

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **LYTCHETT MINSTER SCHOOL**

Post Green Road, Lytchett Minster

LEA area: Dorset

Unique reference number: 113863

Headteacher: Mr S R Clark

Reporting inspector: David Potter  
1027

Dates of inspection: 18<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> November 2002

Inspection number: 249636

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Post Green Road Lytchett Minster Dorset
Postcode:	BH16 6JD
Telephone number:	01202 622413
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr C J Hall
Date of previous inspection:	21 <sup>st</sup> October 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
1027	David Potter	Registered Inspector		
9880	Tony Comer	Lay Inspector		Attitudes, values & personal development; Care: advice, support & guidance; Partnership with parents and students
19096	Brian Bartlett	Team Inspector		Curricular & other opportunities
4738	David Berrisford	Team Inspector		Care: assessment; Leadership & management: resources
4741	Diana Valentine	Team Inspector		
31845	Michael Clarke	Team Inspector	French	
12226	Caroline Clarke	Team Inspector	English	
1085	John Laver	Team Inspector	History	
14776	Phil Waite	Team Inspector	Mathematics	
15277	Chris Vidler	Team Inspector	Business Studies	
27585	Ken Hounslow	Team Inspector	Biology	
18888	Jan Boulton	Team Inspector	Leisure & Tourism	
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31385	Neil Gillespie	Team Inspector	Information and communication technology	

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## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>6 – 9</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
<b>ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>10 – 11</b>
<b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL</b>	<b>12 – 17</b>
<b>WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED</b>	<b>18 – 19</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	<b>20 – 25</b>
<b>PART D: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
<b>RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHEIVEMENTS</b>	<b>26 – 27</b>
<b>STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>27 – 27</b>
<b>TEACHING AND LEARNING</b>	<b>27 – 28</b>
<b>CURRICUALR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS</b>	<b>28 – 29</b>
<b>THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES HE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?</b>	<b>30 – 31</b>
<b>THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	<b>31 – 32</b>
<b>PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES</b>	



## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

The school was inspected by five inspectors, led by David Potter. This is a summary of the inspection report, which is available from the school.

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Number of full-time students:	1168	larger than average
Students with English as an additional language:	0.0%	below the national average (7.8%)
Students entitled to free school meals:	6.9%	below the national average (15.3%)
Students with special educational needs (SEN):	19.4%	in line with the national average (19.5%)

The school serves the villages of Lytchett Minster, Lytchett Matravers and Upton, and estates on the western edge of Poole - a community which contains both disadvantaged and advantaged areas. Very few students live near the school, which is set on the edge of a small village, and travel to school is from a wide geographical area. The school population has grown slightly in recent years, and student mobility is low. The school is over-subscribed; about 170 students enter Year 7 each year and are joined in Year 9 by 40 to 50 students from a local middle school. Students' attainment on entry is slightly above average; the school receives fewer students of very high ability than might be expected. A very serious fire in 2000, together with a large existing building programme, has resulted in a high proportion of the school being housed in inconveniently-sited mobile classrooms for over two years. The school has arts college status.

### HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school that continues to improve. Students achieve above-average results and make rapid progress because of the very good teaching and excellent welfare and support they receive, and because of excellent, clear-sighted leadership. This is a happy school in which staff and students work together amicably; it is also a confident school with a strong spirit, shown by the way in which the difficulties posed by the major fire have been overcome and treated as an opportunity to fulfil the school's vision. The value for money provided by the school is very good.

#### What the school does well

- Standards in tests and examinations at all levels are generally well above national averages and the averages of similar schools.
- Students achieve well, building on their earlier attainment and making good progress.
- Teaching is very good, especially for older students.
- Students have excellent attitudes to the school and their work; the behaviour of older students in particular is excellent.
- The care provided for students is very good and promotes their learning.
- The student support centre is very effective in improving the attendance and behaviour of disaffected students.
- Leadership by the governors, headteacher and senior staff is very good, and leads to secure, rapid improvement.
- The school is very well managed: finance, organisation and administration are all of high quality and enable the school to run smoothly.

#### What could be improved

- The requirements of the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (SEN) are not yet fully met.
- Many aspects of accommodation are poor, not just those caused by the serious fire.

### HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvement since the last inspection in October 1996 has been very good. Standards have risen at all levels, teaching has improved, with a sharp increase in the proportion that is very good and excellent, and attendance is above the national average. The strengths have, in almost all cases, been further improved and action has been taken in respect of all the weaknesses. Compliance with the National Curriculum and the use of assessment are now very good, and other weaknesses such as the use of

information technology (IT), the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme and the quality of reports are much improved. Provision for students with SEN is much improved: that for students with behaviour difficulties is now very good, but that for students with learning difficulties, although improving rapidly under its interim management, does not yet fully meet the requirements of the Code of Practice.

## STANDARDS

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	B	C	n/a	

Key	
Very high	A*
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E
Very low	E*

For several years, results in both GCSE and in the national tests in Year 9 have been well above national averages, and above to well above the averages of similar schools. Since students' attainment on entry to the school is slightly above average, progress is good both for 11 – 14 and 14 – 16 year olds. Results at age 14 in 2002 showed a further sharp rise: the trend in these test results in recent years has been at least as rapid as the national trend. Until a slight fall in 2002, the trend at GCSE had been above the national trend. Points per student have continued to rise rapidly. Both boys and girls achieve well, the differences between their performances being less than the national difference.

Results at A-level (and latterly also at AS-level) have for several years been above the national average; in 2001, the results achieved by a weaker year group were in line with the national average. Results in 2002 were the best in the school's history, and were well above the provisional national average.

Students achieve well in sixth form vocational courses: completion rates are very good, and a very high proportion of students achieves merits and distinctions.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Students involve themselves fully in the life of the school and have positive attitudes to their work, to each other and to the school as a whole.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The behaviour of older students is excellent. There is a small amount of misbehaviour by younger students in lessons. Behaviour around the site is generally very good.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Relationships are professional and good-humoured. Students become mature, balanced young adults who respect other people and their views.
Attendance	Good: absence, both authorised and unauthorised, is below the national average.

These aspects of the school's work result not only in a happy atmosphere in which students and adults enjoy each other's company but also one that enables them to get on with teaching and learning.



## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 - 9	Years 10 and 11	Years 12 and 13
Lessons seen overall	Good	Very good	Very good

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

Teaching is very good and a major contributory factor to the standards and progress achieved. Teaching was good, very good or excellent in over four out of five of the lessons seen; no less-than-satisfactory teaching was seen. The proportion of very good and excellent teaching increases with the age of the students, to over 50 per cent in the sixth form. As a result of the quality of teaching, students, especially those from Year 10 upwards, have developed very good learning skills and attitudes to their work. Time on task is very high: students settle to work quickly and persevere when they find it difficult.

Teaching has many strengths: teachers are not only knowledgeable subject specialists, many have an infectious enthusiasm which they transmit to their students. Lessons are well planned and proceed at a good pace; work is generally marked and returned rapidly, though there are inconsistencies in the degree to which students are helped to understand how to improve their work. Students respond well to the high levels of praise they receive and to the good-humoured relationships they have with their teachers. Teaching meets the needs of almost all students well.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum.	Very good. The school has an excellent curriculum for students in Years 7 to 9, while that for older students including the sixth form is very good. Further development of the curriculum is necessary to increase the opportunities to study vocational courses in Years 12 and 13. Extra-curricular provision is excellent.
Provision for students with special educational needs (SEN)	Satisfactory, and very good for those with behavioural difficulties. The temporary SENCO has done extremely well to re-invigorate SEN provision after the hiatus of the last year. There has been rapid progress this academic year, but the requirements of the Code of Practice for SEN are not yet fully met.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. Provision for social, moral and cultural development is especially good and is a major factor in developing the positive attitudes and very good behaviour described above.
How well the school cares for its students	The school is a very caring environment in which students can feel safe and develop confidence, and in which they are encouraged to become independent. Tutors know their students' capabilities and aspirations, and use this effectively to set realistic goals for improvement.

The school provides a rich experience for its students and is successful in meeting the needs of almost all of them. Planned improvements to the provision for vocational courses in the sixth form, and for students requiring learning support in the main school, will make this a fully inclusive school. The curriculum provides breadth of opportunity, such as a half GCSE in IT for all students, and the wider life of the school provides ample opportunity for students to mature as learners and responsible young adults.

## HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher and senior staff, together with the governing body, have established a shared vision and direction for the development of school which have led to the very strong improvements that have been made.
How well the appropriate authority fulfils its responsibilities	Excellent. The governing body fulfils all of its statutory responsibilities and is very well organised. Governors provide excellent support for the school. They work in partnership with senior staff to understand the school's strengths and areas for development. Through their monitoring of the school improvement plan (SIP), they hold the school to account very effectively.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The collation and use of attainment data are excellent. Students' attainment and progress are tracked from their arrival at the school to leaving at the end of Year 11 or Year 13. These systems, together with a comprehensive programme of quality assurance, ensure that staff and students have an informed perspective as to potential areas for improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school benefits from a strong and committed governing body that is fully involved and active in all aspects of budgetary management. Planning reflects the needs and aspirations of the school, ensuring that the procurement and deployment of scarce resources are targeted at enhancing the learning opportunities for all students and at making necessary improvements.

By improving the quality of self-evaluation and of teaching, and by managing the complex plan for the development of the site, school leaders have shown how they use the principles of best value to improve the cost-effectiveness of the school which, as a result, provides very good value for money.

## 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>▪ their children are attaining well and making good progress;</li> <li>▪ students are encouraged and expected to work hard and achieve their best;</li> <li>▪ the teaching is good;</li> <li>▪ the opportunities provided are varied and rich;</li> <li>▪ the school is a place with decent values which helps their children develop into mature, rounded and tolerant young adults;</li> <li>▪ it is a well-managed school which keeps them well informed;</li> <li>▪ the house system;</li> <li>▪ that it is a good and improving school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the provision for students with SEN;</li> <li>▪ behaviour, especially in lower-ability sets;</li> <li>▪ how the school works with parents and responds to their concerns and complaints;</li> <li>▪ aspects of homework: some parents believe there is too much homework, others that there is too little.</li> </ul>

Inspectors are in full agreement with most of the views expressed by parents, especially with their predominantly positive opinions. Inspectors found behaviour overall to be very good, but agree that there is a little misbehaviour in classes in Years 7 and 8; a very few students are responsible and they are generally well managed. Although rapid improvements are now being made, provision for students with learning difficulties does not yet comply in full with the requirements of the Code of Practice. The amount

of homework set is generally adequate. The school communicates with parents well; although a few parents feel that the school has not responded adequately to their concerns, this is not the norm.

## ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

## LYTCHETT MINSTER SCHOOL

The sixth form was inspected by a team of 14 inspectors, led by David Potter. The summary report focuses on subjects and aspects of the sixth form. The full report is available from the school.

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this large, popular comprehensive school has 185 students, with equal numbers of male and female students. Just under half of the students from Year 11 in Lytchett Minster School enter the sixth form and are joined by a small number from other schools. Since results at GCSE are well above average, all students embark on two-year, advanced-level courses.

### HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a very good, highly cost-effective, and improving sixth form. Standards in examinations have generally been above the national average, and in several years well above it; students generally achieve very well in relation to their results at GCSE. The success and improvement of the sixth form are the result of excellent leadership, consistently very good teaching, the excellent attitudes of the students to their work, and the warm, professional relationships between them and their teachers.

