

INSPECTION REPORT

QUEEN MARY'S HIGH SCHOOL

Walsall

LEA area: Walsall

Unique reference number: 104261

Headteacher: Mrs D F Woods

Reporting inspector: Mr D Driscoll
11933

Dates of inspection: 18th – 22nd February 2002

Inspection number: 192424

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

© Crown copyright 2002

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range of students:	11 – 18
Gender of students:	Girls
School address:	Upper Forster Street Walsall WS4 2AE
Telephone number:	01922 721013
Fax number:	01922 632387
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Vivian M Fairbank
Date of previous inspection:	11 th November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
11933	D Driscoll	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and student's achievements.</p> <p>How well are the students taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
9086	R Watkins	Lay inspector		<p>Students' attitudes, values & personal development.</p> <p>How well does the school care for its students?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with its parents?</p>
22411	A Axon	Team inspector	Mathematics	
19596	B Treacy	Team inspector	English English as an additional language	
4145	C Harrison	Team inspector	Science	
10297	D Cox	Co-ordinator for the sixth form	Design and technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities?
17868	E Metcalfe	Team inspector	Religious education Equal opportunities	
18542	G Griffin	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
15462	C Blakemore	Team inspector	Geography	
15832	J Vanstone	Team inspector	History	

19905	I Kirby	Team inspector	Music	
12985	S Jeffray	Team inspector	Physical education	
2597	C Jackson	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
20124	J Peach	Team inspector	German Spanish	
4689	M Christian	Team inspector	Art and design	
4829	I Waters	Team inspector	French	
17278	B Abrams	Team inspector	Chemistry	
31100	G Hunter	Team inspector	Latin	

The inspection contractor was:

Independent School Inspection Services (ISIS)

15 The Birches
Bramhope
LEEDS
LS16 9DP

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

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7 - 13
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	
Students' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
 ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	14 - 19
The school's results and students' achievements	
Students' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?	19 - 23
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?	23 - 28
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?	28 - 32
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	32 - 33
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	33 - 37
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	38
 PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	 39 - 43
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	44 - 74
PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	75 - 99

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Queen Mary's High School is a smaller than average grammar school educating girls between the ages of 11 and 18. A small number of boys join the school in Year 12; there are currently 19 boys in the sixth form. Of the 717 students at the school, 242 are in the sixth form. The students come from a very wide area, but overall, the socio-economic circumstances of the students are well above average. The students come from a rich mix of ethnic backgrounds. Around 62 per cent are white, with 24 per cent from Indian or Sri Lankan backgrounds and much smaller proportions of students from Black-Caribbean, Pakistani and Chinese backgrounds. In total, there are 163 students who come from homes where English is an additional language, which is a high proportion. All of these students are, however, completely fluent in English.

The attainment of students on entry to the school in Year 7 is very high, although attainment in English and mathematics is significantly better than in science. The students' practical skills are lower than their general academic attainment, being much closer to the national average, particularly in subjects such as art and design, design and technology and physical education. Attainment on entry to the sixth form is very high. There are seven students with special educational needs, a well below average proportion, and none has a statement of special educational need. Most students with special educational needs are dyslexic. The school is a specialist college for the teaching of foreign languages, a designated International School and part of the Walsall Local Education Authority 'Excellence in Clusters' scheme.

The school is extremely popular with parents and there are far more students wishing to join the school than there are places available.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school. Standards are very high because the very good teaching, together with the students' excellent attitudes, is leading to students achieving very well. The school is very well led and managed, so it is improving rapidly; even the areas for improvement noted below are not weaknesses, simply areas that could be even better. The school provides very good value for money and the sixth form is very cost effective.

What the school does well

- The very good quality teaching is leading to students achieving very well and leaving the school with results that are very high.
- The school is a shining example of what can be achieved by a school with specialist status.
- The excellent leadership provided by the headteacher is ensuring that standards are rising rapidly, despite already being very high.
- The students' excellent attitudes to their work play a most significant part in their very good achievement.
- The school provides very well for students' personal development and they leave as mature and responsible members of society.

What could be improved

- The teaching in Years 7 to 9 is not as good as that in the rest of the school.
- The provision for students who are particularly gifted and talented is at an early stage of development.
- A few teachers do not make enough of students' excellent attitudes to their work by sufficiently involving them in the lessons.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good progress since it was last inspected in November 1996. The quality of teaching and learning has improved significantly. As a result, standards at GCSE have improved at a rate that is above the national average and last year's A-level results were among the best in the school's history. All the three main weaknesses identified at the time of the last inspection, marking, assessment and the quality of middle management, have been dealt with very successfully and all are now at least good.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A*	A*	A*	

Key	
very high	A
well above average	*
	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Standards at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13 are all very high and place the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Standards of numeracy and literacy are very high, as are all other aspects of students' performance other than their practical skills, which are slightly lower, as they are on entry to the school. Results in the National Curriculum tests have improved at a rate that is slightly below the national average, but GCSE results have improved at a much faster rate than that seen nationally over the past four years. Students performed particularly well in religious education and foreign languages in 2001, but under-performed in physics. Results at A-level have also improved significantly and those in 2001 were among the best in the school's history. The best results were in information and communication technology and the foreign language-based general studies courses. Students did not perform as well as they should have in English literature, history and physics.

Students achieve well in most subjects in Years 7 to 9; they do particularly well in design and technology, history, Latin and religious education but only do as well as expected in music. Achievement is very good in Years 10 and 11 and is at least good in all subjects except physical education where it is satisfactory. Achievement in the foreign languages is exceptionally good in all of Years 7 to 11. Students achieve very well in the sixth form. Achievement is at least good in all subjects except design and technology, English and physics, where it is satisfactory.

The school sets appropriately challenging targets for its performance and is successful in meeting or exceeding them.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Students show an enthusiasm for learning and for hard work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. The worst that occurs is the occasional petty squabble and, as a result, exclusion is very rare indeed.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Students work together happily and leave the school as mature young adults.
Attendance	Excellent. The attendance rate is very high with no unauthorised absence.

Students show a great enthusiasm for school and to do well. They behave very well, not because of a fear of punishment but because they appreciate the impact that their actions will have on others. They are interested in the views of others and there is a singular lack of any form of oppressive behaviour. They readily accept responsibility and demonstrate an excellent degree of initiative.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13

Quality of teaching	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; virtually all lessons were at least satisfactory while 41 per cent were very good or excellent. The teaching across the school meets the needs of these high attaining students very well. Teaching is better in Years 10 to 13 than in Years 7 to 9 because there is more specialist teaching and the need to prepare students for examinations adds a degree of urgency to the teaching. Where the examination is brought forward, such as to the end of Year 9 in foreign languages, the same high quality teaching becomes evident in the lower school.

In Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning is satisfactory in music and good in all other subjects except design and technology, religious education and all the foreign languages where it is very good. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning is good in all subjects except geography, history, mathematics, physical education, religious education and all the foreign languages where teaching is very good. Throughout the school, the skills of numeracy and literacy are taught well.

Students put immense amounts of effort into their work and concentrate hard at all times. The best lessons take advantage of students' excellent attitudes by involving the students completely. Overall, students make very good gains in their knowledge, skills and understanding.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. The curriculum has good breadth, but more could be done for those students who are particularly gifted and talented. The curriculum in the sixth form meets the needs of the students very well.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. The students experience the same curriculum as others and make similarly very good progress.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Very good. There has been one student who has joined the school in the recent past who was at an early stage of learning English. She received two hours extra support every day and is now totally fluent.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Very good. The provision for students' spiritual, moral and cultural education is very good and the provision for social development is excellent.
How well the school cares for its students	Very good. There is a high level of academic and personal support for students and very good procedures for monitoring their progress.

The school has a good partnership with parents, who hold the school in high regard. All subjects meet statutory requirements in the main school, but there are not enough religious education lessons in the sixth form to teach the full content of the locally agreed syllabus.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher is an excellent leader and staff in other management posts support her very well.
How well the governors fulfil	Very good. Governors have a deep knowledge of the school's strengths and

their responsibilities	weaknesses and play a leading role in deciding the school's priorities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. The school analyses examination results exceptionally well and has very good systems for monitoring and supporting teaching.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. Funds are targeted very efficiently to where they will do the most good and the use of the language college grants has been exceptionally good.

The school has sufficient staff, accommodation and resources. The way that the school meets its aim of developing the student, both academically and personally, is excellent. Excellent development planning and a complete lack of complacency have brought this about. Overall, the school works very hard to provide the best education for its students with the money it receives.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The progress that their children make. • The quality of teaching, including the expectations that teachers have of their students. • The quality of leadership and management. • The way that the school develops their children as young adults. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework. • The information on their child's progress. • The range of activities outside of lessons.

The inspection team agrees completely with parents' positive views. However, although a lot of homework is set, particularly in Years 10 and 11, this is fundamental to the high standards achieved. The inspection team also disagrees with parents over the range of activities available, which is much wider than in many other schools. Parents' concerns about information on progress are justified to some extent. While written reports are good, the gap between them and the next consultation evening is often too long and it is not made clear enough to parents that they can come into school to discuss the report immediately after it has been published and that the school will make all the student's teachers available.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

QUEEN MARY'S HIGH SCHOOL

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is larger than in most other schools and is growing in size. There are currently 223 female and 19 male students in the sixth form, all of whom are studying for the wide range of AS or A-level courses offered by the school. Very few students leave the school at the end of Year 11, but around 35 joined from other schools last year. The composition of the sixth form matches that of the main school in terms of ethnic groupings and students' socio-economic backgrounds. All students entering the sixth form need a minimum of six GCSEs at grades A*-C, including B grades in the subjects that they intend to study. All students exceed these requirements and attainment on entry is, therefore, very high, except in theatre studies where no student has studied the subject before.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form is very good and meets the needs of its high attaining students very well. Standards are very high and students achieve very well because the teaching is very good. Teaching and standards have improved significantly since the last inspection and overall very good progress has been made. This rate of improvement is a result of very good leadership and management. Overall, the sixth form is very cost effective.

Strengths

- Standards are very high and students achieve very well because of very good teaching.
- Examination results are consistently in the top five per cent nationally and well above the average for all institutions for sixth form students, including colleges and independent schools.
- Standards are continuing to rise as a result of very good leadership and management.
- Students have excellent attitudes to their studies.

What could be improved

- Teachers of English and design and technology are not sufficiently familiar with the demands of the new syllabuses.
- Teachers in physics do not demand as much of their students as other teachers.
- Some teachers do not make the most of their students' excellent attitudes.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Staffing difficulties have been overcome and the standard of teaching is good.
Chemistry	Very good. Results at A-level were very high last year and students achieved very well because of high quality teaching.
Physics	Satisfactory. The demands made of students are not as high as in other subjects.
Design and technology	Satisfactory. Teachers need a better understanding of the new examination syllabus to raise the standard of teaching overall.

Business studies	Very good. Students achieve very well as a result of very good teaching.
Information and communication technology	Very good. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge ensures that students consistently do better than in their other subjects.
Art and design	Very good. The students' excellent attitudes, together with very good teaching lead to excellent levels of achievement.
Theatre studies	Very good. Students have never studied the subject before and achieve very well.
Geography	Very good. Students often gain their best results in this subject and achieve very well.
History	Good. Students did not achieve as well as they should have at A-level last year, but this ran contrary to the trend of usually very good results and AS results were the best in the school.
English Language	Satisfactory. Staff have received insufficient training on the demands of the new syllabus so teaching is not as good as in most other subjects.
French	Very good. Standards are very high and achievement is very good as a result of very good teaching.
German	Very good. Standards are very high and achievement is very good as a result of very good teaching.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very good. The quality and availability of advice and guidance are very good in all areas of the school's work.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Very good. The extensive systems for analysing examination and other data on students' attainments are used very well to highlight strengths and weaknesses. Teaching is monitored and supported very well. The way that the school prioritises and addresses its weaknesses are very good. The school goes to great lengths to ensure that all students are given the same opportunities as their peers.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way the courses meet their needs. • The printed information they receive. • The quality of teaching and the willingness of teachers to help them outside of lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of advice, particularly about future options. • The way the school responds to their views. • The range of activities open to them.

The inspection team agrees with the students' positive views. Where a significant minority expressed negative views, there were also high proportions who were very satisfied. The reason for this appears to relate to specific circumstances. The concerns about advice on future options were raised by Year 12 students who had not yet had the benefit of the careers education course. The current lack of private study rooms, while refurbishment is taking place, has reduced the number of social activities that can take place and the students are unhappy with the decision to implement a 'no bags' policy. The inspection team therefore appreciates the students' concerns, but the first two are only short term. The 'no bags' policy has been implemented for the good of the school as a whole and is entirely reasonable.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Students achieve very well at the school. Standards are very high at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. The students who took their GCSE examinations in 2001 gained results that were well above the level that would be expected given their attainment on entry to the school. Parents are very impressed with the progress that their children make. Throughout the school, the very high standards in all of the foreign languages reflect the success of being awarded language college status.
2. Attainment in the National Curriculum tests in 2001 was very high. Results in English, mathematics and science were all very high and placed the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Results in science were not quite as good as those in English and mathematics; this is a result of students' attainment in science being lower than the two other subjects when they joined the school rather than any differences in the progress that they make in Years 7 to 9. Students from Indian or Sri Lankan backgrounds generally made better progress than white students did. However, the Indian and Sri Lankan students joined the school with lower levels of attainment than their white counterparts did, so the overall effect of this better progress was to bring their standards up to the same level as the great majority of other students, but not quite enough to get them to the very highest levels in the same proportions as white students.
3. Results in mathematics and science have risen and fallen as the national averages have done since the school was last inspected. The results in English have also followed the national trend, but with greater variations so that when the national results rose, the school's results improved by a greater degree, but the decline was greater than that seen nationally the following year. Overall, when all three subjects are taken into account, the trend in results has been very slightly below the national rate of improvement but results have never been out of the top five per cent of schools nationally and the school has maintained its very high standards. Overall, results in 2001 were similar to those in other selective schools.
4. Standards of work at the end of Year 9, seen during the inspection, confirm the results of the 2001 national tests in English, mathematics and science, in that students are attaining very high standards. These standards represent a good level of achievement for students in all three subjects. Standards are also very high in French, geography, German, Spanish and religious education. In design and technology, history and information and communication technology standards are well above average while standards are above average in art and design, Latin and physical education. Standards are average in music.
5. Overall, students are achieving well in Years 7 to 9; they do better than expected, given their attainment when they joined the school, in almost all subjects and very well in design and technology, history and religious education. They achieve exceptionally well in French, German and Spanish, but perform only as expected in music.
6. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2001 were very high and placed the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Results were well above the average for grammar schools, with the proportion of passes at the highest grades of A* and A being much higher than other grammar schools. Since 1997, results have improved at a much better rate than that seen nationally, despite already being very high in 1997. The results represent a very good level of

achievement given the students' attainment when they joined the school and their results in the national tests when they were in Year 9.

7. Results were very high in all subjects, except Latin and the separate sciences, where results were much closer to the national averages as these are subjects that are generally only taken by the highest attainers nationally. There were, however, some quite outstanding results. In French, geography, German, Japanese and Spanish, results were at least half a grade better, on average, than in other selective schools. Students also did very well in religious education, but their results in physics were not as good as in other subjects, including the other sciences.
8. In the work seen during the inspection, attainment is very high in all subjects except Latin and physical education, where they are above average. The standards of work seen during the inspection generally reflect the standards suggested by the 2001 GCSE results.
9. Students achieve better standards than would usually be expected, given their levels of attainment at the start of the course, in all subjects except art and design, geography, history, mathematics and religious education, where they do much better than expected, and in the languages, where achievement is excellent. Students perform as well as expected in physical education.
10. Standards have either improved or been maintained at a very high level in all subjects since the previous inspection.
11. The very few students with special educational needs at the school achieve as well as other students. The school's procedures for selecting students on entry means that virtually all them have a good command of English and so have little or no difficulty in gaining access to the National Curriculum. However, some students do join the school when they are at an early stage of learning English. In the most recent case, the student's needs were quickly assessed; she was provided with support and has made very good progress. Those students who are particularly gifted and talented make similar progress to other students, but there are differences between the subjects. In physical education, for example, the high quality of the extra-curricular activities mean that those who are particularly gifted can excel but this is not the case in music in Years 7 to 9, where the work is too easy for the most talented musicians. In some subjects, most notably the foreign languages, students are entered for GCSE earlier than usual, so they are really being fully extended.
12. Standards of literacy are very high. Students' grasp of basic literacy, including spelling, punctuation and the use of grammar, is consistently excellent. Handwriting is almost invariably neat, well formed and easily legible. Students' vocabulary is well advanced and enables them to describe both everyday situations and technical processes with suitable vocabulary. Students are flexible in how they express themselves and can adapt what they have to say for the requirements of particular audiences. Their understanding of what they read is excellent and most students read for pleasure.
13. Standards of numeracy are very high, and this is particularly valuable in geography and science. In geography, students use a high level of data handling skills when observing, reading and representing information from data about river discharge and plotting line graphs. In science, students use calculators accurately in investigation work. They do use formulae, but they are not confident and they regard straightforward equations as a problem. Students' number skills are very good but insufficiently used to support their work in science. In other subjects, such as physical education and modern foreign languages, the students easily cope with the levels of numeracy required.

