventions from the teacher's very good subject knowledge. Through good feedback on their performance, students gained insight into their own strengths and areas for development.
291. A-level music is taught jointly with another local school. There were no candidates in 2002, but in 2001, four students took the examination and results were below average. One lesson was observed, which was very good. Students worked independently on their compositions, using software to refine their work. Learning was very good because of the teacher's expertise and because students were well informed of the progress that they were making.

### Art and design

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

#### Strengths

- Good teaching and learning enables students of all abilities to achieve well.
- There is a good range of media available, from which students can develop individual strengths.
- Students have positive attitudes and develop good relationships with staff.
- Talented students attain very high standards, particularly in textiles.

#### Areas for improvement

- Students' critical analysis and theoretical work is below the standard of their practical work.
- There is a lack of ICT equipment such as scanners, printers and digital cameras to use in creative work.

292. A-level results have in recent years been well above average. In 2002, they fell somewhat. The reason for this was that the syllabus included a greater emphasis on critical and contextual studies. Most students who take art are well prepared by their GCSE studies with a good range of practical skills to apply to the A-level course. They are weaker those areas of the course that require them to use analytical thinking and do extended written work. In response to this, the

department has changed the A-level course, with Year 12 following a different syllabus from Year 13.

293. For current students, standards are above average in all the art courses except photography, where they are below average. Students achieve well. Often they produce practical work of a very high standard, but their written studies in evaluating art objects and understanding the context in which they were made do not match this standard. Higher-attaining students' work, in lively, visually stimulating sketchbooks and journals, does show the high level of critical evaluation that is expected and their achievement is very good.
294. In Year 12, the disparity between practical and theoretical work is not so marked and students are likely to do better in their examinations. In a large-scale drawing project, Year 12 students develop the ability to retain both expressiveness and proportion. Similarly, they learn how to develop their own interpretations of ideas in three-dimensional work, though their written analysis of this is not so good. Other Year 12 students reach good standards and are creative in making prints based on natural forms.
295. Teaching is good. Students enjoy good relationships with teachers. Most students achieve well because teachers' individual attention leads them to choose media and techniques where they can be successful. This is achieved through detailed assessment and oral feedback that clarifies where their strengths lie and what to do to improve. Teachers have a good understanding of students' difficulties with the more abstract aspects of art and help them to overcome these. In a Year 13 lesson, for example, on artistic problem solving, the teacher helped students to think analytically through experimenting widely in different media to identify and then solve the problem. Even with such very good teaching, however, the problem-solving unit is proving very difficult for most students. Good textiles teaching has resulted in some very high standards in Year 13 and also enables lower-attaining students to achieve well.
296. Leadership and management are good. Students speak very highly of the support they receive. They value the contribution the subject makes to their personal development, such as the opportunity to visit galleries in Amsterdam. They are rightly critical of the department's lack of ICT resources such as scanners, printers and digital cameras. Without these resources, they are unable to develop their understanding of the creative application of computers in art. This significantly compromises their readiness for employment or higher education.

## HUMANITIES

297. History, law, sociology and psychology were the focus, but geography was also sampled. In geography, examination results were well below average in 2001 and students did less well than in their other subjects. One lesson was observed, which was good. The teacher promoted a lively debate on economic sustainability and the conflict between environmental and economic interests. This was made relevant to students' own experience and all were fully involved.

### History

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

#### Strengths

- Standards are above average in both Years 12 and 13.
- Teaching is very good: it is enthusiastic, well planned and reflects strength of subject knowledge and high expectations of students.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards the subject: history is a very popular option choice in the sixth form.

#### Areas for improvement

- The department should continue to develop methods to ensure that all students participate actively in lessons.
- Although resources are adequate, the department needs to purchase more single copies of books in order to form the basis of a sixth form library.

298. A-level results in 2001 were well above average, with a high percentage of students gaining A and B grades. Although the percentage of students achieving the higher grades fell in 2002, this was a relatively weaker year group who achieved their predicted grades. AS-level results were also in line with predictions. For current students, standards are above average and achievement is very good. Students in Year 12 are progressing smoothly from GCSE, where their standards were below average, to AS level.