#### Strengths

- Results of AS/A-level and vocational examinations are well above national averages and represent very good progress from GCSE.
- Teaching is very good: it is never less than satisfactory and well over half is very good or excellent.
- Students learn very well; they enjoy life and work in the sixth form and work in partnership with their teachers.
- The sixth form provides a very broad curriculum for more-able students.
- Students' work and progress are monitored very well: they receive excellent feedback on their work and guidance on how to improve.
- The leadership provided by the headteacher, governors and the heads of sixth form is excellent.

#### What could be improved

- The provision of sixth-form courses for students with modest GCSE results.

### THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgements about provision, and comment
English	Very good: standards are high and teaching, leadership and management are very good.
Biology	Good: teaching and learning are good and students achieve well in relation to their GCSE results.
Business Studies & Economics	Very good: excellent planning combined with innovative teaching leads to above average standards.
French	Good: examination results show a clear, upward trend over the last three years. Teaching is good and students respond well.
History	Good: standards, teaching and leadership are all of a good standard
ICT	Excellent: examination results are consistently above the national average, teaching is very good and there is rapid improvement.
Leisure & Tourism	Very good: results are well above average as a result of very good teaching and leadership.
Mathematics	Satisfactory with some good features. Examination results are around the national average with some recent improvement, and teaching is now good.
Music	Very good: standards are above average, teaching is very good and the subject is

	growing in popularity.
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*Inspectors make comments in the range excellent, very good, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, poor, very poor.*

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance on personal development are very good. Academic support and guidance for students are excellent. The comprehensive tracking of students' progress, undertaken by tutors, enables students to understand their strengths and weaknesses and to set targets for improvement. Information about future courses of study and arrangements for entry into the sixth form are very good. Provision for careers education and opportunities beyond school are also very good, especially for those proceeding to higher education.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent, with a clear sense of direction and very good evaluation and planning systems. The head of sixth form has established a very strong ethos and culture for the sixth form, reflecting the wider aims of the school, and helping the students meet their aspirations. Teachers are well qualified for the subjects that they teach; they have a very good knowledge of the requirements of the examination courses and both students and teachers have access to a very good range of resources.

Sixth form managers use their excellent management information systems and strategies for guidance and support to ensure that all students achieve and make progress. The planned development of Level 2 courses will make the sixth form still more inclusive. By providing clear leadership, very good teaching and quality assurance systems, the school ensures that the sixth form is cost-effective.

## 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>• The teaching they receive, which they find both helpful and challenging.</li> <li>• The support they receive for independent study.</li> <li>• The good range of courses provided.</li> <li>• The variety of extra-curricular activity and the rich social life of the sixth form.</li> <li>• The information and advice they received when entering the sixth form.</li> <li>• The guidance they receive about their work from teachers, tutors and especially from the heads of sixth form.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice about careers and higher education.</li> <li>• The feedback on their work and the information they receive about how they are getting on.</li> <li>• There are mixed views about the extent to which they are listened to and treated as young adults.</li> </ul>

Inspectors are in full agreement with students' positive views. They are very well taught and, although there is some inconsistency, teaching is challenging and enables students to work independently. Relationships are excellent. The guidance to students as they enter the sixth form, and as they progress through it, is very good. As a result, sixth form students genuinely enjoy their school. Inspectors agree that the range of courses provided for the students who enter the sixth form is very good, but find that there should be better provision for students with modest GCSE qualifications. The advice given to students applying to higher education is very good, but less good for those considering other pathways. Through the school council and its regular meetings with governors and senior staff, students' views are listened to. Inspectors do not share students' views on the feedback to them about their achievement, finding it excellent.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

**Standards in tests and examinations at all levels are generally well above national averages and the averages of similar schools.**

1. For several years, results in the national tests and examinations for students aged 14, 16 and 18 have been consistently well above figures for schools nationally and above to well above the averages of similar schools. Trends in results since the last inspection have generally been above national trends, although there have been “blip” years (such as 2000 for the tests at the end of Year 9, 2001 for A-level) when results have dipped to close to the national average.

2. In the national tests at the end of Year 9, students’ results have improved year-on-year since the last inspection in the core subjects (English, mathematics and science), with a pronounced further improvement in 2002. The proportion of students attaining the nationally-expected level (Level 5) and the higher levels (Level 6 and above) in these three subjects is above, and often well above, average. Although the amount of available attainment data in the other subjects of the curriculum is much less, they too are above average and improving. Since the last inspection, the gap between the attainment of boys and girls has remained narrower than the national gap.

3. At GCSE, students have also continuously attained well above their peers nationally, placing the school for the last three years within the top 20 percent of schools nationally, both for the proportion of students who achieve five or more higher (A\* to C) grades and for the proportion attaining five or more graded (A\* - G) results. The trend in average points per student is above the national trend line, reflecting an accelerating proportion of higher grades attained since the last inspection. The proportion of students who leave school without any graded results is very small and well below the national figure. In recent years, the school’s results have been above, and in some years well above, the averages of similar schools. The school has exceeded its targets for GCSE in recent years. Both boys and girls attain well; the gap is narrower than the national gap because boys achieve particularly well. Attainment in English, English literature, science and French is significantly above the national average and is at least average in most other subjects.

4. Standards at A-level, and latterly AS-level, have been consistently above, and often well above, the national average. There was a ‘blip’ in 2001, when the results achieved by a weaker year group were average. However the results achieved in 2002 were the best in the school’s history and well above the provisional national average. Results in recent years have been average to above in most subjects, and especially strong in chemistry, theatre studies, music and sports studies. Results in mathematics were very weak in 2001, but recovered in 2002. Results in Spanish are unsatisfactory and need attention. Attainment in vocational courses in the last four years has been excellent, with over 40 per cent attaining distinctions, a further 40 per cent plus attaining merits, and only three per cent failing to complete their courses.

5. The above-average attainment is the result of very good teaching (paragraphs 11 – 16), a very well-organised curriculum and students’ excellent attitudes to work (paragraphs 17 – 10).

**Students achieve well, building on their earlier attainment and making good progress.**

6. Students' attainment on entry to the school is slightly above average. Whilst the full range of attainment is represented, a very high proportion of students lie within the middle-to-above-average ability band, and there are very few students of well-above-average ability. By the age of 14, students are achieving significantly above their peers nationally in English, mathematics and science and in their foundation subjects. Achievement is therefore good. Students of all abilities make good progress; those of higher ability show clear signs of being able to handle increasingly difficult concepts and are using a variety of writing styles in their work. Students with learning difficulties produce well-presented, complete and detailed work of a sound standard; weaknesses in the provision for these students limit their further progress and are described in paragraphs 37 – 39.

7. Throughout Years 10 and 11, students continue to make good progress, often exceeding expectations and achieving above the target grades set on the basis of their earlier attainment and teachers' assessments of their work. The good teaching students receive pays off in accelerating learning skills and excellent attitudes to work; this is shown by the trend in results at GCSE, which has been above the national trend, and by the very good learning and behaviour observed among older students. Most-able, gifted and talented students achieve excellent examination results; a much higher proportion achieve ten or more higher-grade results, several with full sets of A\* and A grades, than the small number of very-high-ability students would suggest. Almost all students with learning difficulties achieve several graded results at GCSE, most of them at grade E and above.

8. Students make good progress in their basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. By Year 11, students are confident to use IT for research and the presentation of work; their numeracy is good, for example their skills in using and interpreting graphs, and they speak, read and write fluently and present work very well.

9. Achievement is also good in the sixth form. On both A/AS-level and vocational courses, students achieve well in relation to their performance at GCSE. The high proportion meeting and exceeding the ambitious targets set for them on the basis of their GCSE performance shows the value added by the school.

10. The school takes a broad view of achievement, giving due weight to academic excellence but also encouraging and rewarding personal and social skills, sporting and cultural achievement. By the time they leave school, students have made great strides in their attitudes to work, their ability to work together and listen to and respect each other's views, and to work independently. Students achieve very high standards in musical and dramatic performance, excellence in activities such as public speaking and chess, and representative honours in sport, including the national Young Sportswoman of the Year and members of the national volleyball squad.

**Teaching is very good, especially for older students.**

11. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 to 13 - a marked improvement on the already good picture described in the last inspection report and a major contributory factor to the standards and progress achieved. Since 1996, the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching has been eliminated, and the proportion of high-quality teaching has increased sharply. There is now no subject in which teaching is weak. These improvements have been achieved during a period of major staff turnover: this is evidence of management's skill in managing change and in quality assurance.

12. All of the teaching observed during the inspection was at least satisfactory, and over 80 per cent was good, very good or excellent. Teaching is particularly good in the sixth form, where almost all of the teaching seen was at least good, and over half very good or excellent. Both parents and students believe that teaching is good: over 90 per cent of the responses to both questionnaires were positive about teaching and this view was reinforced in discussions held with inspectors.

13. Teaching has many strengths. Teachers know their subjects and the requirements of the examinations well, and use that knowledge to focus students' attention on key learning points. Expectations are high: teachers insist on high-quality work, accuracy and correct terminology, and provide a high level of demand and challenge through thought-provoking questioning. In an excellent Year 11 history lesson, students were provided with a range of resources - objects, audio tape, Internet text and printed images; the very challenging, open-ended tasks they were set intrigued and motivated them to produce very good results. This lesson exemplified the infectious enthusiasm which many teachers have and which they transmit to their students. Lessons are well planned with clear aims, and proceed at a good pace. Teachers know individual students and their capabilities well, and use this knowledge to support and challenge them. Work is generally marked and returned rapidly, although there are inconsistencies in the degree to which marking helps students to understand how to improve their work.

14. Students respond well to this very good teaching, to the high levels of praise they receive and to the good-humoured relationships they have with their teachers, by learning very well. By the end of Year 9, students have developed very good learning skills and excellent attitudes to their work. Time on task is very high: students settle to work quickly and persevere when they find it difficult. The quality of learning improves as students move through the school: it is better for those in Years 10 and 11 than for younger students, and better again in the sixth form. This demonstrates the impact of the teaching and of the monitoring systems.

15. The two remaining areas for development in the teaching are:

- the support provided for students of different abilities, especially those with learning difficulties, which is inconsistent. Individual education plans (IEPs) are of good quality but do not yet sufficiently shape the teaching of students with SEN across the subjects they study (see paragraphs 38 and 39);
- a few teachers are too tolerant of misbehaviour by a small number of younger students.

16. Teaching is of consistently high quality because:

- school leaders have set clear expectations;
- there is a well-planned induction programme for new teachers;
- teachers are trained and monitored carefully through the well-organised performance management system.

**Students have excellent attitudes to the school and their work; the behaviour of older students in particular is very good.**

17. Student's attitudes are excellent towards their studies and towards the wider life of the school and the community. Relationships among students, and between them and their teachers, are very good. At its best, and especially in Year 11 and in the sixth form, learning takes the form of a professional partnership between the class and the teacher.



18. In lessons, attitudes are very good; students concentrate, settle to work quickly and maintain their efforts well. They work well independently and in groups. They participate in lessons willingly and take work seriously; in a very good Year 11 religious education lesson on the implications of the Holocaust, students showed tolerance and sensitivity not only in the views they expressed, but also in the way they listened and responded to each other's views.

19. Behaviour, in lessons and around the site, is generally very good. Students generally do not exploit the difficulties posed by the temporary buildings and the considerable distances they have to travel between lessons; students move briskly around the site and do their best to arrive on time. A few teachers are on occasion too tolerant of the small amount of irritating low-level misbehaviour by younger students which slows learning in a few lessons. This is, however, rare and from Year 9 onwards, students' behaviour is extremely good.