14. The rate at which students make progress is usually a result of the quality of teaching that they receive, so that where teaching is good, the standards achieved by students are higher than expected. However, there are some notable exceptions to this rule. In art and design, the teaching is good, but the achievement of the students is even better because of the way they work so diligently on their own. The very good teaching in all of the foreign languages really brings out the best in the students so that their own enthusiasm and sheer hard work raise their achievement to an excellent level. The opposite is seen in physical education, where the teaching is very good in Years 10 and 11, but the levels of achievement are only satisfactory. Several factors contribute to the situation in physical education. Firstly, the indoor accommodation is limited to one, relatively small, gymnasium. As this is the only large room in the school, it is taken out of use for examinations, so for relatively long periods it cannot be used. Instead, students must travel to the pitches, which are a significant distance from the school. This means that lessons have to be two hours long and some of this time is spent travelling. The fact that lessons are two hours long leads to fewer lessons, so the gap between lessons is greater and students forget some of the work in between.
15. The school has set appropriately high targets for its performance, based on the attainment of the students when they join the school and the raising of standards, and has been successful in meeting or exceeding its targets.

Sixth form

16. Standards in the sixth form are very high and students are achieving very well. All students study for AS-levels in Year 12, but most do not 'cash in' their AS-levels results, preferring instead to continue with their studies to full A-level. It is very rare for a student not to complete a course.
17. Results in the 2001 A and AS-level examinations were very high overall and placed the school not only in the top five per cent of all maintained schools but also in the top five per cent of all schools, including colleges and independent schools, nationally. Both boys and girls gained results that, overall, were very high. Results are rising rapidly and the results last year were among the best in the school's history.
18. Results in 2001 were at least above average in all subjects except English literature, history and physics. In most subjects results were well above average or very high. Students performed well in most subjects, but there were a few subjects where they excelled and others where they did not do as well as they should have. Students gained their best results in information and communication technology and in the foreign language based general studies courses; their worst results came in English literature, history and physics.
19. Results in each of the subjects fluctuate year on year as the numbers studying some of them are relatively small so one student can make a significant difference to the results overall. However, if an average is taken over the last three years, students tend to achieve very well in chemistry, geography and information and communication technology with no significant under-performance in any subject. In particular, the results in history appear to be a real 'blip' as results have been very high in previous years and the AS results in 2001 were the best in the school.
20. The standards observed during the inspection were very high overall. Standards were well above average or very high in all subjects except physics, where they were above average, and design and technology and theatre studies where standards were average. These standards represent very good achievement in most subjects; even in theatre studies, where standards are average, students achieve very well given that none have had any experience of

the subject before or studied it at GCSE level. In design and technology, English and physics, however, levels of achievement are only satisfactory. In design and technology and English the teachers are teaching new syllabuses and have not had enough training in adapting their teaching strategies to the demands of the new courses. In physics, the teaching does not make the same demands of students that is the case in other subjects, while being told that they will find the topics difficult lowers students' confidence.

21. Almost all students continue their education at university after leaving the school, having gained the necessary grades at A-level.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

22. Students' attitudes to learning, their personal development and their attendance are all excellent and this helps them towards their impressive achievements. In conversation, students in all year groups show much appreciation of the provision made for them by the school and are clearly happy to be there. As at the previous inspection, their enthusiasm for learning is impressive. They respond very willingly to their teachers' friendly attitudes and high expectations and also relate exceptionally well to one another. The vast majority of parents expressing a view are happy with standards of behaviour and they are also very appreciative of the mature and responsible attitudes that students are helped to develop. The positive attitudes and excellent behaviour go a long way towards producing the effective climate for working that is so apparent in the school.
23. Students' excellent attitudes are evident across the whole range of school activities, regardless of their ages, ethnic backgrounds or any other differences. Their levels of interest and willingness to learn are very good or better in at least three out of four lessons. They concentrate very well, are keen to answer questions, like to explain their views, and rise to the challenge of any independent research tasks. They readily work together, sharing their own ideas and listening with respect to others' suggestions so that they help each other to learn. Students cope very capably with the responsibilities given to them; for instance, Year 10 physical education students responded with confidence, initiative and style to the task of organising a netball tournament for themselves. In the few lessons where students' active involvement is less, this stems from lack of opportunity rather than lack of willingness. Very positive attitudes are also evident in the care students take with presenting written work, particularly in the diligence often apparent in the preparation of GCSE coursework folders. Away from lessons, other activities generate enthusiastic support and students play a very good role in the life of the school. Students appreciate the range of after-school foreign language lessons and the trips to other countries that are offered, as well responding well to the more usual opportunities in sport and music. The high level of commitment means that there are few problems with late arrivals at the start of the day compared with what often happens in other schools, despite the long distances some have to travel from their homes.
24. Behaviour is excellent and exclusions are a very rare occurrence. The excellent relationships developed mean that students feel very secure that bullying or other harassment is unlikely to arise, though they know that staff remain alert to any developing concern. Equally, their understanding of the school's expectations leaves very little room for any misbehaviour though, infrequently, individuals incur sanctions for neglecting pieces of homework. Occasional petty disagreements surface among younger students, but teachers help them to understand how to resolve such unfriendliness, so that such matters are of little concern to those in Years 10 and 11. Even Year 7 students show sensitivity to others' feelings, as when, in discussion, they recognised that it is important to behave properly because of the way any misbehaviour may affect others. This capacity develops considerably, so that in Year 10, when preparing presentations on human rights, students talked about rights of protection

from discrimination with interest and mature depth of understanding, citing incidents from local news to support their views.

25. Attendance remains excellent, as at the previous inspection; the attendance rate of over 96 per cent is well above the national average with no unauthorised absence. The strong focus that students throughout the school have on learning means that it is very rare for any to stay away from school without good reason. They know that if they are unavoidably absent, for instance because of illness, they have to take responsibility for catching up with any work they have missed, so their progress does not suffer. Parents play their part in maintaining attendance levels by generally observing the school's requests to avoid family holidays in term time.

Sixth form

26. Sixth form students show excellent, mature attitudes to their work and to the wider opportunities offered by the school. All, including boys and girls that transfer from other schools, share the same strong motivation for learning and appreciation of the high standards that the school can help them reach. All readily mix and work together without regard to their different ethnic backgrounds, contributing to a sense of harmonious community that adds significantly to the quality of the learning environment.
27. Students know that they are present through their own choice and they are very keen to benefit from their studies and to achieve the best possible examination results. Their teachers' high expectations and the high proportion of very good teaching adds to their motivation, so that in seven out of ten lessons their response is very good. It is never less than good, even in the few lessons where teaching is relatively less stimulating. Straying attention is never a problem although students are occasionally rather passive when the style of the lesson does not invite their active involvement. Even though conditions for work are not always ideal in the present temporary study rooms, individuals show very good capacity to organise themselves and work independently in their study sessions. Their enthusiasm helps them to refine and use their learning skills very effectively. They enjoy the challenge of thinking about complex issues and are confident and fluent in explaining themselves. For instance, when a Year 13 mathematics group were starting to get to grips with concepts of hypothesis testing, they all readily became involved in discussing their ideas and confidently put forward suggestions to the teacher, and this helped their learning to move forward at a very good pace. Students demonstrate good independence in research as when Year 12, in religious education, were very serious and responsible in selecting information relevant to subtle aspects of medical decision making impinging on rights to life.
28. Other aspects of personal development are exceptionally good in the sixth form, in response to the high expectations and high quality guidance that students experience. As well as having realistic aspirations for their future education and careers they show a mature and perceptive capacity to value each other's friendship and to consider the needs of others. As at the previous inspection, they respond with mature confidence to the additional responsibilities they can undertake to enhance the life of the school. They add to the breadth of experience for younger year groups, by organising various extra-curricular opportunities such as debating and drama groups. They take a lead in organising activities for the three houses, and a very capable contribution was apparent as sixth formers confidently led younger students in an after-school practice for an inter-house dance competition. They created a very pleasant and co-operative learning atmosphere without any need for input from teachers.

29. Attendance in the sixth form is excellent, with students seldom absent except during the occasional study sessions that they are permitted to spend working at home. This reflects students' high motivation to learn, their respect for teachers' expectations regarding their regular presence, and also the pastoral support that is extended to any student whose attendance begins to slip. Full attendance is seen in many lessons. This helps the rapid pace of learning to continue without interruption and contributes to students' very high attainment.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

30. The quality of teaching and learning in the school is very good and meets the needs of all students very well. Teaching was at least good in around one in every two lessons and very good or excellent in around one in four. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and students make good progress in their learning. In Years 10 and 11 the work is matched exceptionally well to the demands of the GCSE examinations; teaching is very good, as is the quality of learning.
31. In Years 7 to 9, teaching is satisfactory in music and good in all other subjects except design and technology, history, religious education and all the foreign languages where it is very good. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is good in all subjects except geography, history, mathematics, physical education, religious education and all the foreign languages where teaching is very good.
32. There are three aspects of teaching which result in the difference in quality between the good in Years 7 to 9 and the very good in Years 10 and 11; teachers' subject knowledge, their planning and their marking.
33. In Years 10 and 11, there are more subject specialists used and usually their knowledge of the subject is outstandingly good. This allows them to follow up students' lines of enquiry when they go off the subject and even applies to teachers who are teaching the personal and social education course. For example, in one lesson on the responsibilities of the individual in selecting a government, voting patterns were being discussed. Some students felt that the turnout of new voters would be high because of novelty value, but the teacher was able to disprove this by instantly quoting statistics without any reference to notes. The students themselves were very interested in talking about how to improve the turnout of voters and came up with some very interesting ideas, such as electronic voting, getting politicians to speak plain English and even making them more attractive. When specialists are teaching their subject in Years 7 to 9, the same degree of excellence is observed. However, some subjects, such as information and communication technology, rely on a number of staff from other subjects and their knowledge of the subject is not up to the same high standards as the specialists. In physics, for example, students sense the difference in security between specialists and non-specialists and their own confidence wanes. Nevertheless, even where specialists are not used, the teacher never has insufficient knowledge of the subject not to be able to make sufficient demands of the students.
34. The planning of lessons is also better in Years 10 and 11, where the planning is very good. Teachers are fully aware that they have to maximise the potential of the students to perform well in examinations so they plan their lessons very well indeed to meet the demands of the syllabus. In geography, for example, students are taught how to get the best marks by teachers making them practice answering questions, including how to make use of data, maps and photographs that are regularly used in examinations. Most schemes of work make very clear matches between the syllabus content and how it is to be taught, so all teachers are working at the same high level, although the schemes of work in Latin are not sufficiently detailed to allow this. The very best examples are observed in the foreign languages where there is a perfect match between syllabus and the content of lessons. Because the languages

are now taught to GCSE level in earlier years, the same excellent planning exists in these years and some of the best teaching is to be found in the languages. Lessons in the languages are spurred on by the need to succeed at examination level, so they proceed at a cracking pace. In several lessons, for example, the teachers set very tight time limits on tasks so the students threw themselves into the work and got a huge amount completed. Other subjects do not have the stimulus of a GCSE examination at the end of Year 9 and so plan for a relatively smaller amount to be covered in a lesson.

35. The effect of having an examination syllabus also provides a focus for the marking of work, so that in Years 10 and 11 the marking is very good, particularly in the foreign languages, Latin and history. In these subjects the work is carefully corrected and students are told exactly what they need to do in order to improve their work. Such comments do not appear as frequently in Years 7 to 9, although the standard is still good. The work in design and technology, for example, is marked thoroughly, but does not give the students enough advice, while in music the over-complicated assessment systems mean that the students work is not marked sufficiently frequently, regularly or in enough detail.
36. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is good. In English, for example, students learn how to read with close attention to meaning, in Latin they read aloud in the original language and in modern foreign languages they learn to skim, scan and to use dictionaries. In many subjects students are required to write at length and many respond to the challenge with relish. A few of the topics which aroused enthusiasm include the different benefits of holiday resorts in geography; sermons for different congregations as part of a study of the medieval church in history; a critique of another student's art, written in French, as part of the Year 10 and 11 course and substantial novels, no less, written by Year 9 students for English. The contribution that subjects make to developing students' competence and skills in understanding and using numbers is more variable. In history, for example, students develop analytical skills when examining statistics from population, birth, and death rate records. However, in design and technology, they do not always use the correct units of measurement, using a mixture of inches and centimetres in one project. In information and communication technology, students extend their understanding of functions when completing spreadsheets.
37. Many other aspects of teaching are, however, universally strong across the school. In particular, teachers are outstandingly diligent in making sure that work missed through absence is completed so students always have a complete set of notes. These high expectations are also observed in the way that teachers expect students to behave, complete homework and work hard in lessons. The students respond exceptionally well, even when tasks are rather mundane or, as in physics lessons, the teachers expect them to listen for too long. The very best learning takes place in those lessons where the students are most actively involved. In one history lesson, for example, the teacher told the students that somebody had been killed and they had to investigate who was the most likely culprit. The way that the teacher told them *outside* the classroom built up an air of tension so that the students were absolutely desperate to get in the lesson and start examining evidence. This was a unique way of learning about the death of Thomas Beckett, while at the same time developing their skills of historical analysis. In a physical education lesson, the students themselves organised all aspects of the lesson, giving them a chance to put into practice all that they had previously learnt. The concentration and maturity shown by the students in evaluating their peers was quite outstanding.
38. Another excellent example of student involvement also demonstrated the part that computers can play in helping students to work harder. In one excellent German lesson, the classroom was set up as a newspaper editor's office and the students had to be reporters who had discovered a 'scoop' about two pop stars. One group had to file the report using email to the

editor and the other group had to produce a taped version of the interview to meet a publishing deadline. The lesson buzzed with activity, students used a very high level of language and became completely immersed in the task, asking to take the work home to complete it as the lesson had ended too quickly for them. When such methods are used that harness the students' willingness to work hard, the quality of the learning can actually be even better than the teaching would usually merit. In art and design, for example, the students are taught well, but their own dedication to the improvement of their work results in even better learning. Computers are generally not used widely enough in several subjects so students are missing out. In art, for example, they do not get enough experience of computer art while in mathematics the computers are not used as a mathematical tool.

39. Across the school, homework is used very well to reinforce the high expectations that teachers have of classwork. Much of the coursework for GCSE, for example, is completed at home and students put huge efforts into its completion. This also has the effect of freeing more time in lessons. The management of behaviour is never a problem in lessons, which allows teachers to make different use of their very good management skills. They frequently, for example, change seating arrangements or the way that students are grouped in order to make the best use of the students themselves, such as putting stronger and weaker students together so that both can benefit.
40. Overall, the quality of teaching has shown very good improvement and there is now a much higher proportion of lessons that are taught to a very good or excellent standard.

Sixth form

41. Teaching in the sixth form is very good, with around half of the lessons taught to a very good or excellent standard. Teaching is very good in all subjects except history and mathematics, where it is good and design and technology, English and physics where teaching is satisfactory.
42. Teachers have an excellent knowledge of the subjects that they teach. All are highly qualified specialists and this shows in the way that they can explain complex theories. In chemistry, for example, students were encouraged to ask demanding questions about magnetic resonance spectroscopy and the teacher provided exceptionally clear answers that allowed students to quickly grasp the concepts involved. Where a new syllabus has been introduced, such as in English and design and technology for example, the teachers are not as confident in its use. In design and technology the examiners' comments pointed out that certain sections had not been covered in sufficient depth, while in English the match of teaching method to content is nowhere near as good as it is at GCSE level. In most other subjects, the quality of planning is very good and meets the demands of the examination syllabuses very well.
43. The teachers' knowledge of the examination requirements also leads to very good marking. Teachers point out exactly where marks will be lost and gained if the work was presented for the examination and also explain how revision techniques can be improved, such as by explaining different ways of presenting work in files in order to make notes more easily accessible. This last feature is notably lacking in physics and lower attainers are struggling to keep their extensive notes in good order as a result.
44. The teachers have very high expectations of what the students can achieve and set very demanding work. One excellent example of this, that also demonstrated excellent use of technology, was in German where a lesson took place in the language laboratory. Here, students listened to tape recordings of advertisements that used slang expressions and were

- read at very rapid pace. The students worked at their own pace, with lower attainers able to rewind the tape and play it several times to make sure they had the full meaning.
45. The very best lessons make use of the students' own thirst for knowledge and enthusiasm to learn. When they are given work to do independently, such as in art, they stick to their task with intense concentration and will readily seek the opinions of others in order to help them. Often, it is when the teacher uses a variety of methods that learning is at its best. In a theatre studies lesson, for example, the teacher set a problem-solving task for groups and then asked them to report back to the whole group on the technical aspects of a theatre set. In physical education the teacher used role-play and video clips to maintain a rapid pace throughout the lesson. In both of these lessons students were active and involved and really threw themselves into their tasks. However, in some other subjects, such as geography, students are not sufficiently encouraged to become involved in discussion; they still behave excellently but the rate of learning is not as good as when they are active. Students are generally very self-confident, but some methods can boost this whilst others reduce it. Getting students to produce critiques in a foreign language of other students' artwork, for example, and displaying them publicly celebrates students' successes, both in art and in the foreign languages. Telling them that they will find the work very difficult, as in physics, before they start the topic, has the opposite effect.
46. Overall, the quality of teaching in the sixth form has improved significantly since the previous inspection.