299. Students' written work is carefully organised and structured to support well-reasoned conclusions based on valid historical evidence. Students are able to articulate their own views with growing confidence. The most able students express themselves fluently; other students work hard to explain and justify their conclusions even though they find this difficult. Year 13 students, for example, spoke about their individual studies, showing a good command of the higher order skills of analysis and synthesis. Their chosen topics included the impact of the Tet offensive, the London dock strike and the Duke of Wellington. In a Year 12 lesson, students showed a good understanding of the factors that enabled Mussolini to come to power.

300. Students learn very well in sixth form history, and make very good progress in both thinking and writing. By Year 13, students are producing high quality written work. Oral contributions are knowledgeable and confident. This very good learning is a result of experienced teaching and students' own committed attitudes to study. Teachers high expectations of what students can achieve and use their own confident subject expertise to prepare students well for the demands of the subject.

301. Teaching is very good. The content of lessons is challenging and students are encouraged to develop their own interpretations of history. Teachers are enthusiastic and committed towards raising standards in the subject and maintaining its popularity as an option choice. They present information clearly and enthusiastically and work hard to ensure that students of all abilities reach their full potential. Teachers use questions very well to clarify and reinforce students' understanding. This was evident, for example, in a Year 13 lesson where students made links between the expansionist policies of Kaiser Wilhelm and Hitler. In a small number of lessons, however, a minority of students do not actively participate in discussions and are not supported to do so.

302. The subject benefits from very good leadership, effective management, very good planning and a clear sense of direction that is shared by the head of department and his experienced colleague. The department would benefit, however, from the purchase of a wider selection of books in order to form the basis of a class library. Not much use is made of ICT to support learning.

#### Law

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

#### Strengths

- Standards are above average.
- Students are enthusiastic and have a mature attitude to study.
- A distance-learning tutor provides good teaching, as well as good quality tasks and materials.
- A link teacher in the school provides students with good support.
- Students develop independent learning skills.

#### Areas for improvement

- There are few contacts with the legal community for visits and speakers.
- Students need more opportunities to develop reasoned argument through class discussions.
- The subject needs a dedicated base where students can access up-to-date resources.

303. Law was introduced as an A-level subject two years ago and the first group took their A2 examinations in 2002. They were taught by a distance-learning tutor, using videoconferencing, and supported in school by a non-specialist link teacher. All students achieved a pass grade and a high proportion achieved A or B grades. Students made good progress in relation to their predicted grades. There was no significant variation in the achievement of male or female students. Students are now taught by the link teacher during Year 12 and by the distance-learning teacher in Year 13, with additional support in school.
304. For current students, standards are above average. Students in Year 13 achieved well at AS level and are making good progress in relation to their predicted grades. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of basic legal issues. They are able to do independent research into the topics they study. They synthesise information from a variety of legal sources and recognise the implication of legal issues and doctrines. They have a good knowledge of the sources of law and of judicial precedent. In discussions, they showed an understanding of the legislative process in the British Parliament and an awareness of the implications of European legal institutions. In a Year 13 lesson by videoconference, they responded positively and accurately to the tutor's questions on criminal intent and the characteristics of a criminal act.
305. Overall the quality of teaching and learning is good. The distance-learning tutor has very secure subject knowledge and provides very clear explanations and answers to students' questions that result in clearer understanding. Year 13 students are challenged to think and develop independent learning skills. They are provided with good support by the link teacher that helps them to build on each taught lesson and prepare for the next. In Year 12, teaching and learning are at least satisfactory and often good. Students are given a broad and accurate introduction to the subject. The materials and tasks are well planned and meet examination requirements. In some lessons in Year 12, students are not always challenged to develop skills of class discussion and to deliver a reasoned oral legal argument.
306. Students show an enthusiastic attitude to their work, particularly in Year 13. They are interested in the subject and have a mature approach to independent study. In Year 12, students are attentive and hard working but much more reluctant to participate in class discussions.
307. The subject is well organised by the link teacher. There are good administrative links with the distance-learning tutor, who visits the school for a seminar twice a year. Work from Year 13 is forwarded to the tutor for assessment and returned within a week. Marking is thorough in both years and students receive guidance on how to improve the quality of their work. Targets are set and monitored throughout the course. The resources are good but there is a need for a base to display newspaper articles, journals and videos to reflect the changing nature of the law, thereby keeping students' knowledge up-to-date. Currently there is little contact with the legal community through visits or speakers coming into school.