20. Students willingly and enthusiastically show initiative and take responsibility in a wide range of activities; the take-up of extra-curricular activities is very high, in an area where public transport is almost non-existent and so special arrangements have to be made to get home afterwards. Students of all ages take a full part in decision-making through school and house councils, and older students provide valuable support for their younger colleagues through mentoring and paired reading schemes. Year 11 students undertake prefectorial duties, supervising parts of the site. The response to community service and to charitable efforts for local and international causes is excellent.

### **The care provided for students is very good and promotes their learning.**

21. The school pastoral care arrangements, based on the house system, ensure that students are known and supported throughout their time in school; these arrangements are very effective and much valued by students and their families. House heads and tutors not only seek to ensure that students are happy and confident in school but also, through their detailed knowledge of students' capabilities and aspirations, set realistic goals for improvement. Parents, in their responses to inspectors, made frequent mention of house heads and tutors as key figures in building their children's confidence and success at school.

22. The quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance about their studies, career opportunities and personal development are very good; support for those in the sixth form choosing pathways other than higher education need some attention.

23. Procedures for monitoring and improving students' achievement, behaviour and attendance are all very good. When students' behaviour causes problems, the support centre is very effective in improving the situation (see paragraphs 25 and 26).

24. The school is a place where students can feel safe, develop confidence and in which they are encouraged to become independent. The school aims to be inclusive by promoting the achievement and personal development of all students; planned improvements to the provision for vocational courses in the sixth form, and for students requiring learning support in the main school, will make this a fully inclusive school.

**The student support centre is very effective in improving the attendance and behaviour of disaffected students.**

25. Although only in the fourth term of its existence, the student support centre is already proving to be a very effective piece of inclusion practice. Through the use of a coherent identification and referral process, students are selected for one of a range of bespoke support programmes, from extended full-time provision to occasional support. The centre also provides behaviour and anger management courses for selected students in Years 7 and 8, a reintegration programme for students who have had extended absence from school, and a weekly 'drop-in' service where students receive friendly and confidential advice. Subject teachers remain responsible for setting and marking work. In addition, students receive, as appropriate, support from the head of centre, the teaching assistant attached to the centre, the education welfare officer, the school nurse and/or a youth worker.

26. The impact of the centre in 2000/01 was to improve the attendance of almost every student targeted for such support, and to reduce, significantly for most students, the number of detentions that they received. As a consequence the number of fixed-term exclusions was halved. The centre works very well with parents and the school nurse provides positive parenting courses. It is too early to evaluate the impact of the centre's work upon the standards achieved by students, and it is important that the school monitors this carefully. At the moment, the targets set for students are not sufficiently specific or measurable to enable this form of impact to be assessed accurately.

**Leadership by the governors, headteacher and senior staff is very good, and leads to secure, rapid improvement.**

27. Leadership and management were seen as good at the time of the 1996 inspection, and have improved significantly since: from the strategic management of a major improvement and re-building programme to smooth day-to-day running (see paragraphs 34 – 36), all aspects are of high quality and directly benefit the standards achieved by students. The great majority of parents believe that the school is well led.

28. Governors, headteacher and senior staff have established a clear vision of a fully comprehensive school offering a rich range of opportunities to all students and helping them all to achieve the highest possible standards; they also strive for a school which sits at the centre of its community and provides opportunities for all, and see the development of the arts college, with its stunning new facilities, as a focus for this community involvement.

29. The success of this vision and direction for the school can be seen in the success and improvement of the school. Typical of the school at its best was the way the whole community responded to the serious fire of 2000: after a period of grieving everyone, led by the governors and headteacher, worked together to ensure that the severe difficulties were treated as an opportunity to further the achievement of the school's vision. Thus the opportunity has been taken to plan a major learning centre to replace the school's inadequate library - not just an expansion, but a re-conceptualisation of the role of independent learning. During the period of potential trauma, the school went ahead with a number of major developments, including a full restructuring of the curriculum.

30. The headteacher and senior staff have developed an effective quality assurance system that brings together the outcomes of monitoring the curriculum, standards and assessment, teaching and learning and performance management. The intelligence gathered from this system ensures that planning and the drafting of the school improvement plan are thorough and based on a systematic assessment of need. The setting,

management and monitoring of the budget are very well done, demonstrating that the school implements its decisions and priorities effectively.

31. Governors carry out their roles extremely effectively. Their business is efficiently conducted and records very well kept. Senior governors are frequent visitors to the school and know it, its strengths and areas for improvement, very well. They monitor the school and hold it to account rigorously through their committees, each of which is served by the relevant member of the school leadership group; that person is required to produce reports on key aspects of performance and on priority areas for improvement, and those reports are carefully scrutinised by governors. The clear focus on raising standards brings rigour and purpose to these discussions. The governing body manages the balance between sufficient proximity to understand the school and sufficient distance to review it, very well indeed. Their long-standing system of termly meetings with the student council, chaired by students, is a piece of very good practice: it ensures governors are well informed and that students have the opportunity to present their views and describe their achievements to the school's major decision makers.

32. The result of the high-quality leadership is a community characterised by its calm, purposeful ethos, by its high standards of work and behaviour, excellent attitudes and its commitment to improvement. Although the community is large and complex, day-to-day running is smooth and little time is wasted.

33. Since it provides very good teaching and a very good curriculum, achieves very high standards and adds substantial value both to the academic and social development of its students, the school, including its sixth form, provides very good value for money for its students and for the wider community it serves.

**The school is very well managed: finance, organisation and administration are all of high quality and enable the school to run smoothly.**

34. This is a school as distinguished for its very good organisation and smooth running as for its strategic leadership. The curriculum is very well planned and timetabled, promoting high standards. Teachers are allocated to classes carefully, and the scheduling of the timetable is very good. The school has first-class databases on students and their progress, and can produce relevant analyses with great speed; this facility enables teachers and managers to make decisions about allocation of time and resources quickly and accurately.

35. The budget is very carefully controlled and well targeted: by focusing on key outcomes - the academic achievement and personal development of students - and key processes, especially teaching quality and monitoring and guidance systems, the school employs the principles of best value to good effect. The school auditors confirm that the school has very good budgetary control systems and that they are overseen effectively by governors, the bursar and finance office staff. Minor recommendations contained in the auditors' report have been acted upon. School administration is of high quality: office staff are very efficient and helpful, and also present an excellent public face for the school. Internal communication, through memos, newsletters and briefings, is good. Within the limitations imposed by the building site, the school is well maintained and cleaned.

36. All of these aspects of school life promote smooth running and enable teachers and students to get on with the job of teaching and learning.

**WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

**The requirements of the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (SEN) are not yet fully met.**

37. The provision for students with special educational needs (SEN) was a key issue at the time of the previous inspection. In the intervening period, the school made substantial progress in this aspect - for example the introduction of the student support (behaviour) centre, literacy and numeracy support including the use of 'Successmaker', mentoring and paired reading support by older students, and the establishment of a large, well-equipped new base for learning support. Changes of personnel slowed progress with the implementation of aspects of the Code of Practice, such as IEPs. Due to the work of the head of student support centre and, particularly, of the temporary, part-time SEN co-ordinator (SENCO) provided by the local education authority, the school has made rapid improvements since September 2002. The temporary SENCO has re-assessed all students in the school, re-assigned them to appropriate levels of intervention and produced good quality IEPs. A permanent SENCO has been appointed with effect from January 2003.

38. Students with SEN make good and often very good gains in their learning in English, but uneven progress in other subjects. They generally achieve well at GCSE (see paragraph 7), but there is scope for further improvement:

- whilst IEPs are of good quality – indeed the strategies they include are excellent – they are as yet used inconsistently in lessons;
- similarly, a good-quality handbook on the teaching of students with SEN has been provided for teachers but observations failed to confirm that it was yet being used;
- whilst the SEN policy has been revised, it makes insufficient references to the involvement of parents and students in the identification, assessment, provision and review processes;
- the deployment of teaching assistants is good in some areas, unsatisfactory in others. Although they provide good-quality support to the students with statements of SEN, in many lessons they provided inadequate support for students with SEN but without statements.

39. The major area for development in the teaching of students with SEN, in subjects, is the consistent use of the strategies in IEPs to modify the work and to identify the support they need to enable them to access the task.

**Many aspects of accommodation are poor, not just those caused by the serious fire.**

40. There is an extensive building and re-building programme associated with the development of the arts college and with the replacement for the accommodation lost in the major fire. This masks the fact that other aspects and areas of the school are poorly accommodated. Several old temporary classrooms are regarded as permanent accommodation; they are in a poor state of repair and their slippery access and windows that open on to walkways are health and safety hazards. Many classrooms are small and badly sound-proofed; controlling the temperature is difficult. The design of one of the art rooms - a horseshoe shape - is unsatisfactory; it is not possible to supervise students properly. There is no medical room. Access to much of the accommodation is impossible for students and adults with mobility difficulties. These inadequacies impact on teaching and on students' learning and achievement.

41. The governors should continue their joint working with officers of the county council to ensure that the planned building and refurbishment programme includes those aspects of accommodation which are inadequate and/or of poor quality.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

### For the whole school:

1. Implement in full the requirements of the Code of Practice for Special Educational Needs (para refs 6, 15, 37 – 39)
2. Continue joint working with officers of the county council to improve those aspects of accommodation which are inadequate and/or of poor quality (para refs 40 – 41, 78).

### For the sixth form:

3. Provide a suitable range of courses for students with modest GCSE results (para refs 60).

*All of the above appear as priorities in the school improvement plan.*

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	38
	Sixth form	39
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		61

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 – 11</b>							
Number	5	10	13	10			
Percentage	13	26	34	26			
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	3	17	16	3			
Percentage	8	44	41	8			

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 all percentages, as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	982	186
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	77	0

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	27	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	227	4

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	13

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.5
National comparative data	9.1

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	99	109	208

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	79	77	86
	Girls	102	82	92
	Total	181	159	178
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	87 (78)	77 (71)	85 (79)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	53 (43)	52 (47)	51 (43)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	64	83	86
	Girls	88	85	95
	Total	152	168	181
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (76)	81 (73)	87 (80)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	39 (38)	51 (48)	52 (48)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

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

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	87	101	188

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	50	81	87
	Girls	68	98	100
	Total	118	179	187
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	63 (66)	95 (94)	100 (99)
	National	51 (48)	89 (91)	97 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average capped* point score per pupil	School	39.2
	National	34.6

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year. **Capped** scores refer to a maximum of 8 GCSEs per student

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Male	Female	Total
	2002	32	42	74

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For all candidates entered (2001)			2002 (Provisional)		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	17.6	16.6	17.0	21.4	20.9	21.2
National	16.9	17.7	17.4			

Previous year figures not entered because the basis for calculation and comparison nationally has changed

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	25	96
	National		75



International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those students who achieved all they studied	School	0	N/a
	National		81

### ***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	1137	47	1
White – Irish			
White – any other White background			
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean			
Mixed – White and Black African			
Mixed – White and Asian			
Mixed – any other mixed background			
Asian or Asian British - Indian	3		
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani			
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi			
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background			
Black or Black British – Caribbean			
Black or Black British – African			
Black or Black British – any other Black background			
Chinese	1		
Any other ethnic group	16		
No ethnic group recorded			

*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: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	67
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.4

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	28
Total aggregate hours worked per week	550

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Financial year	2001/02
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	£
Total income	3229481
Total expenditure	3139162
Expenditure per pupil	2720

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.5
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**Average teaching group size:**

Key Stages 3 and 4	24
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*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

Balance brought forward from previous year	132846
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Balance carried forward to next year	223165
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**Recruitment of teachers**

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	33.5
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Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	36.4
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Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
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Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than a full school year (FTE)	2.56
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*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1168
Number of questionnaires returned	445

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	60	6	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	38	51	5	2	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	21	57	13	2	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	19	60	15	5	2
The teaching is good.	25	62	6	1	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	47	20	4	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	43	44	7	4	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	53	43	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	21	47	20	5	7
The school is well led and managed.	26	51	8	5	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	34	56	7	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	46	45	4	1	5

### Summary of parents' and carers' responses

The views of the 33 parents who attended the meeting, the 445 who responded to the questionnaire, and the 57 who sent letters to the registered inspector, are generally very positive about the quality of education and care given to their sons and daughters. Parents believe that their children are expected and helped to do well through good teaching and welfare, and that the school helps its students grow into rounded, balanced young adults. Parents think that, as a result, their children achieve well and make good progress.