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

47. The curriculum is good overall. It meets the needs of the students well.
48. The curriculum is good in Years 7 to 9. In Years 7 to 9 all students study the National Curriculum plus religious education and a programme of personal and social education. Students study two foreign languages as well as Latin. All students are now entered for GCSEs in information and communication technology and foreign languages earlier than is usually seen. In design and technology, whilst the curriculum meets statutory requirements, it is rather narrow with no food technology being provided; this is because there is no specialist accommodation.
49. The curriculum is good in Years 10 and 11. Students follow a core programme, which includes either three separate sciences or the combined double award. All students take at least nine GCSE subjects with the higher attainers taking 11. The school offers the individual student an appropriate range and number of options including a private study option for students who would benefit from a lighter load at GCSE and more time for coursework and homework. In the previous inspection report, the school did not meet the statutory requirements for religious education in Year 11. Since that time, religious education has been made compulsory for all students and meets the needs of the locally agreed syllabus.
50. Students with special educational needs do not experience a different curriculum from other students; this is entirely appropriate given the nature of their needs. Teachers are aware of the students' needs and take account of them in their teaching.
51. The school's strategy for teaching literacy and numeracy is good. A literacy co-ordinator has been recently appointed and she, in consultation with other teachers, has produced a policy for teaching literacy across the curriculum. This has proved valuable in creating a good level of consistency in teaching some aspects of literacy, such as spelling and the use of subject-specific vocabulary. Although there is no whole school strategy in place, the school is

implementing the National Numeracy Strategy in mathematics. This has led to changes in lesson planning and methods of teaching. Arrangements are in place for all staff to develop an awareness of the cross-curricular relevance of numeracy so that they can perceive how mathematics contributes to and draws from many subjects of the curriculum.

52. There is satisfactory provision for students who have been identified as being gifted and talented. A new initiative has been launched recently; gifted and talented students have now been identified and a register compiled. The school is part of the Walsall Excellence in Clusters group of schools. This links well with the school's status as a specialist language college and supports the school's targets for extending community participation. Through this programme, self-esteem and aspirations are challenged, as well as academic aptitude. This sharing of expertise is working well; for example, a small group of gifted students in Years 7 and 8 attend another school in the cluster for additional mathematics.
53. The arrangements for teaching personal and social development are very good. The work that is planned includes all the required aspects of health education; sex education and drugs awareness and these plans provide a good experience for the students because they are dealt with in great depth. There is particularly effective development of ideas of tolerance, understanding and respect for others. The school gives the course a high priority in recognition of the need to broaden students' horizons. The use of foreign languages to enhance levels of interest and challenge, with a healthy eating module taught largely in French, is a particularly notable feature.
54. Very effective attention is paid to careers education, so that it meets students' needs very successfully. For instance, students are introduced to the careers library at an early stage, through the way a large minority of Year 8 are trained as monitors to help keep the contents up to date and in good order. Relevant topics are introduced in interesting ways. For instance, through playing 'The Real Game' Year 9 students are enabled to gain considerably in understanding of the world of work and to develop aims and aspirations for their own future roles. Year 11 students follow a suitable work experience programme, benefiting from the considerable efforts made by the school to obtain placements in local businesses and organisations that are relevant to their career aspirations. Very good liaison with the careers officer means that she makes a full contribution to the programme, through contributions in lessons and voluntary lunchtime session on specific topics as well as through an appropriate programme of interviews. The way that the careers library is readily accessible within the main library successfully encourages students to use it.
55. The school has excellent links with the local community. This is a school that fully embraces the local community and works extremely hard to meet the needs of the students. The school provides language courses for the local community, both for children and adults. Tutors from the local community come to the school to provide extra classes. Links with external agencies and other organisations provide valuable experiences for students. Students in design and technology, for example, visit local industries, which helps them to appreciate modern work practices and advances in industrial technology. There are good links with the University of Wolverhampton with all student teachers visiting the school to receive training in modern languages and/or information and communication technology. The breadth of the curriculum is enhanced by very good links developed both within the local community and also world wide. For instance the annual activities week involves students in a wide range of experiences, such as trips to France or Spain and days spent with different local organisations, including the local mosque and the citizens advice bureau. Students' language studies together with their knowledge and understanding of the wider world benefit considerably from the partnerships established with schools in Europe and in Japan.

56. The school provides a very good range of extra-curricular activities. There is good provision for sports and after-school clubs. Five staff run the extra-curricular sports programme, with about half of the school population participating on a regular basis. Many students use the school's facilities outside of normal school hours. Many of these additional opportunities stem from the school's status as a language college. After-school clubs are offered in a wide range of languages, including, Panjabi, Gujarati, Japanese, Ancient Greek, Latin and Russian. Opportunities are provided during the school holidays for students to use the facilities; again many of these are linked to their studies. The school operates a summer school for particularly gifted and talented students from local primary schools. The school's choirs and orchestras contribute players to national orchestras and events.
57. The school has very good links with partner institutions. It has very good pastoral links with the local primary schools and curricular links are good. Links with feeder primary schools help students to cope cheerfully with their transfer into Year 7 and in addition local primary students can gain valuable experience by attending events such as the annual international day and the Japanese summer school that was recently held for gifted and talented students in Years 5 and 6. There are very good links with institutions of higher education and training organisations that provide good information when students are making choices about their future pathways. The school is part of the Walsall 'Excellence in Clusters' project as a high achieving school.
58. Equality of access and opportunity is excellent. The school uses its own funds to ensure students from poorer backgrounds experience all that the language college has to offer as well as participating in trips and visits. The school is committed to promoting equal opportunities for all and has a very good Equality of Opportunity policy that covers all the relevant aspects. These are all observed in practice. The school meets the requirements of the Race Relations Act and is justifiably proud of its multi-cultural community of students and staff. Displays around the school suggest an awareness of an ethnically diverse society and all groups are represented in non-stereotypical ways. The school monitors students' achievement by attainment and ethnicity. The curriculum celebrates cultural diversity and prepares students very well for life in a multi-cultural society.
59. The reviews of the curriculum, together with precise action to improve weaknesses, have resulted in significant improvements since the previous inspection.
60. Overall, the provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. Social development is excellent and spiritual, moral and cultural development is very good. These aspects are integral parts of the whole school ethos where the motto is to educate the 'whole person'.
61. Provision for spiritual development is very good. The very high quality of work done in almost all areas ensures that all students have ample opportunities to reflect on and explore the values and beliefs within subjects. Religious education makes a very significant contribution to students' spiritual awareness because the subject is taught from the perspective of philosophy and ethics. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs and the beliefs of others and how these contribute to human well-being. They are given opportunities to understand human feelings and emotions and how these impact on themselves and others. Students develop a good sense of aesthetics, particularly of beauty and balance in subjects such as art, drama, dance, music and poetry. In assemblies students consider themes such as the uniqueness of mankind and the future and what it might hold. They reflect on our use and misuse of time and of opportunities missed to appreciate the beauty of nature. There are missed opportunities for reflection in that there is no provision for a daily act of collective worship, as was the case at the time of the previous inspection.

62. Provision for moral development is very good. The understanding of right and wrong is embedded in the school ethos. The personal, social and health education programme makes a very good contribution to students' moral development especially in promoting tolerance and understanding. The school educates students very well in understanding their rights and responsibilities, making them aware of their duty to help those in need and support a range of charities. Students themselves choose the charities, responding to crises around the world and also to appeals from major charities such as cancer research. Teachers are very good role models and set good examples for the students. Moral issues are studied formally in many subjects. In geography, students study international aid to the developing world and they learn of aspects inherent in trade and protection that often disadvantage the poorest people, while in science they study the moral implications of the use of various energy resources. Students are trusted to use the school facilities, including the computers, before school, at break, lunchtime and after school.
63. Provision for social development is excellent. It is well integrated with spiritual and moral awareness and is most impressive in class and around the school. The school has students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and all mix very well socially in all areas of the school. This brings richness to the relationships and to the experiences of all students. In most subjects students have many opportunities to work in pairs and small groups. They study social changes formally in history and religious education. The physical education department puts great emphasis on the social etiquette of team games; captains meet the opposing teams and the players look after visitors. There is a school council that enables students to have a say in the running of the school as appropriate. The house system gives students an extra sense of belonging as well as opportunities to mix with and support students in other years.
64. Provision for cultural development is very good. The school's status as an International School and a language college leads to a clear focus on thinking internationally. The whole school is aware of this status and the fact that it has to be applied for every three years so there is a great emphasis on keeping a very high profile on different cultures. There are good links with a range of other European countries and Japan. There is an International Day that is seen as a major event in the school year and students take responsibility for much of the planning for this event. Care is taken to ensure students study literature from a range of non-European cultures. In geography students study of a range of cultures including Japanese, Amazonian peoples and the urban developments of the shantytowns in Brazil. In science, students study nutrition largely in French as two teachers have undertaken a bilingual teaching course and apply it in these lessons. Students study a wider range of foreign languages than is usual, including Japanese. There is a good range of cultural visits to theatres, museums and galleries and a significant number of visits abroad. This very good provision overall ensures that students have confidence in themselves and in their own abilities that contributes to their success in school.
65. There has been a good improvement in the provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development since the previous inspection.

Sixth form

66. The sixth form curriculum is very good and offers the same excellent equality of opportunity as the rest of the school. The curriculum is broad and very relevant. There is an extensive and growing range of AS and A-level courses plus a small number of additional GCSEs on offer. The AS and A-level courses are perfectly suited to the needs of high attaining students, including those from other schools. Courses match students' aspirations and potential; joining the sixth form is seen as a natural extension of the students' education. Statutory

requirements, on the other hand, are not met; students do not receive sufficient religious education to meet the needs of the locally agreed syllabus.

67. Students are offered considerable choice in their subject options. Students initially start out studying four AS-levels in Year 12 and follow three through to full A-level in Year 13 as well as A-level general studies. The very highest attainers continue to study four A-levels in addition to general studies. Students have the opportunity to participate in an afternoon of leisure sporting activities, although the take-up by students is relatively poor. Those who do participate thoroughly enjoy the wide range of activities provided.
68. Students are offered very good quality careers advice in preparation for the sixth form when in Year 11, and support is provided each summer following the publication of GCSE results. Such advice enables the school to succeed in matching the students' requirements to the courses being offered. Those students who join the school in Year 12 also receive very good advice on which subjects to choose.
69. The school has chosen not to teach key skills separately although students do receive considerable input through the general studies course.
70. An excellent feature of the school's curriculum is the strong and developing partnerships that have been established with the local community. The school provides language courses for the local community, for both students and adults. Students in the sixth form work as learning mentors in the Playing for Success scheme at Walsall Football Club. The school arranges an International Day, which sixth form students support, when 300 primary school children visit the school as part of language college outreach work. The Year 12 'Challenge of Industry' day engages students in well-planned team building activities hosted by a range of organisations in the locality. Speakers from higher education institutions and from industry add to the quality of careers guidance. Links with other countries continue to be very important for those studying the range of modern foreign languages; for instance, on occasion they are able to follow work experience placements abroad.
71. Offering a variety of opportunities, ranging from sport through to music and drama, enriches the curriculum. There is very good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the sixth form. All these aspects are well integrated and considered formally within the general studies programme of work, for example in the section that covers moral and social issues to do with wealth and poverty and a range of political concerns, including those of other cultures. Students are given leading roles in the social life of the school through their management of the prefect system and their general support for younger students. They are encouraged to take responsibility and show initiative and they do this admirably, particularly in their role as mentors to younger students. The school council includes the 'Senior Students' from the sixth form. These students have a significant input into the work of the school. The house system, in particular, promotes social development and responsibilities. Through the school's status as a language college and International School students have access to a wide range of enhancement studies that enables them to explore values and beliefs from other cultures. These elements are particularly evident in music, art, sport, drama and language studies. The assembly timetable is planned to include topics that recognise and celebrate different religious festivals. There is a clear aim to promote enjoyment in their studies and this involves looking at the subjects in relation to what they add to the human experience and joy in life. Students display a strong moral and social conscience by helping the school to function as a harmonious community and by helping to raise large sums of money for a range of charities. These provisions lead to well-rounded, confident young people who are prepared to take an active role in their own education that will enhance their chances of happiness and success in school and in later life.

72. The curriculum has undergone significant changes since the previous inspection. The introduction of the new system of AS and A-levels has been managed very well. Very good progress has been made since the previous inspection.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

73. Pastoral care continues to be very good, as at the previous inspection. Staff know students well and show very good care and understanding in the way they cater for individual personal needs. The encouragement for them to work hard and to make progress with learning is very effective. Arrangements for assessing and recording students' gains in knowledge and skills remain very good, and the use made of this information in planning for their further progress is now much more consistent, so that it is almost always at least good. Good steps are taken to maintain the excellent levels of attendance.
74. A suitable induction programme is in place to help Year 7 students to cope calmly with transferring from their many primary schools and to get to know their new teachers and fellow students. The school's expectations are shared with them and their parents through the home/school agreement when they join and are consistently reinforced by staff. Students throughout the school show a good level of confidence that help is available to overcome any problems, either with their work or with more personal concerns. For instance they appreciate the lunchtime mathematics surgery where they can get extra help from teachers or from sixth form mathematics students. They appreciate the system of academic reviews that help them to understand the progress they are making and to set themselves targets towards further improvements. Where occasionally an individual is faced with either academic or personal difficulties staff are quick to identify this and to provide appropriate help. The school makes relevant arrangements to meet the special needs, whether they arise from mental or psychological condition or physical disability, of any student capable of meeting the academic entry requirements. Teachers maintain links with a wide range of relevant outside support agencies that they call on when an individual has particular needs for support.
75. Management of behaviour is very good. The very well judged policy reflects appropriately high aims regarding students' behaviour and relationships with others. It is very well implemented through the shared high expectations of staff, so students show a high level of awareness and consideration of others' needs. A system of commendations rewards good attitudes as well as good work. It successfully provides extra motivation through competition between the three houses to see which can gain the most, though a few younger students have doubts about inconsistencies between different teachers in the way commendations are issued. Suitable sanctions are used well when they are needed. A quiet word is usually all that is needed to correct the occasional minor lapses in behaviour. Teachers carefully tackle any other concerns that emerge; for instance, they take good care to find and reconcile the views of all involved if students need help in resolving discord within a group of friends. Students are confident that any problems are carefully investigated and fairly dealt with. Proper routines are in place to respond to more serious incidents of unacceptable behaviour on the very rare occasions that they arise. Teachers take good care to provide relevant extra support if any student needs extra help to sustain good standards of behaviour. However, the routines required by the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice are not in place with regard to any students identified as having special educational needs. Because of this, there is a lack of the formal target setting and review procedures that should underpin the support given to any student recognised as having emotional or behavioural difficulties, or indeed any other special educational need.

76. Good attention is given to monitoring and promoting attendance. Pastoral staff are alert to pick out the rare lapses in attendance that occur and follow them up to good effect. However, the way absence of Year 11 students on study leave is recorded does not match the legal requirements for registration procedures and better attention is needed to this point.
77. Provision for other aspects of students' well-being is generally good; for instance, there are a good number of trained first aiders so that any students who become ill or injured in school receive good care and attention. Good child protection procedures are in place and care is taken to ensure all staff know what they should do about any possible concerns. Health and safety routines remain satisfactory, as at the previous inspection. Good attention is given to some aspects, such as the well-structured scheme for practising emergency evacuation procedures. Another good feature is the way students' own understanding of health and safety matters is raised, for instance through a competition to design safety posters that are then displayed around the school. Instances of effective risk assessment, to identify and control potential hazards, are seen, for instance in the steps taken to limit crowding in a locker area at the end of lessons. However, formal routines for assessing and controlling possible risks are not as yet applied consistently enough.
78. The school's procedures for assessing and monitoring students' attainment and progress from Year 7 to Year 11 are very good. A substantial amount of data on students' attainment is collected and recorded when they enter the school. Students are tested regularly to establish what they know and can do in individual subjects and clear systems are used to check the progress that each student makes during the year. This is supported through the annual academic review when students benefit from consultations with tutors leading to the setting of personal targets for the next phase of learning. There is a very good flow of information from the senior management to subjects with established routines to check how it is being used to improve the progress that students make. In mathematics for example, teachers have very good arrangements to measure the progress that students make in Year 7 to Year 9 against national standards and these help to set targets. Throughout the school all students are set minimum target grades based on National Curriculum levels or examination grades and the progress is measured against these criteria. In some subjects, however, procedures are not fully effective because of inconsistent practice in target setting or when marks awarded are not clearly related to national benchmarks like GCSE grades.
79. The one area of weakness lies in the school's failure to meet statutory requirements in setting clear and achievable targets on individual education plans for students with special educational needs. However, in practice the students' progress is measured as effectively as all other students'.
80. The school makes good use of assessment data to influence the curriculum. In geography, for example, the achievement of higher attaining students' rose as a result of improved lesson planning. The use of assessment in planning the curriculum is very good in modern foreign languages, history and religious education and is good in most other subjects, except art, music and physical education where it is satisfactory. In modern foreign languages, for example, teachers have analysed results and improved standards through the introduction of GCSE coursework. The use of assessment overall has improved since the last inspection. The school participates in local and national initiatives to measure the relative average performance of its students against similar schools and uses the information to assess how well students are achieving.

Sixth form

Assessment

81. Similar very good systems to those used in the main school for assessing students are used in the sixth form. The school makes very good use of national data to set target grades for students in all subjects. The data is combined with the teachers' deep knowledge of their students to produce a 'realistically achievable' grade. The result of assessment is fed back through the line manager to the assessment co-ordinator and information is regularly reviewed by the headteacher and shared with governors. The head of subjects, head of sixth form and form tutors are quick to follow up concerns by interviewing the students concerned. The school monitors progress closely and works with other high attaining girls schools to allow accurate comparisons to be made.