#### Psychology

Overall, the quality of provision in psychology is **satisfactory**.

#### Strengths

- Students achieve well in Year 13 and standards are improving.
- Teaching has some significant strengths.
- Students' attitudes towards the subject and classroom relationships are very good.
- Assessment is systematic and closely linked to course learning objectives.
- Homework is set regularly as an integral part of learning.

#### Areas for improvement

- Standards are below average in Year 12.
- Some lessons do not challenge students to think for themselves and learn independently.
- Assessment results are not used enough to track progress.
- The subject is not well managed within the humanities faculty, with inadequate procedures for monitoring and improving the provision.
- There are not enough resources.

308. Psychology has grown rapidly in popularity, with 65 students taking AS level and 19 taking A2 level. A-level examination results have improved steadily since 1999, and have been average for the last two years. AS results were below average in 2001 and dropped further in 2002. The work of current students is below average at the end of Year 12 and average at the end of Year 13. Students' achievement in relation to their GCSE results is satisfactory in Year 12 and good in Year 13. Male and female students achieve equally well.
309. Students develop a sound knowledge of psychological theories and methods, and learn to compare their usefulness. In work on stress and psychosomatic illness, for example, Year 12 students related the ideas to their own experiences and to those of families and friends, making thoughtful observations about methods for controlling stress. Year 13 students know a number of research studies on aggression and frustration, with higher-attaining students making links between them, and proposing their own interpretations.
310. Students' files are mostly well organised but contain little independent work. Higher-attaining students write well-structured essays, but for others, especially in Year 12, essays are superficial and immature. Weaknesses include oversimplification and undeveloped arguments, with insufficient comparison of theoretical studies.
311. Teaching is satisfactory with some very strong features. The teacher has very good subject knowledge. Students benefit from clear explanations of different theoretical perspectives, and respond well to very good relationships in lessons. Lessons have clear objectives, with a range of activities that meet course requirements. There is an emphasis on research methodology and ethical considerations in psychological investigation. Lessons enable students to understand the nature of psychological research and to develop appropriate skills. In the best lessons there is a good pace, sustained interaction and good challenge for students to think and make decisions.
312. In too many lessons however, learning is over-directed by the teacher, with too little opportunity for students to take initiative and to learn in depth through structured discussion. Questioning is not always sufficiently challenging in extending students' own thinking. There is not enough requirement for students to study independently through guided reading and use of the Internet.
313. Learning is consistently well supported by homework assignments. Literacy and numeracy skills are strongly supported. Assessment is linked to the course requirements. Day-to-day marking is more variable in quality and sometimes lacks guidance for improvement. Insufficient use is made of assessment results to track students' progress and to set targets for improvement.
314. The psychology teacher is a well-qualified subject specialist, but is not a trained teacher and has recently begun a graduate training programme. The growth in interest in the subject and recent improvement in standards reflect his enthusiasm and growing expertise. Leadership and management are satisfactory because he is well supported on the graduate training programme, but he is significantly less well supported within the humanities faculty. Resources are inadequate, as are the procedures for monitoring performance and planning developments. These shortcomings hinder improvement in standards and provision.

#### **Sociology**

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

#### Strengths

- Attitudes towards learning are good overall.
- Teachers show enthusiasm for the subject and a commitment to improvement; despite the current staffing difficulties, the quality of teaching is satisfactory overall.

#### Areas for improvement

- There are no permanent specialist teachers. Staffing instabilities and a lack of specialist knowledge have meant that standards are no longer above average.
- Teaching and learning methods do not engage the active participation of all students.
- Resources are limited.