A small minority of parents is very unhappy about the provision for students with SEN, and about the behaviour of some younger students. Several parents criticised the way the school works with them and the speed and reliability of response to their questions and complaints. Although several parents made comments about homework, those comments were mixed, some saying there is too much homework, some that there is too little.

## **PART D: THE SIXTH FORM**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

42. At the time of the last inspection, the school's A-level results were described as in line with the national average, and results in vocational courses as above it. Standards in vocational courses remain very high, and those at AS/A-level have improved, and for several years been above the national average. In 2001, the results achieved by a weaker year group were still in line with the average. The results achieved in 2002 were the best in the school's history, with over 21 AS/A-level points per student, and well above the provisional national average of between 17 and 18. Male and female students achieve equally good results. Retention and completion rates are very high: for several years, over 90 per cent of students have completed their courses.

43. Students' success is shown by the fact that, on leaving the sixth form, a high proportion - about three quarters - goes into higher education. Results in recent years have matched or exceeded the targets the school has set.

44. Results in recent years have been average or above average in most subjects, and especially strong in English, chemistry, theatre studies, business and economics, IT, psychology, music and sports studies. In these subjects, standards are high, often well above the national average; all or almost all students pass and many achieve the highest grades. Results in humanities subjects - geography, history, sociology and psychology - art and French are sound and generally improving. Results in mathematics and physics have been low, but recovered to the national average in 2002. Results in Spanish are unsatisfactory; pass rates and grade quality, even for the small numbers who choose the subject, are both low, and relatively few students meet their target grades. Attainment in vocational courses in the last four years has been excellent, with over 40 per cent attaining distinctions, a further 40 per cent plus attaining merits, and only three per cent failing to complete their courses.

45. The work seen during the inspection was at least in line with the results achieved; in several subjects the standard of current achievement is above those results, suggesting continued improvement. Sixth form students are achieving well and making good progress in all of their subjects. In French, for example, students are showing good skills in writing and listening, but their speaking skills need further development if they are to develop greater fluency. In English, standards of students' work are very good; they are able to use literary and linguistic terminology fluently in both formal and informal situations. Students studying leisure and tourism have a good range of knowledge about differing sections of industry and are able to draw on local examples for their studies. Standards of performance in music are high.

46. The improvement in achievement - the added value - from GCSE by students on both vocational and academic courses is good. By analysing students' achievement against the targets set of the basis of their GCSE results, the school has developed good, well-founded analyses of the value it adds in the sixth form. Overall, students achieve well.

47. Several students attain outstanding A-level results each year. Gifted and talented students achieve excellence in academic results, in regional and national sporting honours, artistic performances and in competitions in fields such as chess and public speaking.

48. Students' standards in key skills are high. They have good ICT skills, using the Internet fluently to gather information, and using other applications such as word processing and graphical techniques to present their work effectively, such as in business, geography

and leisure and tourism courses. They write well in many subjects; their skills of analysis of different points of view, and their ability to assemble these into well-reasoned arguments are good in English, and very good in history. They speak very well, and extremely well in English: they discuss readily in lessons, and in many subjects they deliver presentations to other members of their class. Students' numeracy skills are good and are developed in many subjects, especially in business/economics, vocational courses, sciences, geography and technology.

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

49. Sixth form student's attitudes to school are excellent. They are enthusiastically involved in their studies, the life of the school and in the wider community, taking pride in the school and their achievements. Relationships between students, and between students and adults, are very good. Learning in the sixth form takes the form of a professional partnership.

50. In lessons, they listen to each other's views and participate in discussion well, asking and answering questions willingly, such as in a very lively 'hot-seating' activity in English. They work equally well independently and in groups in several subjects, including music and geography. Students willingly and enthusiastically show initiative and take responsibility in a wide range of activities. This is exemplified by their involvement in school and house councils, their very valuable support for younger students through the mentoring and paired reading schemes, and through their involvement in school clubs and in the community. They carry out the mentoring sessions, in which they provide support for younger students who may be having problems with work, relationships or confidence in school, extremely well, showing skill, sensitivity and determination. They have a mature approach to all aspects of school life and a wide range of personal skills: they display these, for example, when they meet regularly with the governing body to report on their activities and to raise issues for governors' attention.

51. Attendance was good during the last school year with little unauthorised absence. Attendance to date in the current year has improved still further.

52. Overall, students have positive views about what the sixth form provides. A significant minority of students expressed negative views about the advice and support that they receive in the sixth form, but these views are not supported by the inspection evidence (see para 67).

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

53. Teaching in the sixth form is of high quality and is a major contributory factor to the high standards achieved. In over 90 per cent of the lessons seen, teaching was at least good, and in over half it was very good or excellent. Teaching was judged to be at least good in every subject inspected, and examples of very good and excellent teaching were observed in every curriculum area. Students respond very well: their attitudes to their work are excellent and they work hard; as a result, their work output is excellent. In the questionnaire they completed, over 90 per cent of students said that they were well taught.

54. One particular strength is the teachers' excellent subject knowledge; they use this to present material with clarity, to help students organise their work and to anticipate what they will find difficult. Their subject knowledge also enables them to provide a high level of challenge through demanding questioning and discussion.

55. Teachers plan well: the lessons they provide are well structured to promote students' understanding. In a very good Year 13 geography lesson, the tasks set required students to organise themselves to investigate a variety of websites to find out about recent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, to structure the information and to share it with each other.

56. Relationships between students and their teachers are of very high quality. This enhances learning because lessons are conducted in a professionally friendly atmosphere, and because teachers' knowledge of students enables them to intervene accurately to provide individual challenge and support. This precision also applies to the very few sixth form students with learning difficulties; they are very well taught and respond by learning and achieving well.

57. Very good use is made of assessment, during lessons in response to students' comments and questions and in the marking of their work; as a result, students generally have a good sense of their own learning, of how well they are getting on in relation to their targets, and of what they must do to improve. Reports to parents, although frequent and analytical, lack diagnostic detail. While some teachers actively promote independent learning, this is inconsistent and there is scope for improvement.

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

58. The school provides a very good curriculum for more-able students in Years 12 and 13 by offering a wide range of AS and A2 courses. In addition, there are very successful Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses in health and social care and in leisure and recreation/travel and tourism. The expectations of students are high. Most are required to study at least four subjects, or the vocational equivalent, in Year 12, and the school does not readily allow students to drop subjects. The system is however flexible enough to tailor courses to meet the needs and abilities of individual students; for example, those for whom it would be inappropriate to continue a subject to A2 level in Year 13 are able to select new AS courses, providing them with a good portfolio of qualifications.

59. Within most subjects, the curricular provision is at least good and often better. However, in mathematics, whilst the provision is sound it is not particularly broad in terms of the mathematics and numeracy that is offered. Although Spanish is offered to A2 level, the teaching time allocated to the subject needs to be increased. Whilst, as a subject, ICT is a strength of the sixth form, the use of and access to ICT in a number of subjects including English, mathematics, history and music should be improved.

60. The school is constantly reviewing the effectiveness of its curriculum for 16 to 18 year old students. The admissions criteria for the sixth form are high – typically six or more GCSE passes at A\* - C levels are required to follow AS/A2 subjects and at least four A\*-C passes to study on the AVCE courses. In the recent past, the school provided intermediate-level courses for those with more modest GCSE qualifications; following a major review of its post-16 provision, which showed that a significant number of these 16 year olds were not fulfilling their potential, the school plans to introduce new intermediate-level courses with effect from September 2003 and 2004. The plans include media studies and aspects of the performing arts, which will meet those students' needs and which the school can deliver particularly well.

61. That aside, in most respects the school manages to match the needs, aspirations and abilities of students to the courses provided in the sixth form. The AVCE courses are particularly appropriate in this respect and also in terms of being responsive to local

circumstances. The school's very comprehensive monitoring and evaluation procedures have identified this and work is being undertaken to ensure that the curriculum for students aged 14-16 years and that for those aged 16-18 dovetail more closely.

62. Students in the sixth form are able to participate in an extremely wide range of extra-curricular activities. These do not only include educational visits in Britain and Europe, music, drama and sports but also many opportunities for the students to take responsibility and develop their social and organisational skills. The students organise house-based activities, support at after-school clubs and deliver a very good paired reading programme for some 40 students in Year 7. They also undertake a variety of fundraising events for charity.

63. The provision for students' personal (spiritual, social, moral and cultural) development is very good, with many excellent features. The provision has a significant impact on their confidence and on their personal skills, including their attitudes (see paras 49 - 52) and academic achievement. Tutorial time and assemblies have specific themes that have been well planned to link aspects of citizenship and personal and social education; this brings coherence to the provision, a quality which was criticised in the previous inspection and which has therefore improved. Students are given very good opportunities to talk about their own and others' feelings; this results in a well-developed sense of empathy for less fortunate members of society, in the UK and abroad. Students are responsive to local and world issues and undertake a lot of fund-raising work. Their spiritual development is enhanced in a number of ways, from curricular provision such as the new AS/A-level course in religion, ethics and philosophy, to the annual carol concert planned by sixth form students.

64. Moral and cultural issues are addressed in almost all subjects. In the leisure and recreation course, students considered the regeneration of a neglected area, and showed good understanding of the needs of different residents from different cultures. The tutorial programme provides good opportunities for students to exchange views on challenging issues, such as racism, differential development and aspects of right and wrong. The impressive range of artistic and cultural activities, the extensive programme of visits to theatres, museums and ambitious visits abroad, enable students to appreciate and value cultural diversity and other people's values and beliefs. This very effective personal enrichment programme equips students with confidence in their own abilities and with respect for others.

65. Opportunities for social development are excellent and enable students to relate well to other people and to work effectively as a member of a group. Mutual support and respect between staff and students, and between the sixth form and younger students, are strong, and are built within lessons, in the extra-curricular programme and in the opportunities provided for students to take responsibility. The very effective mentoring programme, in which sixth form students support younger students, provides opportunities for leadership. The school and house councils also enable students to exercise responsibility and take part in decision-making, as do the regular meetings with governors.

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

66. The care and welfare of students are very good. The quality and accessibility of information, advice and guidance on personal development are generally very good. High-quality guidance and induction arrangements are made for entry into the sixth form; these features attracted much praise from students.

67. Academic support and guidance for students as they progress through the sixth form are excellent. Assessment is accurate and realistic; tutors have an excellent understanding of the examination assessment criteria for their subject. In all subjects, students' work is marked thoroughly and marking makes clear to the student what s/he should do to improve, except that the use of two grading systems sometimes causes confusion. Good diagnostic comments are provided in marking in several subjects, such as French, history and leisure, recreation, travel and tourism; these comments enable students to know exactly where they are and what they must do to improve. Most students agree that their work is thoroughly assessed and that they know how to improve it. In many subjects, for example ICT, teachers are willing to give assistance at any time, including help via e-mail, in order to help students overcome potential difficulties. Students have confidence in their teachers and meet with them regularly to review their current and expected future attainment, and to set targets for improvement. Across all subjects, tracking of students' progress is very good. Review statements to parents and students are clear and supportive; the level of diagnostic detail in the written reports is sometimes thin. In their questionnaire returns, several students expressed concern about the degree to which they are kept informed about their progress; the view of inspectors is that this is very well done, and that the only issues needing a little attention are clarity about target and predicted grades, the differences between which confuse some students, and the detail in reports to parents.