Advice, support and guidance

82. Advice, support and guidance are very good, as indicated at the previous inspection. The process starts during Year 11, when students are told of the provision offered in the sixth form. Due care is taken to help them consider other possible post-16 routes. Those joining from other schools are fully informed in advance about the academic and pastoral provision; for instance, there is an extra pre-joining induction meeting for them in addition to the usual programme for those joining from within the school. Parents and students confirm their acceptance of their responsibilities to the sixth form by signing a relevant home/school agreement. Pastoral staff give good attention to monitoring how students settle in during their first weeks at the school. Most are happy with the choice of courses because the school asks about their preferred subject combinations while they are still in Year 11, before deciding what options to offer. There is appropriate support for the few who modify their original decisions in the early weeks of the autumn term, and guidance for them as they change to other courses. All this contributes to the very high retention rates in the sixth form.
83. Systems for advice and support remain very good as students progress through Years 12 and 13. Students appreciate the way teachers are readily available and always willing to give extra help or guidance over academic matters and they know they can also get help with any personal concerns. They mention especially how the head of sixth form always finds time to see anyone who wants her advice. The pastoral system is geared to respond effectively to any problem, though deviations from the expected high standards of behaviour are almost unknown. Attendance is monitored in lessons as well as at the start of each session. Students are appropriately given personal responsibility for explaining any absence and also have a reasonable degree of freedom about spending particular study periods at home, but nevertheless any concern about attendance is quickly followed up. There is good liaison with parents over any cause for anxiety that arises.
84. Subject teachers track individuals' academic progress and are alert to offer extra assistance to any in danger of falling behind. The good day-to-day support from subject teachers generally ensures that students have a very good understanding of their own capabilities and progress. However, a minority are less confident about this and this is justified to an extent, as in some instances, for instance in information and communication technology, they could be helped to be clearer about their target grades. As at the previous inspection, the system of formal academic reviews plays an important part in the way it helps students to consider the standards they are achieving and to accept responsibility for agreeing targets for their own progress with learning. Tutors use morning registration periods for ongoing mentoring of individuals, though at such times others in the group tend to be less gainfully employed.
85. Careers guidance has a high profile and is very well judged to meet students' needs. It is delivered in part through the general studies programme but there is also some very good relevant use of tutor time, together with ample opportunity for personal research in the careers library. Students are encouraged to consider a range of possible careers, and to look at

important elements such as the potential for job satisfaction as well as more factual details. Teachers give much encouragement to individuals to widen their experience by attending university open days. Very good liaison with the careers officer, who arranges relevant drop-in sessions so that she is readily accessible, contributes to the strength of the provision. Altogether, careers guidance is a very good match to students' needs and aspirations. Support through the university application process is very strong, with excellent guidance about preparing a personal statement. Good efforts are made to arrange practice interviews at relevant times for any who want this help. The very good guidance also extends to preparation for the transition to university life, to help students cope with the practicalities and challenges that most will face after they leave school. A minority of students rate careers guidance less highly than other aspects of provision but this appears to relate to fact that Year 12 are still at a relatively early stage of the programme rather than to any deficiency in it.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

86. Good links are developed with parents, and there is a very good sense of partnership with students in the sixth form. Parents who express a view are very happy with the very good teaching and with the high expectations that help students to make such good progress with their learning. Sixth form students are as enthusiastic as their parents about these aspects of the provision offered by the school, though their views on some aspects are more variable. A few of the parents' questionnaires show that they would like a closer partnership with the school, for instance through more information about students' progress.
87. General information available to parents is satisfactory. A meeting for the parents of newly joined Year 7 students early in the autumn term gives an opportunity to discuss any initial difficulties in settling in. The prospectus is attractive, with a suitable range of information. The booklet for students and parents about the sixth form gives a very full account of the curricular and wider provision, and indicates clearly the high commitment that is expected from students. The governors' annual report is generally informative but could usefully add a few extra details, for instance an outline of arrangements that may be made regarding admission and full access for any students with physical disabilities. The termly newsletters include a good, lively account of school events and concerns.
88. Efforts to inform and consult parents about the progress and needs of individual students are also generally good. Teachers welcome enquiries from parents and readily follow up any concerns they express. In their turn they are quick to contact parents, including those of sixth form students, if any anxiety arises about them. The school aims to report progress to parents every term, through either an interim report, the very well attended discussions with teachers, or the main annual report. These annual reports, together with the interim assessments, are of generally good quality; for instance, they allow parents to see how the student is doing in comparison with the average for the year group. Parents' reservations about the information they receive are justified to an extent because there are instances where there is not enough subject-specific information about the progress that the student has made. In addition, it is not made sufficiently clear to parents that they may contact the school to arrange a discussion after they have received the main annual report and many parents feel that they have to wait until the next parents evening. Because the expected assessment and target-setting routines are not in place for those few students with special educational needs, their parents do not have the extra opportunities for involvement that would usually be extended to them. In the sixth form, the spread of information available to students about their achievements in addition to that in their official reports allows them to have good involvement as partners in their own learning.

89. Throughout the school, students' homework diaries give parents the chance to monitor the homework they do, and the way that homework is regularly completed indicates that parents are very supportive over this. Parents also show much support by sending students to school properly equipped, even to the extent of buying them extra items such as paintbrushes and sketchbooks for their art lessons. They come in very good numbers to dramatic and musical performances and a good number also respond to consultations, for instance during the formulation of the revised sex education policy. The parents' association makes an important contribution by raising considerable funds for projects such as the replacement of musical instruments for the music department.
90. Sixth form students enjoy studying at the school and rate highly the quality of support to help them gain excellent examination results. They feel they are well informed before they join and that they are enabled to settle down well. They greatly appreciate the way that teachers respond readily to any requests for extra help with work and voice especial appreciation of the support always available from the head of sixth form. Their views on several points, including the advice given to them before they enter the sixth form and about future options, the range of activities and enrichment and the way the school responds to their views, vary widely from extremely positive to rather negative, though the majority of those expressing views were satisfied with all these areas. Such matters as the date of the inspection and the timing of delivery of the careers programme have to be taken into account in considering these views, as do their individual preferences and priorities. For instance, although many are happy that they can follow the courses they want, a few are disappointed about the non-availability of subjects, such as not being able to pursue drama to A-level. A few in Year 13 still mention the uncertainties they faced with AS courses. They feel that guidance as to the expectations on these new courses was, of necessity, limited because staff had no prior experience of teaching the courses to draw on when offering advice. The school generally does consider sixth form students' views, as it does of those of others. Students' discontent about how their views are considered relates mostly to unhappiness with the recently introduced 'no bags' policy. The sixth form can see the advantages of storing bags in lockers during the day but are not all yet reconciled to the practical difficulties of carrying piles of books around the site.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

91. The school is very well led and managed by the headteacher and senior staff. The outstanding leadership provided by the headteacher has led to a rapid rise in standards at both GCSE and A-level. The school aims to develop the potential of each student to the full, both academically and in terms of personal development, and the way that it reflects this in the education that it provides is excellent. Weaknesses are tackled head-on and there is a distinct lack of complacency in the school as all staff demonstrate a very good commitment to improve still further.
92. The role played by middle managers is very good overall. Heads of department are given a good deal of responsibility and generally carry out their duties with a high degree of diligence. Perhaps the best example is observed in the way that the language college has been managed. The school was without a manager for some time as the headteacher and governors wanted the right calibre of candidate. In the intervening time, the senior member of staff responsible for the college did an excellent job, not just in maintaining the status quo but also continuing to develop new initiatives, such as International School status. The outstanding leadership provided by the new head of language college has led to benefits not only permeating all aspects of the school, such as the teaching of lessons in other subjects in a foreign language and providing a vast range of extra-curricular classes, but also to the languages being a leader in driving up standards. For example, all students now take their

GCSEs in languages earlier than usual so as to widen their options in later years. The school is a shining example of what can be accomplished with specialist status and all its targets have been met.

93. One area that is fundamental to the school's success is the way that examination data is used to identify strengths and weaknesses in its performance. Results are compared with national statistics for each subject, but are also analysed to assess the progress that students make in each individual subject, that takes into account how well girls achieve in other selective schools. All heads of department complete an extensive review of examination results, although some are much better than others. Those for mathematics are particularly well detailed, for example, while those for Latin do not identify any real actions that could have improved standards. The systems for monitoring teaching are generally very good as senior staff and heads of departments carry out frequent lesson observations, although the weaknesses in music had not been picked up. The observations are targeted at specific aspects of teaching, such as ensuring that all students know what the aims of the lesson are, and in this way a great consistency of good practice has been developed. Where teachers are found to require extra support, this is quickly provided. The outcomes of these systems are twofold. Firstly the quality of teaching is improved across the school, and secondly the school's managers obtain a clear idea of what the priorities should be for development.
94. The priorities for improvement in the school development plan are very good and all aimed at raising standards still further. The actions that are taken to meet the school's targets are excellent and very detailed in the school development plan. The results of the work of previous years can be seen in the rise in standards and the improvement in teaching. However, the school's lack of complacency is evident even here as during the week of inspection the special group of staff and governors met to discuss how the process could be improved still further.
95. Governors play a very good role in shaping the direction of the school. They know its strengths and weaknesses very well and can, for example, discuss examination results in detail because they are kept so well informed. They take their roles very seriously and have thrown themselves into the life of the school. For example, workshops have been set up where governors are told about issues facing the school and then move into groups to try to find solutions. Several of the ideas that have come up have been completely new and have changed the direction of the school's thinking. Although the governors fulfil their responsibilities very well, they do not meet all their statutory requirements and this small aspect of their performance is unsatisfactory; the frequency of acts of collective worship does not meet requirements.
96. The school's management team is very good at ensuring the school is providing the best value for the money it receives. Its performance is compared with other schools, both of a similar type and all schools nationally. Examination data is analysed in great depth and very good use is made of new technology in this respect as well as in other areas of administration. The arrangements to consult with students and visitors, such as student teachers, and take their views into account are very good. However, there is still room for improvement in addressing areas with which parents and students in the sixth form have concerns, such as the 'no bags' policy and the arrangements for parents evenings. The targets for improvement are challenging and emphasise continued improvement.
97. The financial planning at the school is excellent. In particular, the school has targeted its finances perfectly towards those areas where it will have greatest benefit. The school receives considerable funds because it is a language college and the use of these has been outstandingly good. The improvements made include widening the language curriculum for

all students, raising examination results significantly and providing valuable links with local, national and international partners that have benefited not only the students but also the wider community and other schools. Overall, the school receives funding that is above the national average, but given the way that it has used these funds to improve standards, work with the community and provide a very good quality education for all its students, the school is providing very good value for money.

98. The school generally has sufficient resources and accommodation, although the lack of facilities for physical education mean that the progress made by students is not as good as the teaching should merit. The newly appointed librarian has made a positive impact in a short period of time. The library has become a learning resource centre for the whole school. For example, there has been involvement with the National Poetry Day, Holocaust Memorial Day and direct involvement with departments such as with the launch of Science Week. Recommended reading lists have been compiled after working in partnership with the English department.
99. The school has enough teachers to meet its needs and their qualifications are very well matched to the needs of high attaining students. The school has excellent support from non-teaching staff. The assistantes play a significant role in raising standards in foreign languages, working both with individuals and small groups. The school is very fortunate to have technicians who support the teaching in information and communication technology and even build computers to save the school money.
100. The school has a very good strategy for performance management that developed out of well-established practices for helping teachers to develop their professional skills. The effectiveness of the prior arrangement was reflected in the awarding of Investors in People status to the school in 1997. In December 2001 that accreditation was renewed for a further three years and the very good re-assessment report strongly confirms the continuing effectiveness of practices to monitor, support and develop all staff, whether teachers or support staff.
101. All teachers have agreed objectives that are well matched to opportunities for their continuing professional development. Teachers take their objectives seriously and the identified action points are of critical importance, acting as the focus of enquiry and analysis in the event that an objective is not met. The main focus of professional development is on continuous improvement of teaching and learning, and the further raising of standards. Teachers who attend courses out of school are required to provide an evaluation of the course's quality, the effectiveness of which is illustrated by two instances of the school receiving complete refunds of fees for courses that failed to meet the standards that the school had expected. The provision of feedback to colleagues is another clear expectation on those teachers who attend such courses. There is a very good induction programme for teachers new to the school and newly qualified teachers, in particular, speak highly of the support they receive from both senior staff and their subject colleagues. The success the school has in supporting its teachers is clear in the improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

102. The sixth form is very well led and managed. The head of sixth form ensures that all students are treated equally and that the school's aim of providing the best possible education for students is continually striven for. The head of sixth form is exceptionally well informed

about the students' academic and personal development because she has forged a team of highly effective tutors who know their charges very well. The introduction of the new curriculum in the sixth form has been managed very well and resulted in very high standards not only being maintained but actually improved so that last year's results were among the best in the school's history.

103. Examination data is examined in great detail to identify strengths and weaknesses in the performance of departments and individual teachers. Where results do not come up to the school's own high standards swift action is taken, for example, the dropping of Latin from the curriculum after some disappointing results.
104. The same very good systems are used for monitoring and supporting teaching as exist in the main school and they are equally effective. The head of sixth form is aware of the areas where high quality teaching is guaranteed and those very few areas where teaching is not yet reaching the same high standards. Support mechanisms have been put in place and quality of teaching is improving in subjects such as physics as a result. The results are observed in the improvement in the quality of teaching in the sixth form since the school was last inspected.
105. The governors view the sixth form as equally important as the rest of the school and take their role here equally as seriously. They are very well informed about standards and play a leading role in planning for the sixth form's future. Although the governors fulfil their responsibilities very well, they do not meet all their statutory requirements and this aspect of their performance is unsatisfactory; students in the sixth form are not taught enough religious education to meet the demands of the agreed syllabus. The priorities identified in the sixth form are very good and all subjects have development plans that support them in some detail. These plans are underpinned by excellent financial planning that ensures that the main school does not subsidise the sixth form; indeed, a small surplus is fed back into the education of students in Years 7 to 11. The school also has other ways of ensuring that it is providing the value for its money, including extensive systems for seeking the views of students and linking with other very high attaining girls schools to analyse results at A-level. Overall, this is a very cost-effective sixth form.

Resources

106. The staffing in the sixth form is very good. There are sufficient teachers for all subjects and their qualifications are exceptionally well matched to the demands of high attaining students. There are good systems for ensuring that teachers are kept appropriately up to date with their subject matter and developments in education. However, the training of teachers in the demands of the new syllabuses is not good enough in some subjects, such as English and design and technology, to ensure that teaching reaches the same high standard as other subjects.
107. The school has sufficient rooms for teaching, but the current arrangements for a sixth form private study room are unsatisfactory and a source of irritation for students. These arrangements are, however, only short term while the school carries out some refurbishment.
108. The resources in the sixth form are satisfactory overall. The library offers a welcoming and studious environment and is heavily used by students. There are sufficient books and resources in the library and departments to support students' studies, except in English where there are not enough copies of the texts being followed for students. Instead, they work from photocopied pages so are unable to read around the passages they are currently studying.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

109. In order to improve the quality of education provided even further, the school's management should:

- (1) Raise the standard of teaching in Years 7 to 9 to that of the rest of the school by injecting the same sense of urgency into the teaching that is generated by having examination targets to aim for elsewhere in the school. (Paragraph 34)
- (2) Improve the provision for students who are particularly gifted and talented by implementing the plans that the school has already drawn up. (Paragraph 52)
- (3) Improve the progress made by students in all years by ensuring that all teachers use the same methods as those employed in the very best lessons of involving students in lessons. (Paragraphs 37 and 45)

Sixth form

- (1) Improve the teaching of English and design and technology by providing more training in the requirements of the new syllabuses.
- (2) Improve the teaching in physics by ensuring that teachers make greater demands of their students.

Governors should also consider the following minor weaknesses when drawing up their action plan.

Meeting statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship and sufficient religious education to meet the demands of the locally agreed syllabus.

Providing individual education plans, with clear targets for students on stage three or above of the special needs register.

Making clear to parents that they can come to the school to discuss their child's report and that the school will make all of the child's teachers available.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	139
	Sixth form	64
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students		84

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	13	40	65	20	1	0	0
Percentage	9	29	47	14	1	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	5	26	26	7	0	0	0
Percentage	8	41	41	11	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y5 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	475	242
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	22	0

Special educational needs	Y5 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	7	0

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	163

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	3
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	3.8
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	0	96	96

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	93	95	96
	Total	93	95	96
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	97 (100)	99 (100)	100 (100)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	96 (97)	98 (98)	90 (89)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	96	96	96
	Total	96	96	96
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	96 (96)	99 (100)	96 (95)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	0	95	95

GCSE results		5 or more grades A*-C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	94	95	96
	Total	94	95	96
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	99 (99)	100 (99)	100 (100)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	69.3 (71.8)
	National	39.0 (38.4)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	3	97	100

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	3	97	100
	Average point score per candidate	23.3	28.3	28.2 (24.8)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	18.0	17.5 (18.2)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	3	97	100	0	0	0
	Average point score per candidate	23.3	28.3	28.2	N/a	N/a	N/a
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	20
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	2
Indian	176
Pakistani	29
Bangladeshi	6
Chinese	18
White	444
Any other minority ethnic group	21

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	42.6
Number of students per qualified teacher	16.8

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	352

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	69.1
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.8
Key Stage 4	22.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	8.8
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	5.6
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	2	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	0	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of students excluded.

Financial information

Financial year	2001
	£
Total income	2080033
Total expenditure	2079094
Expenditure per student	3053
Balance brought forward from previous year	43355
Balance carried forward to next year	44294

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	717
Number of questionnaires returned	92

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	41	2	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	58	36	1	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	38	54	3	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	46	14	4	1
The teaching is good.	38	53	3	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	40	13	2	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	34	9	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	77	21	0	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	28	53	12	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	39	52	3	0	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	51	42	2	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	37	41	13	2	7

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

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Results in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations are consistently very high when compared with the national averages.
- Many students attain excellent standards. In particular, some written work is outstanding.
- Students have excellent attitudes towards their work and this undoubtedly contributes to the progress they make.