315. A-level results have been above average for the last four years. For current students, however, standards are average in Year 13 and below average in Year 12. This is because there are currently no permanent specialist sociology teachers to ensure that students begin their course with a sound understanding of theory. The school has worked hard to recruit a permanent specialist but so far has not been successful. Lessons are currently taught by a non-specialist teacher and by a temporary teacher who has not taught the subject at this level before. Students are concerned about the staffing situation and this too has an impact on the quality of their work. Students in Year 13 benefited from specialist teaching in the early part of their course. Their achievement is satisfactory overall, whereas achievement in Year 12 is unsatisfactory.
316. Students in Year 12 have a below-average knowledge and understanding of sociological traditions and have difficulty in applying theoretical concepts to unfamiliar situations. They show little understanding, for example, of terms such as functionalist or Marxist. Their understanding of the principles of research methodology is, however, average; this is largely because they are given better opportunities to reinforce their learning through structured discussion in that part of the course. Year 13 students research topics using the Internet and the library. They have a sound understanding of the causes of crime.
317. The teaching of sociology is satisfactory overall, although there are significant areas of weakness arising from the unsatisfactory staffing situation. Teachers are committed to their students but have no experience of teaching the subject at this level and cannot always give clear explanations of concepts and theories. In many lessons explanations are read out and then repeated if students fail to understand. In some lessons, however, teachers use relevant examples to illustrate propositions and principles. This enlivens lessons and keeps students interested. Teachers also work hard to improve the range of resources in the department: there is a sociology page on the school's Intranet, for example, and books and newspaper articles are brought into most lessons. There are some good opportunities for students to discuss and argue a viewpoint, but in too many lessons such opportunities lack structure and a significant minority of students do not participate, or continue to chat while others are talking. A significant number of lessons rely on lecturing to students and providing them with handouts. In these lessons a minority of students lack motivation and do not work to their full potential.
318. Although students are rightly concerned about the staffing situation, most show enthusiasm for the subject and are keen to express their ideas. Students in Year 12, for example, engaged in a lively discussion on a recent controversy about the adoption rights of unmarried couples. The department needs to consider, however, ways in which to engage passive students in their own learning.
319. Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory despite the hard work and undoubted commitment of individual teachers. This is because of the unsatisfactory staffing situation: there is no effective head of department. The school, however, is providing the temporary teacher, who is an adult education teacher, with a planned programme of support and this is beginning to improve the situation. Although resources have improved, there are still insufficient numbers of up-to-date books and videos.

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

320. The focus was on English and French, but German was also sampled. In German, AS and A2-level results are average. Two German lessons were observed. One was good and the other very good. In the very good lesson, the teacher's detailed planning and very high expectations ensured that students heard and spoke German for most of the lesson. Students were challenged to work at speed, improvising conversations about the arrangements for a business meeting. There was a high level of interest and commitment. In both lessons, students showed very good attitudes to study.

### English

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

#### Strengths

- Teaching is good, with teachers' specialist subject knowledge used to good effect to extend students' learning.
- Students are encouraged to develop independent study skills.
- Leadership and management are good.

#### Areas for improvement

- Assessment information is not used enough to target underachievement.

321. In 2001, A-level results were above average in English language and well above average in English literature. All candidates achieved a grade. Results remained similar in 2002. Almost all literature and language candidates passed the 2002 AS examinations.

322. The standard of work seen is also above average, with particularly good work seen from some students of English literature. Students can analyse literary texts successfully, and are able to compare and contrast treatments and themes. Higher-attaining students write accurately and stylishly. Those studying English language understand the use of rhetorical devices and can analyse text closely and carefully, using appropriate technical language. English literature students use the techniques of literary criticism well to comment on writers' intentions and the methods used to achieve specific effects. One student had written a particularly interesting piece comparing five poems by Sylvia Plath. Students on both courses achieve well.

323. Teaching and learning on the AS and A-level courses are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge that enables them to ask probing questions and to explain the finer points of linguistic and literary analysis. In a Year 12 lesson about a scene from 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', for example, the teacher gave clear and full explanations of the language and its meaning and deepened the students' understanding of the scene through careful questions targeted at individual students. He also read aloud very well – bringing the character vividly to life and helping the students to gain insights into the text.