68. Guidance and information for those going on to higher education is very good, but that for those considering other pathways is less good. This is partly a matter of timing, the inspection taking place at the peak time for UCAS applications; students not going on to higher education need to be aware earlier in the year of the support available to them.

69. Careful analysis of the results of assessment and performance in external examinations helps tutors to improve their courses. In physics, for example, evaluation of students' performances on assessment tasks led to a change of external examination syllabus.

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

70. Parents and carers are pleased with the standards achieved in the sixth form, and with the teaching and support and guidance given to their children when they are students there. The criticisms raised by some parents (Section C and page 9) are not directed at the sixth form, which almost invariably attracts praise. Both parents and students see the heads of sixth form as influential figures, much liked and respected for the skill with which they lead and manage the students, teachers and programmes in the sixth form.

71. Students are happy in the sixth form and proud of what it offers and achieves. They particularly like:

- the good range of courses available;
- the information about those courses, and the guidance, they received on joining the sixth form;



- the teaching, which they find both helpful and challenging;
- the variety of extra-curricular activity and the rich social life;
- the guidance they receive about their work from teachers, tutors and the heads of sixth form.

72. Several feel that careers advice, especially for those considering routes other than higher education, and feedback to them about their work and progress could be improved. There are mixed views about the degree to which they are listened to and treated as young adults.

73. Inspectors agree with the positive views of students and parents, and also that there is scope for improvement in careers advice. Inspectors disagree with the point about feedback: except for some confusion about target and predicted grades, these systems are of high quality. Inspectors' views were that students are listened to well, and that the school tries to treat them as young adults.

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

### **Leadership and management**

74. The leadership and management of the sixth form by the headteacher and governors, and by the heads of sixth form who lead it on a day-to-day basis, are excellent. The head of sixth form and her team have established a very strong ethos and culture, reflecting the wider aims of the school and yet maintaining a distinctive flavour for the sixth form. The aims centre on helping students to raise and meet their aspirations, and also embrace the development of students' personal skills and their contribution to the community, both that within the school and the wider community.

75. Recruitment to the sixth form follows a very comprehensive programme, starting with students in Year 9 by ascertaining their aspirations, and culminating in a wide range of information and consultation activities for Year 11 students and parents. All options for post-16 education are explained, enabling students to make unbiased decisions and to have equality of opportunity.

76. Assuring the quality of provision is one of the strengths of the management of the sixth form. The current review of the curriculum provision aims to meet the needs of more students by re-introducing a number of level two courses, beginning at the start of the next academic year. The head of sixth form has established a series of sixth form focus groups; these are effective in keeping the provision under review and for identifying future areas of need and development. The programme of annual reviews of departmental performance includes a focus on sixth form provision, and contributes to the very effective whole-school quality assurance cycle. The student tracking systems are excellent: these feed information about strengths and weaknesses and the need for improvement to students and their parents about individual progress, and to managers about provision. By focusing resources on priorities and by ensuring that the focus is clearly on raising standards through high-quality teaching and excellent tracking systems, sixth form managers apply the principles of best value well.

### **Resources**

77. Teachers of sixth form students are well qualified for the subjects that they teach and have a very good knowledge of the requirements of the examination courses. Both they and their students have access to a very good range of high-quality teaching resources. There

are extensive ICT facilities, but access is sometimes difficult because they are so heavily used.

78. Accommodation for sixth form teaching varies considerably in quality; overall it is unsatisfactory. For some subjects, such as business and economics, it is good, but for others such as English, which is based in elderly huts, and leisure and tourism, which is scattered across the school, it is unsatisfactory. There are insufficient private study facilities with access to ICT. Current rebuilding plans, when implemented, will put some, but not all, of these shortcomings right; the English department, for example, will still be poorly accommodated.

79. Students benefit from a good range of courses and from the excellent range of opportunities and extra-curricular opportunities provided. The teaching and care they receive are very good and they achieve high standards, adding substantial value from GCSE. Very good financial management and planning, embracing the principles of equal value and best value, enable the sixth form to operate within its budget on a very good, cost-effective basis. The sixth form therefore provides very good value for money for its students and for the wider community.

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

In the inspection, nine subjects/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 and 2002; national comparative information is not yet available for 2002.

### 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	12 (16)	100 (44)	87	42 (13)	43	6.0 (1.75)	5.8
Biology	17 (15)	94 (87)	88	41 (33)	34	5.76 (4.53)	5.25
Human Biology	6	67	67	50		5.0	
Physics	14 (11)	100 (91)	88	57 (13)	40	7.0 (4.36)	5.67
Business & Economics	17 (20)	100 (95)	92	29 (55)	32	6.59 (4.9)	5.5
Physical Education	7 (11)	100 (91)	92	86 (30)	25	6.57 (6.18)	3.09
Leisure & Tourism	11	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	* (15.27)	10.06
Art & Design	11 (6)	100 (100)	96	36 (50)	46	5.27 (6.0)	6.57
Music	4 (1)	100 (100)	93	50 (100)	35	5.5 (10.0)	5.74
French	14 (10)	100 (100)	89	36 (30)	38	6.29 (4.8)	5.59
Chemistry	12 (4)	100 (100)	90	58 (0)	43	6.67 (4.5)	5.9
Design & Technology	12 (11)	100 (100)	91	33 (18)	30	5.83 (5.27)	5.38
Geography	18 (14)	100 (79)	92	17 (20)	38	5.22 (3.57)	5.74
History	10 (10)	100 (100)	88	60 (27)	35	7.4 (5.0)	5.45
Home Economics	4 (2)	100 (100)	83	50 (0)	28	6.5 (5.0)	4.73
Psychology	15 (13)	93 (100)	87	33 (46)	34	6.27 (6.62)	5.09
Sociology	7 (9)	100 (100)	*	0 (44)	*	4.57 (6.44)	*
Spanish	3 (6)	67 (100)	89	0 (17)	39	2.0 (4.0)	5.7
Communication Studies	11 (19)	100 (74)	93	18 (16)	31	5.64 (3.68)	5.53
Theatre Studies	8 (10)	100 (100)	99	87 (50)	38	8.25 (7.2)	6.59
English literature	7 (10)	100 (90)	95	29 (20)	37	5.43 (5.2)	5.91
English language	21 (25)	100 (96)	92	24 (12)	30	6.0 (4.24)	5.28

(Figures in brackets are for 2001)

\* figures not available

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### GCSE COURSES

80. The school provides re-sit courses in English language and mathematics. These courses were not inspected in detail because they are taken by relatively few students. Results on the GCSE mathematics resit course are good with the majority of students achieving the grade boost they are seeking.

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

81. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in mathematics, further mathematics, biology/human biology, chemistry and physics. The AS/A-level courses in mathematics and biology were inspected in detail, and human biology and physics were sampled.

82. Standards in chemistry are high - often well above the national average. Pass rates are regularly 100 per cent, and many students attain the highest grades. In 2002, both A and AS-level results were very good and almost all students met or exceeded their value-added targets. Results in physics vary: in 1999, the average grade was above the national average, while in 2001 it was well below it. A-level physics results in 2002 were very good, but those at AS-level were low and well below individual targets.

#### Mathematics

83. Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**, with some good features. Examination results are around the national average with some recent improvement, and teaching is now good.

#### **Strengths**

- A-level results have improved significantly this year and now match the national average; a high proportion of students re-sitting GCSE achieve the necessary grade improvement.
- Teaching, most of which is good or very good.
- The academic support for students, which enables them to understand their progress and to seek any help needed.
- The faculty is well managed and is developing practices to enhance staff contributions and promote collaborative working.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- A-level achievement does not yet reach the level of comparable schools nor quite realise students' potential.
- Students are not consistently engaged in asking questions and searching for the reason why something works.
- The faculty's development plan is not precise enough about the specific, achievable steps they are taking in order to achieve higher standards.

84. Mathematics AS- and A-level results have usually been around the national average since the last inspection. They dropped significantly in 2001, largely as a result of staffing problems, but have recovered well this year and are in line with the national average. The popularity of this course suffered following these poor results, but the number of appropriate recruits is much healthier in the present Year 12, and early information suggests bigger numbers next year.

85. Evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files confirms recent improvement and shows that standards are again at national average. In one lesson, the small Year 13 group struggled more than might have been expected with the idea of expressing a graphical relationship in parametric form. The content of students' well-organised and well-annotated files demonstrates balanced performances across the three strands of pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics. In lessons students' knowledge was a little insecure in the areas of graphical visualisation and reasoning. Algebraic manipulation was also a little painful and slow for some. Students in the GCSE retake group showed good recall of the main statistical ideas that they will need to apply in the data-handling coursework task that they are just starting to plan.

86. On the AS/A-level courses, most students are making satisfactory progress from their entry grades. All Year 13 seem likely to achieve their target grades, which range from B to D. A few students in the much larger and significantly livelier Year 12 group are achieving particularly well, given their relatively low prior attainment.

### **Quality of education**

87. Teaching is always at least satisfactory, and most is good or very good; this accounts for the current improvement in standards. Teaching is at its most effective when teachers take time to set new skills or processes within a meaningful context. For example, Year 12 were exploring the relevance of integration, previously met as the inverse process to differentiation, to the task of calculating total distance travelled, by examining a simple velocity against time graph. This nicely contrasted some knowledge and a method they previously knew with something different that could be a far more powerful approach.

88. In the best teaching, students were challenged to explain their thinking, often about why something works. This was effective because students found the classrooms safe for taking risks, and had sufficient, appropriate resources to enable communication of unrefined first thoughts and ideas. Such lessons also used collaborative groupwork well.

89. In the less effective lessons, teaching verged on lecturing, with students mainly taking a passive role, answering a few directed and closed questions during note-taking and then being helped individually as they undertook related practice examples. In these sessions, students' learning was limited by lack of interactions with peers, and sometimes with the teacher. Teachers are currently inconsistent in the way they involve students in lessons; more consistent expectations will foster even higher achievement.

90. Since the last inspection, the faculty has improved significantly the way it monitors the progress of students and sets and adjusts individual targets. Students now express appreciation for the way they are supported in understanding the structure of their courses, and how extra help is made available in both individual and group situations.

### **Leadership and management**

91. The mathematics faculty is well led and managed. Organisation of students into appropriate courses is efficient and responsibilities are well shared amongst a larger group of staff. Leadership has been effective in restoring both recruitment and standards of attainment at A-level. Collaborative efforts by staff to modify schemes of work have led to better understanding and higher performance by students; these should continue. Good attention to staff development, closely linked to classroom practice, has improved the quality of teaching since the last inspection.

92. Departmental documentation does not express clearly the faculty's and the school's strategies to raise standards further. The faculty improvement plan requires a tighter focus on a series of specific and achievable steps that will maintain recent improvements and help concentrate the team's attention on outcomes.

93. Access to ICT is currently adversely affecting some teaching and learning by limiting students' ability to visualise functions graphically.