Area for improvement

- Ensuring that the quality of all teaching becomes very good.

110. In the 2001 national tests for 14 year olds, results were very high compared with the national average and average when compared with other grammar schools. Results have remained very high, compared with national results, since 1997. They broadly followed the national trend between 1997 and 2001. Teacher assessments and test results were broadly similar, but the highest attaining students performed better in the tests than was predicted by teacher assessments. The trend of results has broadly followed the national trend. Results in English were similar to those obtained in mathematics and science.
111. In 2001, the GCSE results obtained in both English and English literature were very high compared with the national average and other grammar schools. The proportion gaining the highest grades of A* or A was well above the average for other grammar schools. Results have been maintained at a very high level since the previous inspection. Students gained results that were similar to those in the other subjects that they studied. There is no difference in the performance of students from different ethnic groups.
112. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that examination results accurately reflect the standards being currently attained in the school. When students' prior attainment is taken into account, achievement by end of Year 9 is good. Students from Indian or Sri Lankan backgrounds have lower standards of attainment on entry than white students. However, in Years 7 to 9 they make better progress than other students, so by the time they reach the end of Year 9 they catch up with the majority of other students. However, their progress is not sufficient to enable them to overtake white students and so they do not reach the very highest levels in the same proportions as white students. The achievement of all students by the end of Year 11 is good. Students with special educational needs make progress at the same rate as other students.
113. Students' attainment in speaking and listening is a clear strength in Years 7 to 11. Virtually all students are keen to take part in a full range of speaking activities, including whole class, group and paired discussions. Students explain themselves fully and use appropriate and interesting vocabulary. They challenge each other and their teachers and can quote evidence to support their points of view. Whilst discussions often become lively, at all times students respect the views of others and observe the conventions of debate, such as speaking in turn. There are many examples of students practising and developing these skills. In a Year 8 lesson students discussed the opening scene of 'Hamlet' in such depth and intensity that they collectively gained a remarkable insight into the nuances of Shakespeare's language. A Year 11 class discussed what the writer's intentions were in an article on suntans, with a number

of students adopting conflicting views and presenting their cases very cogently. Students' communication skills are all the more effective because many have developed excellent listening skills. For example, they concentrate very well when reading, either aloud or to the class, and consequently any subsequent discussion is very well informed.

114. By the end of Year 9, students read novels, plays and poems that are appropriate for their age. Almost all students read for pleasure and buy their own books or borrow them from a library. Most can name favourite authors. Many have made a particular effort to see film versions of their favourite novels, with much enthusiasm being expressed for 'Lord of the Rings'. The majority of students read aloud with very good expression and understanding, though lower attainers have a somewhat stilted delivery. By the end of Year 11, students go on to read more complex texts. All students are interested in the social, moral and personal issues which exist in literature, ranging from the nature of savagery in William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies' to courtly sophistication in Shakespeare's plays. Additionally, all but the lower attaining students explain how writers create particular effects and offer an evaluation of the quality of their writing. The vast majority of students possess a good technical vocabulary that enables them to identify literary devices and linguistic features.
115. By the end of Year 9, students are familiar with different types of writing, including description, narrative and reportage. Students have developed the routine of re-drafting their work to improve it. By the end of Year 11 students consolidate further their skills in assembling information and improving it before presenting their best copy for assessment. Handwriting is usually very good. Students understand the conventions of punctuation and paragraphing and apply them consistently and accurately. Many students enjoy writing and become absorbed in their work, as was seen in the many excellent, lengthy narratives that students produce. Very high quality analytical work was seen on demanding topics, such as comparing the effects achieved by Thomas Hardy in 'The Withered Arm' with those in Alice Walker's 'The Colour Purple'. Students' use of information and communication technology to enhance their work is broadly average.
116. The quality of both teaching and learning in Years 7 to 11 is good, although some very good teaching was also seen. When teaching is most effective, a number of features are in evidence. Teachers possess very good subject knowledge and are well aware of the requirements of the course they are teaching. This means they are able to communicate to students what they need to do to achieve high standards and they teach in such a way that students are appropriately challenged. This happens in many lessons across the year groups. In a Year 10 lesson on HG Wells' 'The Red Room', for example, the teacher used questioning very effectively to initiate a discussion on the writer's use of colour and his skill in using bleak humour. The teacher also ensured that all students were fully attentive and that most made an oral contribution. In Years 7 and 8 teachers introduce students to various aspects of the life and times of Shakespeare, which arouse their enthusiasm and lead to enjoyment in the reading and acting of the plays. Most teachers have high expectations. They expect students to work hard, to participate fully in lessons and to behave well. Resources are effectively used to deepen students' understanding, as was seen, for example, when a teacher led a Year 8 group in a discussion of an extract from 'Hamlet'. The teacher used an overhead projector to display the text and students could watch as she annotated it. This gave the students the chance to have a picture of what an annotated text should look like and to see concise notes being made. Learning is rapid when the pace is brisk, work is challenging and when students have the opportunity to actively participate in the lesson. Marking is good and gives students guidance on how to improve their work. Students have excellent attitudes towards each other and their teachers. They are ready to explore ideas together, are ambitious, and take pride in achieving high standards. Teachers and students together create a very good environment for learning.

117. However, there are some lessons when teaching is less effective, although still satisfactory. This happens when the teacher spends too long explaining a single point so the pace of the lesson is slow and the work lacks sufficient challenge. This results in students losing interest and making only slow progress.
118. Very good opportunities are provided for speaking and listening in other subjects of the curriculum and students are expected to play a full part in discussions in most subjects. Students also develop a full range of reading skills. In Latin, for example, they read aloud in the original language and in modern foreign languages they learn to skim, scan and use dictionaries. In many subjects students are required to write at length and many respond to the challenge with relish. A few of the topics which aroused enthusiasm include the different benefits of holiday resorts in geography; sermons for different congregations as part of a study of the medieval church in history; a critique of another student's art, written in French, as part of the Years 10 and 11 course; and substantial novels, no less, written by Year 9 students for English.
119. The department is led and managed well. A clear emphasis has been placed on improving standards in the departmental development plan. Progress since the previous inspection has been good. Standards by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 have remained very high. The department now has a good programme for the teaching of drama in Years 7 to 9. Marking is more consistent. However, there still remains a need for more multi-cultural texts for students in Years 7 to 9.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- Standards are very high.
- Very good planning and effective teaching methods are leading to a high proportion of very good teaching across the school.
- Students enjoy their mathematics; the standard of presentation is excellent and students are eager to learn.
- The quality of leadership and management is very good and leading to improvements in teaching and standards.

Area for improvement

- Teachers do not make enough use of information and communication technology.

120. In the 2001 national tests for 14 year olds, results were very high compared with the national average and average when compared with other grammar schools. Results have remained very high, compared with national results, since 1997. They broadly followed the national trend between 1997 and 2001. Results in mathematics were similar to those in English and science.
121. Results in the 2001 GCSE examinations in mathematics were very high in comparison with the national average for all schools and other grammar schools. The proportion gaining the highest grades of A* or A was above the average for other grammar schools. Results have been maintained at a very high level since the previous inspection. Students' results in mathematics were similar to those they attained in most other subjects that they studied. There is no difference in the performance of students from different ethnic groups.
122. In the work seen during the inspection, the standards that students attain by the end of Year 9 are very high. This represents a good level of achievement for all students, when their attainment on entry to the school is taken into account. Students from Indian and Sri Lankan backgrounds make better progress than the other students do. Their levels of attainment are lower when they enter the school but, by the end of Year 9, the standards they attain are similar to the other students. The highest attaining students display excellent algebraic skills when solving equations. Others apply techniques they have previously learnt when adding numerical fractions to adding algebraic fractions. Students extend their work on mensuration to Pythagoras' theorem. This leads on to a good understanding of the application of trigonometric ratios by the higher attainers. Students quickly develop good skills in analysing and representing data, so that they can, for example, generate grouped frequency graphs from continuous data. This work allows them to develop excellent statistical skills such as calculating probabilities of combined events using tree diagrams, which prepares them very well for more advanced work.
123. In the work seen during the inspection, the standards that students attain by the end of Year 11 are very high. The proportion gaining grades A*-C was much higher than would usually be expected from their results at the end of Year 9; they have achieved very well. In their coursework, students demonstrate presentation skills of a high order and use both tables and diagrams well when investigating solutions to the 'Emma dilemma' problem. They explain their results very clearly, and use a high level of algebra in order to come to a conclusion. This high level is reflected in their work in algebra when solving equations. Students sketch and interpret graphs of different types of functions, using graphic calculators effectively to support their findings. When investigating the graphs of trigonometric functions, students quickly learn to recognise the amplitude, period, and asymptotes of the particular graphs. They then use this understanding to recognise the symmetry of the curves and can match up the value of the angles. The higher attainers progress to using the formulae to calculate sides and angles of any triangle, not just right-angled ones. Data handling skills are very good. Students calculate standard deviation and use this to compare distributions. They plot and interpret cumulative frequency graphs with complete accuracy.
124. Overall standards of presentation are excellent in mathematics and spellings are generally correct. Students set their work out clearly and are developing very good skills in structuring answers. Students respond well to the very good knowledge and the high level of questioning of their teachers. They confidently and coherently answer questions and contribute well in class discussions, explaining the methods they use to solve problems and work out answers whilst the others listen attentively. Students learn from each other and this consolidates their

understanding, increasing the amount of learning achieved. When given the opportunity, students work well together in pairs. They discuss their work with each other usefully and then report their findings coherently to the rest of the class. They have a mature approach to mathematics and are well motivated. Consequently they put in a very good level of intellectual effort and acquire new knowledge at a rapid rate.

125. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. There are examples of excellent teaching. Learning is very good because of the students' high level of concentration and attention in the majority of lessons and the high quality of questioning and support by teachers. In the best lessons, teachers ask questions like "Can you explain how you got this answer?" This encourages students to consider in detail the steps they have taken. For example, in one lesson the teacher introduced the students to surds; the excellent choice of examples and activities enabled students to quickly progress from applying their understanding of collecting terms in algebra to learning how to manipulate surds, but it was making them explain their methods that really made them think hard about what they were doing. In a minority of lessons opportunities are missed to use questions in order to take forward students' learning and make them think deeply. Explanations are very clear and well-structured demonstrations encourage good skills in presentation, which prepares students well for higher level work. Lessons generally proceed at a brisk pace so that lots of work is covered. Teachers plan and prepare their lessons very well, basing their planning in all years on the strategies of the National Numeracy Strategy. This gives students regular opportunities to develop further oral, mental and visualisation skills in the starter sessions. Included in the planning are challenging questions that extend students' learning further. In lessons, teachers explain to students clearly what they should be learning and then use methods that maintain interest and motivation. Teachers use resources, such as individual white boards and overhead projectors, effectively but, although graphic calculators are used effectively when students compare graphs, not enough use is made of information and communication technology.
126. The management of students is generally very good in all years and students respond accordingly; behaviour is excellent and students work very well with each other. There are generally very good relationships in the classrooms both between students and between students and teachers. This leads to an atmosphere of respect and a good understanding of the needs of students. Consequently, students want to learn and this is an important contribution to raising standards. When working in pairs and groups, students are encouraged to engage in discussions and ask each other questions so they really understand their work. Teachers give students extensive opportunities to demonstrate answers to other students. The students explain answers clearly and this contributes well to their learning. Homework is set regularly and supports the work students do in class very well, preparing them for their next lesson and supporting their revision.
127. The contribution that subjects make to developing students' competence and skills in understanding and using numbers and data varies. In history it is good. Students develop analytical skills when examining statistics from population, birth, and death rate records. From the Doomsday survey, they reinforce their skills in creating pie charts by representing data about the relative sizes of different manors in the local area. However, in design and technology, they do not always use the correct units of measurement, using a mixture of inches and centimetres in one project. In information and communication technology, students extend their understanding of functions when completing spreadsheets.
128. The leadership and management of mathematics are very good, as is the capacity for improvement. The leadership of the recently appointed head of department is very enthusiastic and, although standards have been rising in the past, the rate of progress is now

very rapid. The head of department has evaluated the strengths and weaknesses of mathematics in the school and has established the strategies needed to improve the attainment of all students. Teachers share responsibilities and are eager to move the provision for mathematics in the school forward. There is a strong commitment by the whole team to improving standards by raising achievement for all students. There are very good procedures for assessing students' performance as they progress through the school. The performance of students is monitored very well through regular testing and there are procedures in place to track students' attainment from these tests and to set targets for improvement.

129. Progress since the last inspection has been good. The results for 14 year olds and the GCSE results have improved since the previous inspection; all students now gain at least a grade B at GCSE. Teaching has improved as well.

SCIENCE

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

Strengths

- Standards are very high.
- Students achieve well. They gain better results in GCSE examinations than might be expected in relation to their attainment when they enter the school.
- Students enjoy science lessons. They ask perceptive questions in order to confirm and extend their understanding.
- Teaching and learning are good overall; they are very good in chemistry in Years 10 and 11.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good. Teachers and technicians work very effectively together as a team and the department has made very good progress since the previous inspection.

Area for improvement

- Students do not do as well in physics as they do in the other GCSE science examinations.

130. In the 2001 national tests for 14 year olds, results were very high compared with the national average and average when compared with other grammar schools. Results were similar to those in English and mathematics. Results have remained very high, compared with national results, since 1997. They broadly followed the national trend between 1997 and 2001.

131. Three quarters of Year 11 take the GCSE double award science examination and, in 2001, almost all students gained grades A*-C and results overall were very high compared with the national average. The remaining quarter of students take the three separate science examinations. Results in these examinations, generally taken by higher attaining students nationally, were above the national average in 2001 in chemistry and biology. In physics, results were close to the national average. The proportion of students gaining grades A*-C in science subjects is well above average compared with other grammar schools. Students do better in chemistry than they do on average in their other subjects; their performance is broadly average in biology and double award science but below average in physics. There are variations in examination results from year to year in the various science courses but, overall, very high standards have been maintained in GCSE science over the last few years.

132. In the work seen during the inspection, attainment is very high compared with the national average both at the end of Year 9 and at the end of Year 11. Students generally have excellent knowledge and understanding of the topics they are studying and can express their understanding very clearly both in spoken and written answers. There are examples of

outstanding attainment for students' age. For example, in Year 8, students move very quickly from understanding the basic structure of the atom, through the meaning of atomic number and mass number, to an appreciation of the existence of different isotopes of elements and the idea of relative atomic mass.

133. Students have very good speaking skills and in Year 11 they debate, expressing a mature appreciation of the ethical issues involved, the advantages and disadvantages of the development of genetically modified foods. Students' practical skills, although better than expected for their age, are often not as high as their other skills in the subject, particularly in the early years in school. However, students' investigations in Years 10 and 11 are very successful and there are some outstanding examples of investigative work into, for example, the effect of an acid or alkaline environment on the action of enzymes. The presentation of students' written work is immaculate and their notebooks provide a valuable source of information for revision.
134. Students' overall achievement in science by the ages of 14 and 16 is good. At the age of 16 they gain even better GCSE results than might be expected, given their very high attainment when they arrived in Year 7. Students from Indian or Sri Lankan backgrounds enter the school with lower levels of attainment than their white peers. They make similar progress through Years 7 to 9 and so remain slightly behind and do not attain quite as well in the national tests at the age of 14. However, from that time onwards, there is no significant difference in the achievement of students from different backgrounds. Students who are gifted and talented often choose to follow the three separate science courses in Years 10 and 11. These courses enable students to study topics that are more demanding than those usually covered before the age of 16, to deal with more challenging ideas, to maintain their interest in the subjects and to make good progress. The few students who have special educational needs are enabled to make progress that is indistinguishable from that of others in their groups.
135. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall in all year groups. Teachers generally have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and plan lessons carefully to meet the needs of students. Lessons begin with a 'starter' activity for students as they arrive. This ensures that students are settled and thinking, even before the lesson is fully under way. Some of these activities enable students to tackle and overcome earlier misunderstandings in, for example, using information on melting point and boiling point to identify whether a material is a solid, liquid or gas at room temperature. Teachers usually question students rigorously to ensure that they recall and understand the work from the previous lesson. The department uses worksheets and question sheets that are well designed to make higher attaining students think really hard about a topic. Slightly less demanding versions are used sensitively for those students who need rather more support. Students have very positive attitudes to science. They ask questions when they do not understand, or when they want to know more, and thus play a very active part in enhancing their own learning. This combination of teachers' skills, high quality materials and students' enthusiastic attitudes ensures that the pace of learning in lessons is usually at least good and often very good.
136. There are some lessons in which teaching and learning are very good or excellent and these lessons occur more frequently in chemistry topics, particularly in Years 10 and 11, than they do in other aspects of science. Where teaching is excellent, students move through a topic very quickly but with plenty of opportunity to take in and understand the ideas and no feeling of being at all rushed. For example, in Year 11, students were introduced to the group of compounds known as the alkanes, quickly recognised the pattern in their structure and formulae, thoroughly enjoyed building models, developed understanding of the specialist terms and learned to name the various isomers. All this was achieved with plenty of

opportunity for students to ask questions like “Where do we start counting?” and “What if...?” and to make their own valuable contributions to the learning of the whole class.