324. Students have good attitudes to work. When they get the opportunity, they generally work well independently. In a Year 13 lesson in the learning resource centre, for example, students organised themselves well, some using computers to do research or draft work, others using reference books. English language students conduct research outside of school, such as in a local children's nursery, to study language acquisition. Teachers mark students' work well, using good knowledge of the criteria for A-level grades. They provide good support for those who find the subject difficult, particularly with coursework. Assessment records are not used enough, however, to monitor students' progress and identify where individuals are underachieving.

325. Leadership and management are good. The department has responded well to the demands of the AS and A2-level courses, and its teachers are also involved in teaching communication skills as part of the key skills course. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have recently started and are current development priorities.

## French

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

### Strengths

- Students achieve well in both years in understanding text and writing.
- Students are motivated and enjoy responding to challenges.
- Most teaching is good. Teachers are excellent linguists.
- Marking and assessment of work are good; students are well informed of their standards.
- Students are appreciative of the help they receive.

### Areas for improvement

- Standards of speaking are below average in each year.
- The school has no formal links with France. Students have little or no first-hand experience of the country and culture.

326. A-level results are average, although from small entries. Since 1998 a third of students have obtained grades A or B. AS-level results in 2002 were also average. For current students, standards are average in Years 12 and 13 and students are achieving well.

327. In Year 13, essays are rich in ideas and clearly constructed, though still marred by grammatical inaccuracy. Students have assimilated specific topic vocabulary and phrases and organise their ideas coherently. They can present both sides of an issue, and express a personal view on complex subjects, such as social inequality and the homeless. Some essays show an awareness of style and adventure in improvising from known speech patterns, but others lack ambition and accuracy. Aural comprehension and speaking are below average. When discussing their views of the sixth form, for example, most students struggled to understand unfamiliar wording of basic questions and to find the vocabulary to express their views. In a Year 13 lesson, students made individual presentations on education and their views of the school. They could describe the system and generally say why the school is good, but inaccurate structure and poor pronunciation detracted from their performance.

328. Year 12 students make good progress in writing, gradually adapting to the demands of more complex language and ideas. They consolidate tenses and add more sophisticated structures. They begin to write discursively, as in an essay on world poverty and the threat of AIDS. Higher-attaining students write quite fluently, adding their own personal touches. They also perform well in role-play situations, though in general oral skills are under-developed.

329. Most teaching is good. Teachers are excellent linguists, reinforcing known work effectively, and extending the language which students use. They use tapes and texts on a wide variety of social and political subjects to provide a demanding context for new vocabulary and ideas. Excellent relationships contribute to a positive atmosphere in which students are encouraged to find the right word or phrase. Marking and assessment are thorough: students are well informed of their standards and how to improve, and speak warmly of the support and guidance they receive. In Year 13, teaching is consistently good: most of each lesson is conducted in French, setting appropriate expectations and challenge. In Year 12, some teaching is good. In one lesson, the teacher planned a very good activity in which the students acted a paired role-play of a visit to an advertising agency, made notes of their partner's agenda for the day and fed it back. Some teaching in Year 12 is not so effective, however, because tasks are not planned thoroughly. The development of oral skills is slow when students are not given enough support to enable them to summarise what they hear, or to improvise confidently. Too much teaching and interaction is in English. The French that is spoken is immaculate but undemanding.

330. By Year 13 learning is good. Students in both years take their studies seriously and gradually become more independent. Significantly, they learn to check their work for themselves. Learning is best when students are challenged to speak on their own or to work collaboratively. In Year 12,

learning is satisfactory, but not consistently good because students do not have enough practice understanding authentic spoken French or speaking it themselves. There is little spontaneous use of the language in either year. ICT is used effectively for research on the Internet and for word-processing assignments.

331. Leadership is sound. There is a positive learning ethos and the provision of a dedicated study room is good. However, the school has no formal links with France and students have little or no first-hand experience of the country and culture.