## SCIENCE

94. The main focus was on biology, but physics and human biology were also sampled. Two sample lessons were observed – Year 12 physics and Year 12 human biology. In these lessons, the teaching was either good or very good. The Year 12 physics students showed sound knowledge and understanding of kinetic theory work, and were able to apply their scientific knowledge well to explain the principles involved in the construction of a thermometer. In the human biology lesson, the students showed a good understanding of previous work on the structure of cells. The teacher used a wide range of methods and modelling techniques to capture the students' interest during this theoretical introduction to mitosis.

### Biology

95. Provision in biology is **good**: teaching and learning are good and students achieve well in relation to their GCSE results.

#### **Strengths**

- Students achieve better results than might be expected from their GCSE results.
- Recruitment and retention are good.
- Teaching is good and leads to good learning.
- The subject is well led and managed.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- To train teachers to use the recently-purchased data logging equipment so that students can connect sensors to their experimental work.

## Standards and achievement

96. A-level results, although varying from year to year, have been around the national average. In 2001 the proportion of students who gained a pass grade and the highest grades, A and B, was average. This year, results were better and are likely to be above average when comparative data are available. A higher proportion of males take biology in this school than is the case nationally; both male and female students achieve well. Very few students have failed to complete the course, which is a compliment to the department for maintaining students' interest.

97. A/S-level results were above the national average both for the proportion who obtained the highest grades and for those who obtained a pass grade in 2001. This year, results were nearer the national average. The number of students choosing to study biology is usually quite high. The current drop in the numbers opting for biology in Year 12 is the result of staff changes which have now been resolved. Given the strength of the present teaching, recruitment to the subject should be restored. Biology is a cost-effective subject in the sixth form. A high proportion of those studying AS-level continues to A2, again reflecting well on

the department. In relation to their GCSE results, students achieve better than might be expected at both A/S and A-level; the department adds significant value.

98. The standard of work of current students is average for the course. Year 13 students showed expected knowledge and understanding of dominant and recessive genes, and were able to apply their knowledge well when considering the changes in allele frequency which occur during natural selection. Students in Year 12 have only just started their course and are achieving well. Their practical skills are well developed, which they demonstrated when finding the water potential of potato cells. In another lesson it became obvious that, for some of these students, attainment will be limited because of their weak numerical skills. In general, students' notes are of high quality, providing them with a very good record from which to revise.

### **Quality of education**

99. Teaching is good, and students learn well as a result. The principal strengths of the teaching are teachers' excellent biological knowledge and understanding, their careful planning and their use of a wide range of methods and resources to aid learning. Teachers provide students with sufficient opportunities to develop their basic skills of communication and numeracy. Until very recently, teachers have not been able to provide students with the opportunity to use data-logging equipment because there were insufficient sensors and computers. Some staff training will be required before the department can take full advantage of the recently-purchased equipment. It is very important, at this level, that students can link sensors to their experiments, enabling them to analyse the data from their experiments using computers. In the lessons seen, students learnt well because the teachers made high demands on them; the good teaching leads to good learning and above-average achievement.

100. Good lesson planning linked to imaginative teaching methods helps maintain students' interests. In one lesson about natural selection, Year 13 students learnt very well. Through her careful use of modelling, the teacher was able to transmit her enthusiasm for the subject to her students. She conducted the lesson at a good pace, with high expectations. In an assessed practical lesson, Year 12 students developed well their ability to follow instructions accurately, enabling them to obtain meaningful results when the experiment is finished. In this lesson, the teacher's clear time targets for the completion of each activity enabled the students to achieve a lot in the time. In another lesson, Year 12 students learnt well about the structure of the human gas-exchange system. The teacher used a wide range of methods and resources to make the lesson interesting. This is a strong team of teachers who can be proud of the work they do for their students.

101. Students show high levels of interest and respond well to the variety of teaching styles that they experience. The majority of students plan to study a biologically-related course at university - again further testimony of the way these teachers have been able to transmit their own enthusiasm for the subject to others.

### **Leadership and management**

102. The good provision for biology stems from good leadership and management. Usually two teachers share the teaching of a group. The four sixth form biology teachers meet regularly to plan the teaching programme and to share ideas. The new head of department has already established himself and is planning further improvements, in full discussion with the teaching team. One of the topics for discussion is whether the current examination board meets the needs of these students fully.



103. Since the last inspection standards have been maintained and the good teaching is leading to improvement. The use of specialist teachers in Years 10 and 11 continues to have a positive impact.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

104. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in design and technology and food technology; the latter has recruited small numbers in recent years. Neither course was inspected in detail.

105. Examination results in design and technology courses have been in line with to above the national average in recent years. AS-level results have included a sound proportion of top grades; the great majority of students meet their value-added targets. A-level results in 2002 were good. The small number of food technology/home economics students achieve very well.

## **BUSINESS**

106. Within this curriculum area, the school currently runs AS/A-level courses in business and economics, which were inspected in detail. Until 2001, the school provided an advanced vocational course in business: students studying this course achieved good results, well above the national average in 2001.

### **Business & Economics**

107. Provision in business education is **very good**: excellent planning combined with innovative teaching lead to above-average standards.

#### **Strengths**

- Results at A/AS-level are above average, often well above.
- Departmental planning is excellent.
- Teachers use a range of innovatory teaching methods which ensure that lessons are stimulating and very effective.
- Teachers have excellent relationships with their students, ensuring that difficulties in learning are quickly tackled.
- Assessment, marking and feedback are detailed and of a very high standard.
- The course prepares students well for lifelong learning by developing their investigative skills.

#### **Areas for development**

- Lack of clarity of intended learning outcomes and insufficient opportunities for whole-class discussions limit learning in some lessons.

## **Standards and achievement**

108. The economics/business A-level is now one of the most popular options in the sixth form and results since the last inspection have been very high. All students have passed in three of the last four years and the proportion gaining A or B grades rose to 30 per cent in 2002. National comparisons are difficult because the students now take the combined economics and business course, which was examined for the first time in 2002. These results are good; male and female students achieve equally well.

109. Evidence from work seen in lessons and in files during the inspection shows that standards are usually high and are always above average. Business skills are a strength and students show flair and confidence when applying business concepts and theory to real-world situations. The best students were able critically to evaluate the value of different motivational theorists to understanding human resource management in local businesses. Course work has given the opportunity for able students to show good insights into the effects of American ownership of film distributors on the fortunes of European filmmakers. Although first-year students showed good progress in understanding how demand and supply can determine the distribution of resources, there was less evidence of their use of economic theory in understanding contemporary economic issues. Thus, they had to be prompted to see the links between low standards of living in developing countries and dependence on the export of commodities such as coffee to large transnational corporations. Students use ICT well and are very willing to contribute to teacher-led class discussions. Homework is promptly completed. All students, whether or not they have studied business or economics before, make good progress in their learning and achieve well.

### **Quality of education**

110. Teaching is always at least good and much of it is very good. Planning for all classes is meticulous. Schemes of work and lesson plans are working documents and teachers are constantly looking for new approaches to improve standards further. Teachers use stimulus materials extremely well by making them accessible to students, and then expecting them to research and contribute additional material. This process is started early, as students are required to build up a file of key economics and business events in the summer holiday before their course starts. The best efforts are rewarded with specially-produced certificates. This helps set the high expectations of students' involvement for the rest of the course, and they respond well to these challenges. Handouts used to support student learning are another example of excellent practice: teachers ensure that students have to modify and develop prepared materials, ensuring that learning in lessons is conducted at a brisk pace and time is not wasted in note-taking or other less productive activities.

111. The marking and assessment of students' work are excellent. Feedback, both written and oral, is very detailed, and individual students are given clear guidance as to what they need to do to improve their performance. Teachers of economics/business have developed excellent relationships with the students, who were open and mature when requesting help or guidance.

112. Learning in some lessons is limited, for two reasons:

- the intended learning outcomes of these lessons are unclear. For example, in an otherwise very well-planned lesson on business ethics, it was hard to determine what students were required to learn – the possible conflict between business objectives and ethical practice, the failure of the market system in ignoring ethical considerations or the importance of ethical considerations in everyday life?
- insufficient attention is paid to extending and developing students' oral contributions, and to whole-class discussion. Teacher questioning of individual students was preferred.

### **Leadership and management**

113. Leadership and management of business and economics, which forms part of a larger faculty, are excellent and have led to very good improvement in recent years. There is a high level of collaboration between teachers, and a constant drive to improve. Departmental improvement planning is excellent. Realistic yet challenging targets are set, success criteria and deadlines are precise and the resource implications are clearly

identified. Teachers take advantage of in-service training opportunities provided by the awarding bodies but links with other post-16 institutions could be developed further.

114. Some of the accommodation used for economics/business is excellent. The large teaching room is used in many different ways and staff and students have worked hard to create an interesting and stimulating base for study. The department shares a building with the ICT department and this makes access to computers relatively easy.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

115. Within this curriculum area, the school runs the A/AS-level IT courses, which were inspected in detail.

### **Information and Communication Technology**

116. Provision for AS/A-level ICT is **excellent**: examination results are consistently above the national average, teaching is very good and there is rapid improvement.

#### **Strengths**

- Standards in AS/A-level are well above average.
- Students make excellent progress in coursework.
- Teaching is very good: lessons are well prepared and move at a brisk pace.
- Clear guidance is given to students, enabling them to gain high grades.
- Relationships between teachers and students are friendly and enable the teachers to motivate students to higher levels.
- Teachers are aware of the value added targets and use them effectively.
- Leadership is excellent and there are excellent relationships within the department.
- Technical support systems are very good and excellent use is made of ICT resources.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Some sixth form students do not have the opportunity to gain certification to show their competence beyond GCSE.

## **Standards and achievement**

117. Results in AS-level examinations, which were introduced for the first time in 2001, are well above the national average. All students achieved at least a pass grade and over 90 per cent achieved grades A - C.

118. Evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' coursework during the inspection confirms that standards are well above the national average. The highest-attaining students are able to make excellent use of the software packages available, using complex functions in spreadsheets and HTML code.

119. Students are highly motivated and have the confidence to tackle new techniques such as adding verification functions into Excel spreadsheets. Teachers are aware of the value added targets set for each student and make special arrangements for assisting those students who are falling behind target.

## **Quality of education**

120. Teaching is invariably very good. Students are set work which builds confidence in the less able while providing extended opportunities for the more able. The teachers' knowledge of ICT enables them to use technical terms with confidence and use anecdotes to build a more realistic environment for learning.

121. Lessons are very well planned with a good range of activities and are conducted at a brisk pace. Opportunities for learning are enhanced by the very good range of software and hardware available. Students may use the ICT area outside lesson times to continue their coursework or increase their ICT skills. Homework is well used and enables students to use their own initiative to complete their work.

122. Teachers know the value added targets set for each student, and make effective use of them to motivate students to achieve their best.

123. Teachers have established a very good relationship with students, enabling the latter to interact positively within lessons and remain highly motivated. Students are keen and enthusiastic to be involved in practical work.

## **Leadership and management**

124. An extremely competent manager who has vision and purpose leads the ICT department. He has an excellent working relationship with his colleagues, including the ICT technician. As a result, the school has excellent ICT facilities that are reliable and well maintained. Plans are in place to build more networked ICT classrooms to cater for increased numbers of students.

125. Although sixth form students in general (not just those studying the subject to examination level) have high levels of ICT competence, some do not have the opportunity to gain certification to show their competence beyond their GCSE qualifications.

126. Since the last inspection, the head of department has ensured that high standards have been achieved and that the school has the infrastructure to build upon a highly successful resource. Information and communication technology across the school was a key issue in the last inspection; improvement since that time has been excellent.

## HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

127. Within this curriculum area, the school currently runs the AS/A-level course in physical education, and the advanced-level vocational courses in leisure and recreation and travel and tourism (which was inspected in detail). Results in the physical education courses have been very good: both the pass rate and the proportion of higher-level grades have been well above the national average, and almost all students met or exceeded their value-added targets.