137. Students do not achieve as well in GCSE physics and the physical aspects of double award science as they do in other strands. Teaching and learning in physics are satisfactory but not as good as in biology and chemistry. There are several minor weaknesses in the teaching of physics that have an effect over time and restrict the progress that students make and their eventual achievement. In Years 7 and 8 there are occasions when teachers who are not physics specialists lack confidence in teaching the subject; students sense this, their concentration weakens and learning is less secure. In Years 10 and 11 physics teachers present information correctly and clearly but sometimes expect students to listen for too long or do not provide enough emphasis on the major points that students need to remember. Some students lack confidence in their ability in physics and regard numerical calculations as a particular stumbling block. Since these students have very high levels of attainment in mathematics, their concerns are not justified and they should be encouraged to regard these aspects of physics as straightforward.
138. The department places particularly strong emphasis on the teaching of literacy skills and students are given many opportunities to write at length and in different styles. Interesting accounts of the advantages and disadvantages of using aluminium to make armour for Napoleon’s army and biographies of famous female scientists occur in students’ work alongside magazine articles about renewable sources of energy and the more usual accounts of experiments and investigations. The department makes good use of information and communication technology to support learning in science. Teachers use sensors and data-loggers in demonstrations and students often obtain information for projects from the Internet and CD-ROMs.
139. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Teachers and technicians work together as a team, react very positively to any suggestions for improvement and share a commitment to ensuring that students’ attainment is as high as possible. The monitoring systems in the department are a particular strength. The findings from monitoring are used most effectively to influence the advice and support provided for teachers and to ensure that any lack of effort on the part of students is identified and dealt with quickly.
140. The department has made very good progress since the previous inspection. GCSE examination results and the test results for 14 year olds have both improved significantly. The department has overcome most of the weaknesses identified in the previous inspection report. Deficiencies in the accommodation for science persist and a significant number of lessons take place in classrooms rather than laboratories.

ART AND DESIGN

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

Strengths

- Teachers successfully pass on their very extensive subject knowledge to the students.
- Students’ learning is very good. They work hard and make very good progress.
- Standards of work are very high by the end of Year 11.
- Students display exemplary attitudes and behaviour, resulting in excellent personal development and relationships.

Areas for improvement

- In order to extend the ceramics course, students should be given opportunities to handle and fire higher quality clay and to experience working with glazes.
- The use of information and communication technology should be extended so students can experience more aspects of the subject, especially computer-aided art.

141. Results in the 2001 GCSE examinations were very high in comparison with the national average. The proportion gaining the highest grades of A* or A was well above the average for other grammar schools. Results have been maintained at a very high level since the previous inspection. Students' results in art were similar to the other subjects that they studied. There is no difference in the performance of students from different ethnic groups.
142. In work seen during the inspection, standards in drawing and painting by the end of Year 9 are above average. These standards reflect good achievement when compared with those attained on entry as students join the school with only average skills in painting, drawing and model making and their knowledge of art and artists is thin. By the end of Year 9, students observe carefully when working from direct observation or when using illustrations. They have a good eye for detail, understand about shape, texture and design and use pencils carefully when trying to add tone and shadows. They mix paint successfully to gain the colours they need, understand about thickness of paint and use a wide range of brush sizes. A few occasionally get the paint too thin and use too small a brush for large areas, which slows down the speed of work. Students in Year 9, working on a 'fruits' theme, successfully translate small detailed drawings into larger and more abstract paintings. The resulting work is bold and colourful and shows understanding of the cell structure of the particular fruit. Students have a good understanding of perspective and proportion. For example, they are currently studying architecture and architectural detail. They know about vanishing points, eye levels, horizon lines and the importance of careful measuring, all of which improve their numeracy. Although much of the coursework is based on drawing and painting; when faced with challenges, for example, in printmaking and collage, they show good understanding of texture, line and colour building. Students produce a good amount of work in sketchbooks and the standard of drawing improves greatly from the initially naïve in Year 7 to the more complex in Year 9. Students build up a good knowledge of artists such as Monet, Lowry and Morris, and the highest attaining ones speak confidently about their lives and works.
143. In work seen during the inspection, standards in art are very high by the end of Year 11 and reflect very good achievement over the two-year course. The scheme of work is based on projects wherein students experiment with tools and materials and use the work of real artists and craftspeople to inspire them. Most students produce sufficient research before starting a project, search the Internet and CD-ROM for information and use the word processor to present their findings. However, as in other years, there is not enough use of information and communication technology as an artistic medium in itself. Students use sketchbooks to practise drawing and annotate their work clearly which helps them later when developing ideas. Their paintings and drawings have good composition and colour and they speak confidently, using the language of art, when criticising real works. Students show confidence when experimenting with montage and collage and use materials imaginatively. Students making some form of body adornment understand the importance of a good armature before creating final decorations on, for example, tiaras, hats and basques. Still life painting is excellent, as students control acrylics effectively, understand about placement and proximity and are careful about accuracy of shape. Figure drawings show clear understanding of body proportion and the highest attaining ones depict posed mood successfully. Work with clay is basically sound as students know about moulding and modelling, but as they only use quick-dry clay, they do not gain experience in firing or glazing techniques. In all the projects, students who are gifted and talented show ingenuity in designing and confidence in developing their own personal styles.

144. The quality of teaching is good and this, coupled with the exemplary attitudes of students and their hard work, brings about very good quality learning. The main strengths in the teaching are in subject knowledge, high expectations and effective teaching methods. The art teachers are talented artists, enthusiastic about their subject, and they inspire the students. Students come to lessons cheerfully, settle to work quickly, try hard and work throughout the sessions so the volume of work is high. Teachers select and use high quality resources to show students the techniques employed by real artists and how to analyse their own work and the work of others. Teachers know the capabilities of all the students, and constantly challenge them to re-assess what they are doing and determine how work can be improved. They encourage students to share their successes and display completed work to show others what is achievable. Lessons include time for instruction, appraisal of ongoing work, students' practical work and question and answer sessions to clear up problems. Students are given responsibility for storing their own work and the older students plan their own coursework, which develops independence and self-reliance. Most students in the earlier years in school know how well they are doing in art, but are unsure of their National Curriculum levels. In Years 10 and 11, the quality of learning is better than the quality of teaching because of the students' very high work rate. They apply themselves completely to the task in hand and take the responsibility of working on their projects very seriously. Behaviour is always exemplary and students' attitudes to their work have a very significant impact on the standards that they achieve.
145. Leadership is good and the head of department is seen as a strong leader, who is well respected by colleagues and students. The department has made good progress since the last inspection as the actions taken to address the criticisms in the last inspection report have ensured success. Standards have improved. There are now closer links with art galleries and colleges and students occasionally have opportunities to work alongside real artists and on local art projects. Experimental work and links with other cultures and countries have broadened the curriculum. Assessment has improved; teachers work closely together to ensure parity in the work and the department uses information from assessment to help in planning new modules.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

Strengths

- The very good quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9 leads to students achieving very well.
- There are super relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves; the lovely manner in which teachers work and support students helps to create a positive environment for working.
- Standards are very high by the end of Year 11.
- There are many opportunities for students to work together on projects: they share ideas about designs; discussing and offering constructive advice when necessary.

Areas for development

- Teachers need to encourage students to be more creative and imaginative when designing.
- The marking of students' work does not always tell them how to improve.
- The curriculum is rather narrow because there are no facilities for food technology.

146. Results in the 2001 GCSE short course examinations were very high compared to the national average. No comparisons are available with other grammar schools. Results have been maintained at a very high level since the previous inspection. The small number of

students who followed the full GCSE course attained very high results. Students' results in design and technology are not significantly different from those they obtained in most other subjects. There is no difference in the performance of students from different ethnic groups.

147. In the work seen during the inspection, the standards attained by the end of Year 9 are well above average overall although practical skills are average. This represents a very good level of achievement for all students. By the end of Year 9, students have a well above average knowledge and understanding of electronics. They understand the basic concepts behind electronic circuits and can describe how they might use a microprocessor to control the sequence of a set of flashing lights. The very highest attainers apply scientific principles accordingly. For example, in a Year 9 class, whilst most students were constructing a 'jitter bug' toy, the higher attainers were discussing how a flywheel mechanism could be used to produce vibration and how this could be used in their project. Students have very good research skills. They access the Internet to obtain information and are selective when editing information to suit their projects. Students make good use of information and communication technology to enhance their projects. They use the *Logicator* software to program a sequence of events. Students' design skills are well above average although much of their work is very structured and lacks real imagination and creative flair. Students have a very good knowledge and understanding of the design process.
148. By the end of Year 9, students' practical skills are average, as they are on entering the school in Year 7. They manufacture printed circuit boards and their soldering skills are average. When processing and shaping acrylic, students display sound practical skills. Textiles work is average. Students use appliqué techniques appropriately although the quality of hand stitching is occasionally rather untidy.
149. In the work seen during the inspection, the standards that students attain by the end of Year 11 are very high and this represents a good level of achievement for all students. The portfolios that students produce are of an exceedingly high standard. Their research work is very thorough and they use spreadsheets to model the cost of their projects. Work is very neat and portfolios are well organised and follow the design process. Students tend not to keep their initial sketches and often their work lacks imaginative thinking. They do not always use the correct units of measurement. For example, in a Year 11 class, one student had produced a cutting list in inches and then measured her materials in centimetres, which led to her project being far too small. Students are very articulate and speak with ease about their projects. Most know and use technical terminology appropriately. Practical skills are above average and there is good attention to detail and quality of finish. Students use powered machinery and hand tools appropriately and with a good degree of dexterity.
150. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subject. The department biases much of their work towards systems and control and towards projects that students will find demanding. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the examination syllabus and are very good at getting students to target the examination criteria; this is one reason why students achieve so well. Lessons are well planned and this is a strong feature of the subject. There is a very clear structure to lessons. This was seen to good effect in a Year 7 class when the teacher sequenced the practical activities in order to sustain the pace of the lesson. Even when planned activities are modified during the lesson the teachers are experienced enough to cope with the situation well. Teachers have very high expectations of students; teachers expect the very highest level of behaviour and response and this is always forthcoming from the students. There are super relationships between teachers and students and between students themselves. There are many opportunities for students to work together on projects: they share ideas about designs, discussing and offering constructive advice when necessary.

For example, in a Year 9 class, when students were constructing part of a storybook, a partner student helped another student when using the pillar drill.

151. Teachers have a lovely manner with the students. There is a great deal of care and attention provided and this is very much appreciated by the students. The students know that if they have any concerns they can turn to their teachers for support. Teachers are purposeful in their approach and do not accept superficial answers from students or poor quality work. Older students display mature attitudes towards their work. They often work for long periods independently of the teacher. Many students take the opportunity to use the department's facilities outside of normal school hours. Homework is set frequently and teachers always insist that all students take note of the homework. The quality of marking is satisfactory although comments are not always informative. Lessons always finish with a very good round up, which teachers use very effectively to ascertain what students have learnt from the lesson and then to plan their next lesson to meet the needs of students.
152. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is narrow with no food technology and only limited textiles. This is because there is no specialist accommodation for food technology and only limited accommodation for textiles. The subject leader has recognised the limitations in the department's accommodation and has focused the curriculum on the real strengths of the department such as systems and control.
153. The subject has made good progress since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching and the standards that students attain have been maintained at a high level.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Standards are very high.
- Students in Year 7 to Year 11 are achieving very well because teachers have very high expectations and set demanding work.
- Teachers use their very good knowledge of the examination syllabus to plan work that meets the demands of the examination very well.

Areas for improvement

- Teachers do not make enough use of information and communication technology.
- Teachers do not encourage students to play a full part in discussions.

154. Results in the GCSE examination in 2001 were very high in comparison with the national average. The proportion gaining the highest grades of A* or A was well in excess of the average for other grammar schools. Results have been maintained at a very high level since the previous inspection. Students' results in geography were similar to the other subjects that they studied. There is no difference in the performance of students from different ethnic groups.
155. In work seen during the inspection the standard students reach by the end of Year 9 is very high compared to the national average. This represents good achievement given their attainment on entry to the school. Students possess a broad range of map and graphical skills. Students in Year 7, for example, were able to read temperature and rainfall data and draw accurate graphs to show the annual distribution, whilst the work of higher attainers was better because they used climate terms and figures to explain their conclusions in writing. Students have an excellent knowledge of places around the world. In Year 9, for example, they are

aware of the distribution of earthquakes and know how the Japanese try to reduce the effects on people's safety. The quality of written work is high and often supported with labelled drawings, except for the small minority whose standard is lower because writing lacks detail and illustrations are untidy. Very few students make enough use of computers to improve their work.

156. In work seen during the inspection, students' standards at the end of Year 11 are very high. This represents very good achievement based on their standards at the end of Year 9. They have very good knowledge of physical and human geography with many higher attaining students achieving good GCSE standards at an early stage of the course. Very high standards are evident in GCSE coursework where many produce extremely well argued and detailed analyses and conclusions, such as those about how typical Walsall's town centre is of the central business districts in most towns. Students show a very good level of numerical competency in many topics, but particularly so in coursework because they collect data and use it to draw graphs and charts to support their reasoning. The quality of this work is improved when students use computers to present the work. Students have an excellent knowledge of places and know about the problems of economic development of countries such as Brazil and how this affects the way of life of the people. They are exceptionally aware of the level of poverty of people and the moral issues that face more wealthy countries about aid and trade.
157. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is good. Teachers plan lessons well and regularly take the opportunity to monitor how well students understand the work covered earlier and reinforce any topics that need it. Teachers have high expectations of students' effort and they make appropriate demands about the level of academic response expected from them in lessons and in the homework. Most students readily accept these challenges and make good progress in improving their knowledge of topics. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, students made good progress in learning about the characteristics of less economically developed countries because they concentrated fully and worked speedily in completing the group tasks set for them in order to reach a conclusion. Occasionally the pace of learning is slower than expected because students are not involved enough in discussions. Work is marked regularly and encouragement is given, but there are inconsistencies in the quality of the assessment by different teachers. Some teachers simply tick the work and do not give an evaluation of the standards achieved.
158. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is very good. The aims of lessons are explained at the start and students know what they are expected to achieve in the lesson. Teachers have very good knowledge of topics and of the syllabus and they explain points very clearly to students; this leads to very good progress being made. Teachers use a range of methods to provide interest and a focus for learning. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, students were engaged well in selecting an appropriate site in a river valley for a tourist facility. It entailed knowledge of river meanders and areas liable to flooding and led to students evaluating a number of different sites in order to reach a conclusion. Teachers prepare students very well for GCSE and constantly improve students' examination skills through guidance and the use of past questions. Students make very good progress in improving their understanding of questions by regular practice, including how to make use of data, maps and photographs that are regularly used in examinations. Occasionally learning is less effective because students are not engaged enough in discussions or because there is no summary at the end of a lesson so that the teacher can check what they have learnt.
159. The quality of leadership and management of the subject is good. The newly appointed head of department has made good progress in updating the schemes of work although further improvements are required to give more guidance to teachers about teaching and learning

objectives. The priorities identified in the development plan are appropriate but need more detail. The department is planning to make greater use of information and communication technology in the curriculum, but currently computers are not used enough for research of topics. The subject makes a good contribution to students' moral and cultural awareness. In Year 10, for example, students know about the poverty of people in cities such as Rio de Janeiro and in Year 9 they study the Japanese way of life.

160. The subject has made very good progress since the last inspection. Standards have improved for students in Years 7 to 11 and the proportion of students awarded GCSE A* grade has risen particularly quickly. Teaching continues to be good, but there are indications that this is now improving further under the new head of department.

HISTORY

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

Strengths

- GCSE results were very high in 2001.
- Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to plan challenging lessons that develop students' understanding very well.
- Students, who are clearly interested in and greatly enjoy the subject, are highly motivated to succeed.

Area for improvement

- The effective use of information and communication technology, as an aid to students' learning, should become a more frequent feature of lessons.

161. Results in the 2001 GCSE examinations were far above the national average and maintained the very high level of results of recent years. Results were similar to those in other grammar schools and students performed as well in history as they did in their other subjects. There were no differences in performance of students from different backgrounds.

162. In work seen during the inspection, students' attainment is well above average at the end of Year 9 and they are achieving very well. The very good knowledge and understanding of history that students have is evident in all lessons. Students in Year 7, for example, deal confidently with information concerning the religious beliefs and practices of people in medieval times so that the notion of the role of 'pardoners' in ensuring a place in heaven for the purchasers of their pardons is readily grasped. In a Year 8 lesson, students animatedly discussed the advantages and disadvantages of potential marriage suitors for Elizabeth I, accurately identifying the differing opinions and reasons for them that were held by Elizabeth herself and Lord Burghley, her powerful adviser. Students' work shows that they develop very well the skills to effectively convey their knowledge and understanding in writing. In Year 9, for instance, students of higher attainment, writing about improvements to public health in the 19th century, convincingly evaluate the influence of the work of individuals like Edwin Chadwick upon the introduction of national legislation. The writing of students of relatively lower attainment is less effective, in that it lacks the depth of detail, analysis and explanation of the very best writing. The work, of such students, on what prompted the government to appoint a Royal Commission in 1835 to enquire into the employment of children in factories, exemplifies relatively shallow written answers. Standards of presentation of written work, however, are very high and they reflect the interest shown in class by all students.

163. The attainment of those students, well over half the year group, who choose to continue with the study of history to Year 11 is very high and they are achieving very well. Students show that their impressive knowledge and understanding is a firm base for their thinking and reasoning when dealing with a satirical political cartoon about the Nazi-Soviet Pact of 1939. Hence, they not only explain the likely consequences for Europe and the world of such an 'unholy alliance', but also display an acute awareness of the motives of Hitler and Stalin, and of the irony used so graphically by the cartoonist. Similarly, in a Year 10 lesson, students were discriminating in their selection of information, available on Internet web sites, for inclusion in their work about the failure of the Munich Putsch that was perpetrated by the Nazis in 1923. The very high standards of written work reached by the great majority of students in Year 11 is well illustrated by answers to such questions as, "Could the Treaty of Versailles (1919) be justified at the time?" The high standards of analysis, conclusion and discussion evident in those answers are found equally in explanations of the weaknesses of the League of Nations between the two world wars. The difference between students of higher, and relatively lower, attainment manifests itself in such writing. The students of lower attainment, all of them working at levels consistent with a minimum of GCSE grade C standard, explore fewer reasons for the weakness of the League, and evaluate their importance and significance less deeply.
164. The very few students identified as having special educational needs are making progress in line with their peers.
165. Teaching is very good in all years and, consequently, students learn quickly and very effectively. The excellent subject knowledge that teachers have is applied, to very good effect, in skilful planning that is rooted in careful analysis of what students need to learn; this manifests itself in a very good range of teaching and learning strategies. When the teachers' infectious enthusiasm for the subject is added to those qualities, it is small wonder that students display their very obvious enjoyment of the subject. In one excellent Year 7 lesson, for example, the room was alive with their excitement and motivation. Told, outside the room before the lesson started, that the murder of an unknown man had been committed and that they were responsible for solving the crime, they could hardly wait to start. A lesson in which they examined sources of historical evidence – a regular feature of history lessons – thus became a fun lesson, but importantly, a powerfully effective learning experience. After quickly identifying the victim as Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, students went on to explore, in small groups, possible motives and who might be to blame for the crime. This led them to consider, with impressive insight and involvement, difficult concepts like the constitutional rights and power of the Crown and Church, King and Pope, in medieval England. The only weakness of any real significance in the teaching is the way that information and communication technology is used only infrequently in lessons, although when it is used students clearly benefit.
166. Students enjoy history in all years and develop their knowledge and skills very well. They are highly self-motivated throughout the main school and teachers prepare them carefully to achieve excellent standards in GCSE examinations. Teachers ensure, by use of appropriate learning strategies, such as well-structured frameworks to help students think and write, that students steadily become more effective in dealing with challenging questions. The marking of students' work is very good; teachers provide clear reasons for the levels they give and, more importantly, explain how the work could be improved. Very good use of available resources, in and out of school, and effective guidance about examination requirements and techniques, are among the reasons why high standards of teaching and learning lead to high examination results.

167. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department took up post in September 2001 and has made an impressive start to the challenge of leading a very experienced team of teachers, all of whom have more senior posts of responsibility in the school. The educational direction of the subject is clear and development plans focus on maintaining students' attainment and aiming to raise standards even further. The assessment of students' progress is based on their prior attainment and leads to the setting of challenging targets that are met year on year.
168. The subject has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards of attainment are higher and teaching, previously described as good, is now very good. This is a tribute to the senior teachers who, during three years without a designated head of department, collaborated well and worked very hard, on top of their other duties, to maintain and improve standards.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

Strengths

- Standards are very high by the end of Year 11 and students are achieving well.
- Teaching is good and leads to good gains in knowledge, skills and understanding.
- Students take a high degree of responsibility for their work and concentrate very well when working without direct supervision.

Areas for improvement

- Students' higher level skills in using advanced software sometimes hide insecurity in their basic understanding in the lower years.
- Students are not sufficiently informed about their progress.

169. Results for the short course GCSE in information and communication technology are very high. Students gained results that were similar to the other subjects that they studied. There are no national figures for comparison with other grammar schools. Results have been very high for the past three years. The very few students identified as having special educational needs are making progress in line with their peers.
170. In work seen during the inspection, attainment is well above average at the end of Year 9 and very high by the end of Year 11. Students achieve well in all years. When they enter the school, students' computer skills are a little above the national average overall, although there is wide variation. During Years 7 to 9 students make rapid progress in improving their computer skills and this is continued into Years 10 and 11 enabling them to obtain very high grades in the short course GCSE examination. All students make this same good progress. Students' literacy skills are promoted well through discussions and evaluation of practical work. Their numeracy skills are well developed through the use of formulae in spreadsheets.
171. By the end of Year 9, students have very good skills in the use of a wide variety of software packages including web tools, word processing and other communication software, databases and spreadsheets. For example, when using databases, students can competently import data from other software, and run sorts, filters and queries to access a variety of data. However, students' higher level skills in using advanced software sometimes hide insecurity in basic understanding. For example, students are extremely proficient at using a database, but cannot identify records or fields in it. Students' skills in web searching and e-mail are well developed too. Students' knowledge and understanding of data logging and the use of computers in control are also well advanced and they use these skills to very good effect in

their science lessons. Students are very competent in their written work and this is well seen in the evaluations of their practical tasks.

172. By the end of Year 11, students' skills are very high in their use of a wide variety of software packages and applications. When choosing an application for a task, their choice is well informed and accurate and if there is any doubt, students carry out tests to help their decision. Occasionally students' work becomes sloppy, for example when the space bar is used to arrange text into columns in a publishing task. Students' evaluations of practical work are excellent; accounts are accurate, well informed and clearly explain decisions made about software and its use.
173. The quality of teaching and learning is good in all year groups. The permanent teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and students learn very quickly as a result. Temporary teachers, through their own hard work and support from colleagues, have a good grasp of information and communication technology and this helps good progress. Teaching methods are good; lively class debates are a feature of revision classes in Year 11, high quality individual practical projects are a feature of Year 9 work and in Year 7 groups of three or four girls work productively together, developing web sites of real quality. All this accelerates learning. Revision discussions are very good because the teacher clearly focuses on how students can obtain top marks. The management of students is good so the students behave very well in computer lessons. The computers, the interactive white board and the peripherals are all very effectively used to promote high quality learning. In many lessons, time and time limits are used effectively and the quantity of work that students produce is high. In a minority of lessons too long is spent on one activity and efforts begin to flag as a result. In other lessons students misunderstand the teacher and this is not always spotted because assessment activities are not planned to check what has been learned. Homework is used well to extend and reinforce class work.
174. Students' attitudes in information and communication technology are good. They enjoy the subject and feel confident. They behave very well and relationships in lessons are good. Students' progress is enhanced by the easy access to computers before school, during breaks and after school and these opportunities are used well. Progress is also accelerated because students take a very high degree of responsibility for their own learning and many practise their skills at home and spend much of their own time enhancing their coursework.
175. The school plans a satisfactory number of activities in other subjects of the curriculum to develop and reinforce students' computer skills. These opportunities are best, for example, in design and technology, modern foreign languages and science. The development of web skills through the use of computers in other subjects is good, but many teachers do not make enough use of computers in their day-to-day teaching to have a real impact on students' standards.
176. Leadership and management are good. Assessment is well established and students' work is regularly marked but the results are not always fed back and students are not always sure about their progress. The department is given sterling support by its technicians who often make a valuable contribution by helping in lessons. The information and communication technology policy group has had a very positive impact on the growth of computer provision and the success of the department.
177. Progress since the last inspection has been good. All matters raised by the last report have been successfully addressed and standards have remained very high.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

Strengths

- Students achieve excellent results because of the very good teaching and the excellent attitudes of the students.
- Students write very accurately, at length and with an ability to reflect their personality.
- Students speak with very good pronunciation and fluency.
- Teachers prepare their students extremely well for the examinations.

Area for improvement

- To ensure that the teaching does not restrict students' performance by focusing too heavily on the requirements of the examination without allowing sufficient opportunities for creativity.

German and Spanish

178. In the GCSE in 2001 results were very high in both German and Spanish. The proportions reaching the highest grades were much higher than the average for grammar schools. In German all students passed with grades B or above and most of them achieved the very highest grade of A*. In Spanish, results were almost as good with the majority achieving an A grade. Results have risen consistently over the past three years in terms of the number of students getting the highest grades and students do much better in German and Spanish than they do in most of the other subjects they take in the school. There was no difference in the achievement different groups of students; all achieved equally well. Students in the current Year 10 were entered for the short course GCSE in their first language at the end of Year 9 and the great majority achieved a grade C or higher.
179. By the end of Year 9 almost every student is achieving extremely well and standards are already very high. All students study at least two languages and although those in the current Year 9 have only been learning one of these for just over a year, they are making excellent progress. Students are able to write at length on a wide range of topics including what they would like to do in the future and the very highest attaining students, especially in German, write with considerable style and flair. Students speak German and Spanish well and are keen to discuss their family and talk about their favourite hobbies with fluency and good pronunciation. They often ask questions of the teacher about what they have to do or ask how to spell things in German or Spanish. They listen to tapes and videos and understand most of what is being said with little difficulty, although during the inspection there were only a few lessons seen where teachers used taped material and students say that listening is the area they find the most difficult. Students are learning to read more widely than the passages in their textbooks allow, although there is not a wide enough selection of resources for them to do this very often in Spanish. They are confident in preparing an email for a foreign partner and all take part in at least one trip to Germany or Spain where they are made to practise their newly acquired language skills.
180. By the end of Year 11 students continue to achieve extremely well and standards are very high. Most students cope easily with the demands of the GCSE, speaking and writing particularly well. They have a good grasp of the grammar of the language and how to use it accurately. They relish writing about what they have done and often produce long and detailed accounts, which are put on display on the walls. They can understand much of what is being said to them in the classroom by those teachers who use German and Spanish for almost all instructions and requests, although there are some teachers who do not consistently do this. Given that students find listening particularly difficult, teachers are missing opportunities for students to practise listening by not using the language for instructions to

tasks. Students are rarely offered opportunities to write creatively in terms of stories or poems but the most able reflect their personality and sense of humour instinctively in their work, writing with warmth and a sense of fun about their family or how they spent Christmas.

181. The very few students identified as having special educational needs are making progress in line with their peers.
182. The teaching of both German and Spanish is very good in all years and this, coupled with the excellent attitudes that the students display, means that the learning is excellent. Many lessons, despite being an hour long, are fast moving and challenging. Teachers transmit an infectious enthusiasm for the country and its language, taking every opportunity to tell them about the customs and traditions. There is little time for students to become restless, they are constantly given new tasks and time limits in which to complete them. If a student is finding work difficult or has been away and needs to catch up, she will often get help from a partner who has been chosen by the teacher. The teacher will then circulate to offer help and advice when needed beyond what the partner can offer. Students are also very willing to help each other without being asked and do so gladly. Teachers know their classes well and plan appropriately challenging work, having various extra tasks for those who find work easy or finish early.
183. In some excellent lessons there is a strong emphasis on fun, involving games and competitions and making reference to things that students can relate to, such as pop stars and television programmes. An excellent Spanish lesson was seen where students had to describe a teacher and others had to guess who was being talked about. The students relished the chance to voice their opinions, used language they had learnt previously and adapted things they knew to express their feelings with great humour and enjoyment. As many of the book based resources are out of date and unappealing, teachers have to find their own resources from the Internet or from the country itself but there is currently no system for sharing these and some students get a much more restricted diet. All students in Years 10 and 11 have the opportunity to work with a native speaker at least once a week, mostly practising their speaking, and they make excellent progress in speaking because of this.
184. Students are extremely well prepared for the examinations; they are very clear what the marking criteria are, having had most of their work marked using this system during Years 10 and 11. They know what they have to do to get the good grades and are constantly encouraged to use what they have read to improve their own writing. For example, one German lesson concentrated on a reading passage where teenagers were giving opinions about their particular likes and dislikes using some interesting structures and turns of phrase and students were asked to note down some expressions that they thought they might be able to use themselves. There are times, however, when the teaching focuses too heavily on the requirements of the examination and does not allow students to go beyond this to develop a more creative approach, to writing in particular.
185. Students file their work very carefully and often use their notes to check something or to remind themselves of a word they have forgotten. The grammar notes that they are given are clear and enable them to understand the way that the language works. Homework is an integral part of the lesson; it is set religiously and is often either writing or learning, helping students to consolidate what they have learnt in class and enabling them to practise skills that they will need for the examination. Students' written work is particularly accurate because they have understood the rules and can check their work, correcting it themselves.
186. Use of information and communication technology includes regular word processing, where students are encouraged to improve style and content, and email or Internet research, but use

of this by all staff is not consistent and some students get more time and practice on this than others. There is a wide variety of software available but because there has yet been too little time to catalogue this and build it into the scheme of work, its use is very dependent on the individual teacher's knowledge. An excellent German lesson was seen where the computer room became a substitute for a newspaper editor's office and the students had to be reporters who had discovered a 'scoop' about two pop stars. One group had to file the report using email to the editor and the other group had to produce a taped version of the interview to meet a publishing deadline. The lesson buzzed with activity; students used a very high level of language and became completely immersed in the task, asking to take the work home to complete it as the lesson had ended too quickly.

187. Students realise the importance of speaking another language; all study at least two languages and several do three to GCSE level. Students are also encouraged to use languages in other subjects; for example, in physical education students were counting in German, and in chemistry they learn the items of equipment in another language. All of this, plus the heavy focus on other languages such as Russian, Panjabi and Ancient Greek in the after-school clubs, helps to create a whole school atmosphere in which languages are an important feature. There are a wide variety of trips and exchanges to many countries; all students visit at least once a country whose language they are studying and return with enhanced spoken skills and enthusiasm.
188. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. The recently arrived head of the language college is a powerful influence in driving forward the planned developments, having already improved the planning in the department and sharing of good practice through the updating of the schemes of work and the new assessment policy. The decision to introduce coursework and allow students to take their GCSE early, possibly followed by an AS course, is well thought through and part of a wider vision of what needs to be done to improve standards still further in the department. Currently the volume of work that the head of the language college has to deal with means that this work takes precedence over some of the more language specific responsibilities. There is therefore further work to be done, for example, in cataloguing and ordering of resources, building up the self-access resource area and sharing some of the excellent teaching approaches.
189. Progress since the last inspection has been very good. Results have continued to improve, especially in the number of students achieving the very highest levels, and the profile of languages remains very high, with many departments contributing well to the international atmosphere. Languages remain a real strength of the school.

French

190. Results in the 2001 GCSE examinations were very high in comparison with the national average. The proportion of students gaining grades A* or A was well in excess of the average for grammar schools nationally. Students gained results that were much better than those in the other subjects that they studied. The trend over the last three years shows a rise in the number of students attaining grades A* and A. A very high proportion of the students who were entered at the end of Year 9 for the GCSE short course in 2001 attained a grade C or above. There is no difference in the performance of students from different ethnic groups.
191. Students' overall standards of attainment in French by the end of Year 9 are very high. Students have a very good understanding of verbs in the present tense and of the relevant topic vocabulary. They understand the foreign language used in the classroom by the teacher very well indeed. Students take part enthusiastically in role-play situations, working with partners. In one lesson, for example, students asked the way to the bank and changed some

money there. Several pairs were able to complete this from memory and very few had to make any significant reference to their written notes. Pronunciation is good. Students' written work is of a high calibre. They copy very accurately, for instance, the answers to tasks on reading comprehension and write accurately about a variety of topics such as transport, daily routine, the family, the region where they live, school uniform or their ideal school, during which they use different tenses. When work is redrafted, it shows a marked improvement. However, not all students complete corrections in order to improve the accuracy of their work.

192. Students' overall standards of attainment by the end of Year 11 are very high. Students have a very good knowledge of vocabulary for different topics; in one class, all students obtained full marks for a reading comprehension about shopping. Students successfully extract information from cassettes, and they understand the foreign language used in the classroom. In a Year 10 class, students gave their opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of different forms of transport. Pronunciation ranged from satisfactory to good, but several students spoke more quietly than the rest. Students write copiously about their topics. They recycle vocabulary and grammatical constructions very competently. In a Year 11 class, for example, they gave advice about how to stop smoking and to stay fit, using constructions from past work together with key phrases. Students are well aware of the criteria for examinations and of what they have to do in order to attain high grades.
193. Students' achievement in French in Years 7 to 11 is excellent. Over the years, students acquire the relevant vocabulary for each topic that they cover and the skills that they require to use it accurately in speaking and writing. Teachers pay meticulous attention to grammar, and tenses and constructions are consolidated in lessons. As they progress through Years 8 and 9, they learn a range of tenses – perfect, future, immediate future and the imperfect. Year 9 students, for example, have made very impressive progress in only five terms in their second language. In their second lesson on the future tense, they used it to give the weather forecast for certain parts of France, both orally and in writing, using authentic French weather forecasts. A small group of students from the same class practised the tense successfully with the assistante. All students add to their grammar file as they move on in Years 10 and 11, and this acts as a very useful work of reference for them, which they used well in some classes during the week of the inspection. In all years students take a pride in their work and written work is very well presented.
194. Students' behaviour in lessons is excellent. Their attitudes to the subject are very good. They are attentive, listen well to the cassette and to each other, and they apply themselves very well to their tasks. They work well independently and in groups. Relationships are very good. The very few students identified as having special educational needs are making progress in line with their peers.
195. The quality of teaching is very good and together with students' extremely positive attitudes leads to excellent learning. Students achieve and learn exceptionally well because the teachers have high expectations, and their teaching is very thorough and methodical. Teachers use the foreign language to good effect in most lessons. Key skills are taught well, and there is a very methodical build-up as the students move from one unit to the next. Regular testing takes place to ensure that students learn well. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, the teacher used flash cards effectively to revise various parts of the verb *aller*. Teachers plan their lessons well, with clear objectives, which are shared with the class at the outset, so that students are clear about what they have to learn. Each lesson begins with revision of past work. Lessons include different activities and different skills, so that students are productive and work at a good pace. They sustain the students' interest and concentration during the lesson. Teachers make good use of resources – cassette recorders, flash cards and the

overhead projector – to introduce new material or to consolidate the topic. Students work quite often with a partner in order to develop their speaking. Occasionally, however, not all students have the opportunity to speak in class, or opportunities are missed for students to take a more active role orally. Few students ask for help in the foreign language. Homework is set regularly. Teachers mark the written work well, using a mark scheme with which students are very familiar, and they provide helpful comments.