### Leisure & Recreation, Travel & Tourism

128. Provision for leisure and recreation and travel and tourism is **very good**: results are well above average as a result of very good teaching and leadership.

#### **Strengths**

- Attainment, which is well above average.
- Achievement, which is good and raises students' aspirations.
- Teaching, which is most often very good and supports the development of independent learning.
- Leadership and management, which are very good.
- Opportunities, which provide students with visits to local, national and international leisure facilities.
- Marking, which is helpful and informative and allows students to improve their final assignments.
- Very good relationships, which support learning.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Monitoring of students' files, which does not consistently ensure that students have a correct and complete learning resource.
- Lack of computers in the subject's scattered teaching bases, which limits the students' opportunities for independent research and learning.

### **Standards and achievement**

129. In 2001, 11 students entered the advanced-level GNVQ leisure and tourism examination and all students gained either a distinction or merit. The Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) was introduced in 2000. The first group of students took the leisure and recreation and travel and tourism examinations in 2002 and attained above-average results. All students passed the examinations and over 20 per cent gained A or B grades in travel and tourism. Over time, the majority of students have attained results above those expected from their GCSE scores and their achievement has been good. In 2002, one student who gained very low grades at GCSE attained a C grade in AVCE leisure and recreation. Male and female students achieve equally well.

130. The standards reached by current students in Year 13, as seen in lessons and in their written portfolios, are above average. Students have developed a very good knowledge about organising an event through their own practical involvement and they record all the publicity and procedures accurately in their portfolios. When discussing their observations of customer care, students' responses were lively, accurate and well thought out. Students know how to obtain evidence from a variety of sources to meet the criteria for the units and they use ICT very well to research information and to present their findings. Students in Year 12 have gained a very good understanding of human resources from their visit to a local health centre. They have produced handouts on specific aspects of the visit but, at this early

stage of the courses, they lack confidence when presenting information to others in the group. They are not yet secure in their knowledge about how to build their portfolios in some units.

### **Quality of education**

131. Teaching is very good. Most teachers have experience in teaching vocational courses and have a good local knowledge that allows students' questions to be dealt with effectively. They undertake regular training and this leads to students receiving very good quality guidance when planning their work to meet the required criteria. Planning is thorough and students are given up-to-date specifications and assignment evidence criteria for each unit. Lesson objectives are outlined at the start of each lesson so that all students know what they are expected to do. Evidence from completed assignments shows that teachers give detailed comments, enabling the students to improve their work. However, students' files are insufficiently monitored to ensure they provide students with a high standard learning resource for the future. The use of guidance sheets and assignment feedback sheets to give written information to students is not consistent throughout the department.

132. Visits to leisure facilities and talks from leisure professionals are organised and these extend students' experiences and bring real examples to their learning. These initiatives and visits are very effective in raising standards because they provide students with a very good base for their learning. Very good use is made of subject-specific vocabulary. In one lesson, students were asked to rewrite phrases using key words and a more formal vocabulary. Students really appreciate the amount of time and help given to them by their teachers. The majority of students in both years are interested in the leisure industry as a career and wish to pursue associated training or university courses in the future.

133. In one lesson where the teacher did not relate the task sufficiently to the final assignment, students' learning was hindered by their lack of knowledge about the required outcome. However, very good teaching and relationships have built positive attitudes and students gain the confidence to work individually on their assignments and learn very well.

### **Leadership and management**

134. The subject is very well led and managed. There is a good induction handbook produced by previous students that helps prospective students to understand the courses. Schemes of work for each unit indicate the school's objectives, visits, resources and teaching approaches. The head of department has excellent organisational skills that have promoted a very successful start to these vocational courses which are very appropriate for students living in the tourist area in which the school is situated; leadership for improvement is very good.

135. Accommodation for the subject is unsatisfactory because the teaching is spread over different rooms in the school and the movement of equipment, books and audio visual aids is difficult and time consuming. In the majority of these rooms there are no computers. This limits how some topics are taught and has a negative effect on students' learning. Students report that it is hard to gain access to computers for independent study.

## HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

136. Currently, two students are following the advanced health and social care course. Results on this course have generally been above the national average, with high rates of completion and a high proportion of merit and distinction awards. An intermediate-level course is likely to be introduced in the next two years.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

137. The school provides courses to AS/A-level courses in art, drama (theatre studies) and music. The music courses were inspected in detail.

138. Standards in theatre studies are high; results in the A-level course have been above the national average for several years, and a very high proportion of students achieves the highest grades. Numbers studying art to AS/A-level have been small, and results generally good; the pass rate has been 100 per cent for several years. Until 2001, the school provided an advanced vocational course in art and design: students studying this course achieved results above the national average.

### Music

139. Provision in music is **very good**: standards are above average, teaching is very good and the subject is growing in popularity.

#### **Strengths**

- The very good teaching, which is raising standards in all aspects of the course.
- The leadership and management of the department, which provides a clear direction for the subject.
- The quality of the department's procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress, which provides a solid base for improvement.
- The significant increase in the number of pupils entering GCSE, which is contributing to the growing number of students opting for the AS/A-level examination course.
- The significant number of sixth form students receiving instrumental tuition and participating in extra-curricular activities, which enhance the music education programme in the school.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- The use of ICT is insufficient to improve students' work in music technology.

## Standards and achievement

140. Standards in the sixth form are good: results in AS-level have been average, and those in A-level, above average. The department has a good record of examination results, which have been consistently above the national average over the last few years, and which represent an improvement from the standards noted at the time of the last inspection. The number of students taking the examination has been low but has increased significantly in the last two years.

141. In lessons observed and in the review of coursework, which includes an analysis of students' recordings of their performances and compositions and a scrutiny of their written work, standards are above average. In Year 12, standards are above average for students at this stage of their course of study. All-round musical skills are developing well. Performing skills are generally good, as exemplified in a lesson where the group was presenting their

performances and where one student's guitar playing was of high quality. Composing skills are also developing well: a number of the students produce convincing compositions. Written work is in the early stages of development for this course, but notes are generally well organised and, through careful marking, students are able to identify how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

142. In Year 13, students attain standards that are average for the performing element of their coursework. They are confident in performance, and the more musically-able display flair and imagination in their interpretation of pieces. Composing skills are above average, and most students can demonstrate the ability to communicate the musical intentions of their compositions well. The development of the students' musical understanding through engaged listening skills is good and was well demonstrated in a lesson where they discussed features of the baroque period and were required to analyse a Bach chorale and write in this style. Their understanding of harmony was supported and enhanced by their singing, in parts, of the chorale.

### **Quality of Education**

143. Both teaching and learning are very good. In the lessons observed, teaching had a very positive impact on the students' learning. The strengths of the teaching are the teachers' subject knowledge, which is reflected in careful planning and in the clear objectives and good exposition of the material to be learnt. Lessons have good pace and there are high expectations of the students, with considerable musical demands made of them. Students consolidate and develop their own learning well; in Year 12, for example, through individual and shared performances, students analysed their own and each other's work and improved their work as a result of practice within the lesson. They show good initiative, and their independent learning skills are developing very well through the use of good self-study material, which is well designed to support and enhance their learning. Students are consistently interested in their course and they work with high levels of sustained concentration. They work hard, at a good pace. The key skills of communication, improving their own performance, problem solving and working together are well developed. Information and communication technology skills, especially those of music technology, are less well developed.

144. Students display very positive attitudes to music. In both Years 12 and 13 all the students are keen and interested in their work. They have very good relationships with each other and with their teachers. They respect each other's views, especially in the Year 12 lesson where students sensitively evaluated their own and other's performances.

### **Leadership and Management**

145. The leadership and management of the sixth form music course are very good. There is a clear vision and direction for the subject, and AS/A-level work now builds effectively upon the practice in Years 7 to 9 and at GCSE. A strength of the department lies in how well it assesses students' performance. Regular assessment, individual targets, the recording of students' work and a careful analysis of recent examination results provides a good focus for improvement. There are insufficient opportunities for the students to undertake their own written evaluations.

146. Since 2000, there has been a significant increase, year-on-year, in the number of students taking the GCSE examination. This is beginning to impact on the number opting for AS/A-level courses. The department also caters for a comparatively large number of sixth form students who continue to receive instrumental tuition and who take part in the rich



variety of extra-curricular musical activities in the school. This contributes to the success of the music education programme in the school.

147. An area for development is in the use of ICT, where the department needs to improve the practice of music technology, through the use of computers and sequencing and notation software, to enable the students to develop their ICT skills more effectively, thereby to enhance and support their musical learning. New accommodation, to be brought into use in 2003, will provide a music technology suite with state-of-the-art facilities.

## **HUMANITIES**

148. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in history (which was inspected in detail), sociology, geography and psychology. A philosophy and ethics AS/A-level course has recently begun, but no candidates have yet reached examination.

149. Provision in geography was sampled and is improving rapidly. Teaching is very good with some that is excellent. Results have varied: pass rates have been high, but the proportion achieving the highest grades has been low in recent years. Sociology results at AS-level improved considerably in 2002: all students passed, almost all at the higher grades. Relatively small numbers of students enter for A-level: again all pass, but the proportion achieving the higher grades varies - it was high in 2001, but low in 2002. Psychology is increasingly popular and students achieve good results, both in pass rate and the proportion of high grades; most meet or exceed their target grades.

### **History**

150. Provision in history is **good**: standards, teaching and leadership are all of a good standard.

#### **Strengths**

- Good standards by the end of Year 13.
- Good teaching, leading to good learning, especially the acquisition of independent learning skills.
- Good leadership and management, especially in adapting to the requirements of relatively new courses.
- Very good student attitudes, which contribute to good learning.
- Very good assessment, which gives students a clear picture of how well they are doing and how they can improve.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Ensuring a more consistent approach to the development of independent learning skills across the department.
- Improving students' access to ICT to assist independent learning.

### **Standards and achievement**

151. In 2001 the percentage of Year 13 students achieving the higher grades in the A-level examination was close to the national average. These results represented a decline on the trend of the previous two years, although relatively few students took the examination during this period. The results for A-level history in 2002 were above the provisional national average. The AS-level examinations taken by Year 12 students in 2001 produced good

results. The results were lower in 2002, but these were subject to appeal at the time of the inspection. Students achieve particularly well in relation to their GCSE results.

152. The inspection showed that standards of students by the end of Year 13 are high in several key areas: knowledge and understanding of the selected topics of study, the skills of analysis and evaluation of a range of evidence, and the ability to communicate effectively. This represents good achievement for both male and female students in terms of their prior attainment.

153. Students show a good level of knowledge and understanding of the background to the English Civil War and key issues in Russian history both before and after the 1917 Revolutions. They make good progress in learning to analyse the short- and long-term causes of the crisis of monarchy in seventeenth-century England. Particularly impressive is students' ability to analyse and assess a range of interpretations, for example of the reasons for Stalin's rise to power in the 1920s. Students learn good research skills and enjoy the opportunity to discuss topics like Napoleon's influence on post-revolutionary France, thereby increasing their confidence as well as their understanding. They also acquire a good range of historical terminology.

### **Quality of education**

154. Teaching in history is good, with some which is very good. The most effective teaching occurs when teachers encourage good collaborative and individual learning, which contributes both to students' personal development and to improving their skills as historians. For example, the use of role play in a Year 12 lesson examining Russia's foreign policy on the eve of the 1905 Revolution helped to give students a good empathetic understanding of the complexities of international diplomacy. Good active learning was also observed in a Year 13 lesson in which students made presentations following research into Napoleon's domestic policy. In these lessons, teachers also used focused questioning effectively to further students' understanding of complex issues. They gave due attention to increasing students' understanding of historical terminology, and gave very good feedback to students on how they could improve the quality of their historical writing and meet assessment objectives more precisely. Where teaching is less effective and students are less motivated, the good teaching practice is not applied consistently: then the activities are more teacher centred and there is less emphasis on student initiative. However, students' attitudes are very positive overall and their active participation in lessons is an important factor contributing to good standards.

### **Leadership and management**

155. Leadership and management in history are good. The department has adapted well to the demands of relatively new syllabuses and has developed schemes of work and approaches accordingly. Teachers have had good professional development to help them implement these changes. Students' enjoyment of the subject is enhanced through the provision of visits such as the recent one to Russia. The quality of assessment is very good: detailed assessment leads to the setting of realistic targets, which in turn have a good impact on motivation and attainment. The department makes a good contribution to moral and social provision, for example by discussing issues of freedom and the role of individuals in authoritarian societies as developed under twentieth century dictatorships. The use of ICT is relatively undeveloped: although many students use it as a research tool and to present their work, access to computing facilities is often restricted.

156. Standards, achievement and positive student attitudes were good at the time of the

previous inspection and they remain so, with some improvement. The maintenance of these strengths, and the success in adapting to the demands of new syllabuses, means that there has been good improvement in history since the previous inspection.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

157. In this curriculum area, the school provides courses to AS/A-level in English language and literature and in French, both of which were inspected in detail; in Spanish, which was sampled, and in communication.

158. The school has traditionally offered the English Language & Literature course. In view of the relatively low numbers, the school decided to concentrate its efforts on English Literature from September 2001.

159. Students on the communication course achieve good results; pass rates at both A and AS-level have generally been high in recent years. Provision in Spanish is unsatisfactory: pass rates and grade quality, even for the small numbers who choose the subject, are both low, and relatively few students meet their target grades.

### **English**

160. Provision in English is **very good**: standards are high and teaching, leadership and management are very good.

#### **Strengths**

- Results are good at both AS and A-level for both male and female students.
- Students achieve well: many reach very good standards in their writing and handle the terminology of literary and linguistic criticism to good effect.
- Teaching is very well planned and teachers know their subject very well. Use is made of a very wide range of teaching activities, some of them exciting, and the pace is very good.
- Students learn very well; they work together very well in groups.
- The subject is led and managed very well.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- The inconsistent use of two marking grades causes confusion.
- Not all students have developed their skills of independent learning.
- There is no English-specific ICT material and little evidence of the use of ICT.

### **Standards and achievement**

161. Since the introduction of AS-level, all students have passed, with a high proportion achieving higher grades. Results in A-level, on both the joint language and literature and the single literature courses, have been above average in recent years: pass rates have been very high and the proportion achieving the highest grades, although it has fluctuated, has been high overall. Male and female students have achieved equally well.

162. The scrutiny of students' written work during inspection shows that the standards across all groups are well above average. Students are able to use the vocabulary, structures and grammar of Standard English accurately in formal and informal situations. They are able to comment on literary techniques, such as writers' use of figurative language, and linguistic frameworks with confidence. In addition, they are becoming familiar with a wider range of literature including Shakespeare, Jane Gardam and Toni Morrison. In Year 13,

students produce sensitive and scholarly analyses of the poetry of Blake together with analyses of the themes, motifs and symbols in 'Beloved'. There is some very good work which makes a comparative analysis of the presentation of Viola in Trevor Nunn's version of 'Twelfth Night' and the students' own interpretation from the text.

163. Standards in students' use of spoken English, particularly in the class observed in Year 12, are outstanding. Here, during a hot-seat activity linked with 'Death of a Salesman', all students spoke at length and with confident knowledge, either as Linda, the character in the hot seat, or as her interrogator. They responded very well to the excellent pace of the lesson, produced their own speeches, analysed two short video extracts from different versions of the play and worked at all times constructively together in controlled groups. At no time did anyone drift off task. In Year 13, most students spoke with real poise and confidence, seeking to develop mastery of a wider specialist and general vocabulary, notably in discussions about 'Beloved' and 'Snow Falling on Cedars'. However, in some sessions, those students who spoke made accurate but limited responses and there is some scope for developing strategies to encourage everyone to participate.

164. Attitudes to English are very positive, with students speaking warmly of their enjoyment of the subject. Students have very good working relationships with their teachers and each other, the majority of groups sharing their ideas with great generosity and courtesy. In a small minority of classes, however, there is little real attempt at communication, either with the teacher or the rest of the class; in these classes, one or two students drift from the task set.

### **Quality of Education**

165. In both Year 12 and Year 13, the quality of learning is, in the majority of cases, very good. For the most part, students work very hard, at a very good pace and most can, or are learning to, work independently. They show real interest and most, particularly in Year 12, are able to draw out relatively sophisticated concepts. They demonstrate an above-average understanding of the assessment objectives and linguistic frameworks as well as the texts. This success is the result of the very good-quality teaching, which in all cases is marked by teachers' very good subject knowledge and their very carefully-considered planning. At its best, teaching is inspirational, of an excellent pace and with an excellent range of teaching strategies. All teachers cater for the variety of learning needs within classes by controlling how students work together and the different learning tasks each group needs. In a small minority of cases students should be helped to develop more independent learning styles.

166. Teachers give students detailed and constructive feedback. Clear individual targets are set at the end of essays and literacy is corrected. However, the practice of giving two sets of grades/marks with a grade for Exceeding Target/On Target/Underachieving (ETU) together with an AS/A-level grade is inconsistently applied, and this may explain students' difficulties in understanding its significance.

167. There are good enrichment activities, such as visits to the theatre to see productions such as 'An Inspector Calls' and 'Hard Times', as well as support conferences and seminars in London and creative writing days at a local manor house, Upton House, using the house and grounds for inspiration. The department has initiated a paired reading scheme, in which 40 sixth formers work with 40 Year 7 students to improve reading. The students have had training for this from the LEA and the activity contributes to students' Duke of Edinburgh awards as well as their personal skills and confidence.

## Leadership and management

168. The leadership and management of the department are very good, and have led to steady improvement since the last inspection. Management is especially important at the moment, since there are several new members of the team including two newly-qualified teachers. The team is supported through:

- fortnightly, minuted team meetings;
- a very good subject improvement plan that includes timescales, monitoring, costs and training requirements;
- a very good marking policy that includes examples of encouragement and possible new targets;
- policies also include a 'Dealing with Unacceptable Behaviour';
- sharing examples of good practice in the team;
- the many shared resources in the team base room.

The quality of teaching shows that these strategies are proving effective.

169. The English department is housed in a series of elderly huts. These do not provide an environment conducive to effective learning. However, despite the poor environment, the teaching rooms are welcoming. They have good displays of students' work in support of, and to reinforce, learning, and include literary terminology such as 'enjambment', 'metre', 'figurative language'.

170. There is a very good selection of English stock in the library specifically for sixth form use. This includes a wide selection of fiction by classical writers such as Dickens, Chekhov and Conrad as well as modern writing, some from other cultures, by authors such as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Bernard Malamud and Naguib Mahfouz.

171. The department makes little use of ICT. Sessions are occasionally booked in the new ICT block and English students make use of Microsoft Office and Desktop Publishing. There is currently no English-specific software in the school.

## French

172. Provision in French is **good**: examination results show a clear, upward trend over the last three years. Teaching is good and students respond well.

### **Strengths**

- Standards in French at A-level have improved considerably over the last three years at the same time as numbers of candidates have increased.
- At AS-level, a high percentage of students have achieved top grades.
- Standards in work seen are good, particularly in writing.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic proficiency are very good.
- Very good use is made of ICT and visits to France.
- The quantity and quality of up-to-date and authentic resources are excellent.

### **Areas for improvement**

- The percentage of students obtaining top grades at A-level has decreased since the last inspection and are below the national average.
- Language acquisition concentrates on quantity at the expense of re-manipulation in new contexts. Students become over-reliant on teacher input.

- Students' ability to speak independently in French, including natural communication with their teachers, falls some way short of what it might be.

### **Standards and achievement**

173. Over the last three years, all students entered for A-level French have passed. At the same time, the number of candidates has risen from four in 2000 to 14 in 2002. The proportion of candidates achieving grades A and B has increased from none in 2000 to 36 per cent in 2002. While this is just below the national average, and not as good as at the time of the previous inspection, it represents a clear and encouraging upward trend. Also, in 2002, of those students achieving below the top two grades, a large number were awarded grade C.

174. At AS-level, in 2001 and 2002, all students passed. At well over 40 per cent in both years, the proportion of candidates achieving grade A or B was well above national averages.

175. Evidence from work seen in lessons and in students' files during the inspection shows that standards are at least in line with expectations and often better: this represents good achievement. Writing is particularly strong: students write at length in French in a way that is marked by care, accuracy and a pleasing fluency, although integration of varied mood and complex tenses is limited. Listening skills are well developed as students understand fully and respond to their teachers' maximum use of the foreign language. Reading, frequently of recent authentic material, is good, with students well versed in comprehension practice. Students' ability to speak in French is quite good. However, they communicate with their teachers in English rather than French and they are generally reluctant to speak independently other than in closely-prepared situations.

176. Overall, students' progress is good and they achieve well. They demonstrate a very good base of vocabulary and lexis. They are generally at ease with the language, enjoy studying it and do so with commendable intellectual application. Positive attitudes towards learning French were unanimously declared by the students themselves; indeed, they appreciate everything about their experience of French.

### **Quality of education**

177. In the sixth form, the teaching of French is good. There is a very close correlation between the quality of the teaching and the learning and progress made by the students.

178. Teachers' linguistic proficiency is good, including native speaker standard. In the classroom, teachers use French to the maximum. The pace of the well-planned lessons is purposeful and students are kept working throughout. Frequent use is made of up-to-date, authentic materials from the French press and internet; this is greatly appreciated by the students. Relationships are good and the degree of challenge is appropriate to advanced-level work. Homework is particularly well used as a medium for improvement. Work is regularly marked and sensibly corrected, but it is the use of copious and detailed comments, supplemented by genuine praise and encouragement, which is extremely useful in guiding students forward. This is very good practice and, again, is an aspect of provision which students appreciate.

179. There is on occasion a tendency for teachers to feed students with too much vocabulary and language build-up. Such concentration on quantity leads students to be over-reliant on the teacher at the expense of the re-manipulation of language in new contexts.

180. Students show positive attitudes to their work and their teachers; they are quiet, attentive and concentrate well.

181. While students *are* on occasion challenged to speak for themselves, this is an area that can be developed much further. Students' ability to speak independently, in open-ended situations, does not match their skills in writing. More opportunities can be offered for students to practise speaking the language for themselves, in less heavily-prepared situations, so as to take more responsibility for their own linguistic development.

182. The use of ICT is a salient feature of the French syllabus: it is well integrated into the teaching and learning programme, often in innovative ways. Nearly all students benefit from the strong exchange links with France.

### **Leadership and management**

183. Although the head of department does not teach sixth-form French, he retains an effective overview of the educational direction of the department as a whole.

184. The senior A-level French teacher has developed the schemes of work, as well as building a massive bank of materials, including the provision for each student of a CD-Rom containing more than 1000 pages and link addresses to numerous French internet sites.

185. Schemes of work are thorough and include clearly-delineated teaching responsibilities where two teachers share the same group. Monitoring of students' progress against set targets is exemplary. Resources for sixth-form French are excellent, both in terms of quantity and quality of immediacy and authenticity.