196. French makes a good contribution to other subjects in the school. A poster in personal, health and social education, for example, displays the need to attack head lice; another poster reminds students of the importance of the triple vaccine – a very topical issue. Students in Year 8 participated last month in a science lesson conducted in French to determine the major constituents of different types of food. They enjoyed this experience very much. All students undertake a residential visit in Year 7 to France. They have the opportunity to join the French exchange with a school near Paris. They have contact with native speakers in school. Progress since the previous inspection has been very good because of the excellent leadership and management provided by the head of the language college.

MUSIC

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11 is good.
- Students respond enthusiastically to music.
- The extra-curricular activities are of high quality.
- Nearly half of all students benefit from a very good range of peripatetic instrumental lessons.

Areas for development

- The musically gifted and talented students in Years 7 to 9 are not being sufficiently stretched.
- Marking is neither sufficiently frequent nor detailed.

197. Results in the 2001 GCSE examinations were very high. It is not possible to compare results with other grammar schools, but students performed as well in music as they did in most other subjects that they studied. There is no difference in the performance of students from different ethnic groups. The very few students identified as having special educational needs are making progress in line with their peers.
198. In the work seen during the inspection, standards by the end of Year 9 are average and this represents a satisfactory level of achievement given their average attainment when they joined the school. By the end of Year 9, students sing enthusiastically with a full range of techniques and tone control. In practical work they play rhythmically and use an appropriate technique on a range of instruments, often performing more difficult pieces. Compositions for the majority of students are well developed and written for a range of instruments using various forms and structures. Students make satisfactory use of information and communication technology to carry out research and to improve the presentation of their written work.
199. In the work seen during the inspection, the standards that students achieve by the end of Year 11 are very high and this represents a good level of achievement given their prior attainment. The small number of students who continue their studies to GCSE level tend to be the most able musicians. These students benefit from peripatetic instrumental tuition and the high standard of extra-curricular bands. Their standard of presentation is very good and they compose music for a very wide range of instruments and use extended forms and structures

as a natural part of their work. They have a very good knowledge of the history of music and this is also reflected in their musical knowledge.

200. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory and in Years 10 and 11 is good. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject. In a Year 9 lesson this enabled students to get a good grasp of music composing for films and how they could use this knowledge in their own compositions. There are two weaknesses in the teaching in Years 7 to 9. The first is the way that work is set at the level of the majority of students and does not take account of those who are high attainers. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, where students were encouraged to work together on a range of instruments, the students who were not instrumentalists achieved well, making good progress in a short space of time. However, the large number of talented instrumentalists were not adequately challenged and soon completed the relatively easy tasks and then become bored, turning instead to counting the number of cars going past. Where all the students are at a similar level of attainment, such as in the GCSE groups, the teachers set work that meets the needs of students much more accurately. In a Year 11 lesson, for example, a good range of technical skills and musical knowledge was demanded so that the level of work achieved was well above that expected for GCSE. The other weakness in Years 7 to 9 lies in the marking of books. The assessment systems used by the department are too complicated and lead to teachers spending so long on complex assessments that they have little time left for actually marking the work and pointing out to students how they can improve. So it is that some groups of students have not had their books marked for long periods. When lessons are well planned, with activities that are clearly related and matched to the needs of the students, they respond well. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, where students used the pentatonic scale for performance and composition, the teacher used a mix of discussion, playing and improvising; this ensured good pace and students achieved well. Students have excellent attitudes and behave well and enjoy the lessons. Nearly half of all the students benefit from having instrumental lessons provided by the visiting instrumental teachers.
201. There is a good range of high quality extra-curricular music activities to enhance students' experiences. A small number of lessons in Years 7 to 9 are taught in non-specialist rooms with limited access to musical resources but the department is shortly to move to newly converted specialist accommodation.
202. The progress of students in Years 7 to 9 is still satisfactory and this is also reflected in the quality of teaching throughout the year groups since the last inspection. The standards at GCSE are still very high compared to the national average. The department has therefore made good overall progress since the last inspection.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- Standards of attainment are above average throughout the school.
- The excellent attitudes of students lead to very good learning in lessons.
- Good, and often very good, teaching enables all students to learn very well in lessons.
- Extra-curricular sport provides very good opportunities for all students, particularly the gifted and talented, to excel.

Areas for improvement

- Achievement is only satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 because the accommodation is poor.

- There is not enough monitoring and evaluation of teaching, to bring the good lessons up to the standard of the very best.

203. The GCSE examination is not taken in this subject.
204. In the work seen during the inspection, students' standards of attainment by the end of Year 9 are above average. This represents a good level of achievement, given students' average level of attainment on entering the school. By the end of Year 9, most students are competent in a range of games skills. The performance of high attaining students is well illustrated by the netball and rounders teams, which won their respective Walsall Schools' Championships. The netball team went on to represent South Staffordshire in the Midlands Regional Tournament. Standards are above average in gymnastics; students show good control and body tension as they work on flight from the trampette. High attainers achieve good body shape in flight and low attainers take pride in their success in achieving a good take-off. Most students have a good knowledge and understanding of the effects of exercise on the body, can warm up independently and can name, confidently, the muscles they are stretching. Students with physical disabilities are well integrated into the curriculum and extra-curricular activities, making good progress alongside their classmates. Although there are good opportunities for students to participate in speaking and listening, their literacy skills are less well developed, particularly in relation to the specialist language of the subject.
205. In the work seen during the inspection, the standards students attain in practical activities by the end of Year 11 are above average. Although they learn very well in lessons, students' achievement is only satisfactory. This is because poor accommodation on site constrains the Years 10 and 11 curriculum, the pitches are so far away that a lot of time is spent travelling, there are long gaps between lessons and there is no opportunity to study for the GCSE examination. Nevertheless, improvement continues in team games and standards in hockey and netball are above average. High attainers in the Year 11 netball team won the Walsall Schools' Under 16 League, and the hockey team was runner-up in the equivalent hockey league. In particular, the overall standard of netball is impressive. Almost all students have a very good grasp of the basic techniques, many think strategically in play and most students can apply their knowledge, skills and understanding of rules and tactics, to very good effect in the game. In addition, students take responsibility for other aspects. For example, they organise and manage a netball tournament involving the whole year. Working in groups, students take the roles of team manager, administrator, coach, fitness leader and umpire, demonstrating, successfully, their knowledge and understanding of what is required of each role. Despite adverse weather conditions, the quality of play, organisation, coaching and umpiring was extremely good. By Year 11, students have above average knowledge of the principles of fitness training, and how to keep fit. They take responsibility for evaluating and improving their own physical fitness, through planning and performing an individual fitness training programme.
206. Standards in extra-curricular sport are high. About half the students in the school participate in an extensive programme of clubs, inter-house, and inter-school competitions. These provide very good opportunities for all, particularly the gifted and talented, to excel in their chosen sports. School teams and individual students gain success and representative honours at district, county and, sometimes, national level. The school is justifiably proud of the success of its athletics teams, which enjoyed outstanding success in last year's Walsall Schools' Athletics Championships and, subsequently, the Midlands Regional Championships.
207. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7 to 9, and very good in Years 10 and 11. Relationships between staff and students are very good and a co-operative climate of learning has been created. The management of students and the organisation of lessons are

also very good, evident in very high levels of student participation, together with excellent standards of dress and behaviour. Students are well motivated and have excellent attitudes to the subject, exemplified by the very good creative and physical effort they put into their work, and their support for extra-curricular activities. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject, prepare their lessons carefully and maintain a good pace of work; expectations are usually high, but they could be even higher in relation to quality of movement in gymnastics. The quality of the department's work books in health-related fitness courses is very good; they are designed to build on students' previous knowledge and experience, and require them to think about what they are doing. Appropriate emphasis is given to the development of students' numeracy skills in health-related fitness lessons. Students' literacy skills are less well planned and developed within the curriculum, particularly in relation to the specialist language of the subject. The use of video and a digital camera enables students to evaluate effectively their own and others' work. Teachers' ongoing assessment and feedback are good, particularly at an individual level, which helps students to improve their work. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to enable teacher intervention to move the whole class forward in gymnastics. Health-related fitness lessons provide excellent opportunities for the development of students' numeracy skills.

208. When teaching is very good, there is a demanding pace of learning, as seen in a Year 9 health-related fitness class, where searching questioning probed students' understanding of how their pulse rate had been affected by aerobic exercise. An outstanding example of very good learning occurred in a Year 10 netball lesson, where students were given a significant share of responsibility for their own learning through assuming the leadership roles of manager, administrator, umpire and coach, as well as player, within a group structure. The students took their work very seriously, used initiative to overcome problems and showed loyalty to their group, ensuring that the Year 10 tournament they were organising would be a success in every respect. The students' effort and enthusiasm contributed, significantly, to a memorable learning experience, and also made an excellent addition to their moral and social development.
209. Leadership and management are good, and the staff form a strong, committed team. The new head of department provides a clear sense of educational direction, well illustrated by the innovative curriculum development in Years 10 and 11. There is only one old gymnasium on site and this is taken out of use for examinations, as it is the only large space in the school. This severely constrains the curriculum, and has a negative effect on standards of attainment. The need to allow two hours for a lesson to get students to the playing fields means that the lessons occur only once each fortnight. This leads to time being wasted in transporting students and to teachers having to spend time recapping as students have not had their understanding reinforced on a frequent enough basis. The monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching, to share best practice, is not yet underway, and the department has not moved forward sufficiently in this respect.
210. The department has made very good progress since the previous inspection. Standards of attainment have improved in all years. The quality of teaching has also improved, and there is now a significant proportion of very good teaching.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

Strengths

- All students are entered for the short course GCSE and they gain excellent results.
- Students are taught the subject in very good depth and detail.

- Students are taught the skills of analysis and evaluation and these skills support their learning in other areas of the curriculum.
- There is good promotion of independent learning.

Area for development

- There is a need to give students more opportunities to use information and communication technology for research and development in their work.

211. All students are entered for the short course in GCSE at the end of Year 11. Results have risen to a very high level and in 2001 72 per cent of the students gained A* or A grades and 95 per cent gained at least a B grade. Small numbers of students are entered for the full course in GCSE, doing half of the study outside of the normal school hours. These results are also excellent with all students gaining A* grades in 2000 and all gaining A* or A grades in 2001. Students perform better in religious education than in most other subjects.
212. Standards of work seen in Year 9 are excellent and students are achieving very well. Students gain a broad overview of the six major world religions in Year 7 and this gives them a good basis for deeper study later. They understand the beliefs about creation from the Christian and Hindu faiths. For a different perspective they also study the Aboriginal tradition with regard to creation and so have an excellent knowledge of different views on creation. They learn 30 significant bible passages and have a good knowledge of Christ's suffering in relation to the bible passages on the Messiah. In Year 8 they learn the key elements of the Jewish and Hindu faiths. They know how different Jewish groups are defined. They learn the significance of the Covenant and can relate this to some similar modern day covenants. In Year 9 students gain a good knowledge and understanding of the Muslim and Sikh religions. They can compare and evaluate religious writings such as the accounts of the birth of Jesus in the bible and in the Qur'an. They can also write at good length on the nature and consequences of free will. They understand symbolic language and can give their own explanations of what might constitute the concept of heaven and hell. All students have good literacy skills and can read and understand writings that are well above the average levels. This enables them to study the subject in very good depth.
213. Standards of work seen in Year 11 are excellent and students are achieving very well. The philosophy and ethics GCSE syllabus is studied. This gives students the opportunity to think for themselves about the great universal questions. They study religious concepts such as conflict and reconciliation in very good depth. They can relate prejudice and discrimination to the human condition and examine the concepts of war and peace, including the classical principles associated with the concept of a 'just war'. In Year 10, students analyse the nature of belief and speak at length about their own understanding of prayer. They can explain their own reasons for prayer including how human needs and sensibilities can be answered in prayer. They understand and can explain the use of symbolic language and can analyse a concept and devise and defend their own opinions and also the views of others by logical arguments.
214. Students make very good progress in all years. They build well on the knowledge and understanding gained in each topic covered. They learn the skills of analysis and evaluation by looking at the evidence and using this information to reach their own conclusions. They can look at philosophical ideas such as good and evil, the nature of belief and the existence of god, and think and reason in abstract terms. They write fluently for the most part and are helped in their religious studies by their very good skills in literacy. The very few students identified as having special educational needs are making progress in line with their peers.

215. Teaching is very good in all years. The subject is taught by non-specialist teachers, but all these teachers are very experienced and in senior positions within the school. All these teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject. They get good support from the acting head of department and from the very high quality of the schemes of work. Students are given information in very good depth and detail and this enables them to work at a very high level. There are excellent aspects in all lessons with regard to the high quality of written materials that are presented to the students. Much of this material is researched and compiled by the teachers themselves and this contributes to the excellent standards in all years. Teachers show very good commitment to teaching the subject in academic terms. They have very high expectations of their students and get a very good response in all lessons. Students' work is marked in detail. The teachers' comments help students to reach the highest possible standards by pointing out how and where to get the necessary information to improve. They help students to express their ideas and opinions clearly. They give students very good opportunities for independent research and learning and this contributes significantly to their success. Assessment is thorough. Students are assessed regularly and there are very good records kept. Although some students use information and communication technology for research, there is limited use in lessons.
216. Students have very good attitudes to this subject. They are quiet and attentive when their teachers are speaking, but at the same time animated and interested. They discuss issues seriously in group work, answering readily and speaking at length to explain their opinions. Overall, behaviour in lessons is exemplary and this can be attributed to the high quality of the work that is presented to them by their teachers.
217. Management of the subject is very good. There is a temporary head of department at present. The schemes of work are very good and have been revised in line with the new agreed syllabus for the first three years. The syllabus for Years 10 and 11 is currently being updated in line with the new GCSE specifications. The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development as all these aspects are integrated into the study in all units of work.
218. There is good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards have improved as the balance between over-emphasis on oral work and other tasks and activities has been rectified. Marking has improved and is now consistent.

LATIN

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good. The marking and correction of students' work is a particular strength.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Most enjoy Latin and find it challenging.
- Students are effectively involved in assessing their own work. With the teacher's guidance they set specific, achievable targets for themselves.

Areas for improvement

- Computer use is currently limited to testing vocabulary and basic grammar.
- Schemes of work and lesson plans are not sufficiently adapted to provide for the full range of ability in classes.

219. Students begin to study Latin in Year 8. Results for those students who chose to study the subject in the GCSE examinations for 2001 were close to the national average both for all schools and for other grammar schools.

220. Attainment is above average by the end of Year 9 and students are achieving well. All students are relatively fluent when translating Latin passages into English, although most, even amongst the highest attainers, miss the odd word, as was the case when translating a passage about the pyramids for a test. In this almost everyone did not translate the word *solebant* meaning 'they were accustomed (to build)' but wrote, "they built". The apportioned 1200-word vocabulary is learned well by most students but less so by lower attainers. A few lower attainers find learning more difficult, but others do not try as hard.
221. Standards by the end of Year 11 are above average and students continue to achieve well. Students increase their knowledge of grammar and syntax to embrace an understanding of the full range of tenses for verbs including the future perfect and pluperfect. They also learn about the use of the subjunctive in indirect questions, purpose clauses and consecutive clauses. Higher attainers show a good grasp of these aspects while lower attainers make errors with tense and person for the verbs. All find the concept of the ablative absolute difficult. Overall most students are on target to achieve a grade A or higher in the GCSE examinations in 2002, which will be an improvement on the 2001 results, and none appear likely to achieve less than a B grade. All find the translation of the set texts, particularly the sections from Virgil's 'Aeneid', challenging. In coming to terms with this and the extracts from prose authors, such as Pliny, they are greatly assisted by very clear, excellent support materials written specifically for them by their teacher. These materials provide notes of guidance, exercises and suggestions to help the students deal with the work on their own account. Most students are making good use of them and all who do so are making very good progress on this front.
222. The very few students identified as having special educational needs are making progress in line with their peers.
223. The teaching is good in all years and results in good learning. Each lesson follows a similar overall plan to that taught to a Year 11 class. This began with a short review of deponent verbs involving the use of flash cards. The teacher's evident fondness for the subject and very secure knowledge and understanding engaged the students' attention. A variety of activities – silent reading, group work, translating a passage and reading it aloud – kept their minds active. Students enhanced their literacy skills, which were already good, by redrafting. In this, as in all other lessons, the students' very good behaviour and attitudes to their work were significant factors in ensuring that they learned well. Their folders of work were very well kept. They worked in silence when required to do so, but discussed what they were doing with freedom and confidence when asked. Relationships in the classroom are very good. The quality of these relationships does much to contribute to the students' progress. The marking of the students' work is exemplary in its frequency and rigour. Each piece of work is marked and coded to show what needs to be corrected. The students then check through with the teacher's guidance to see what they have wrong and set very good, precise targets for their own improvement.
224. The department is well managed. The head of department, who is a confident teacher, undertakes almost all of the teaching. Nevertheless the departmental schemes of work do not detail all of the extra support materials and techniques developed and used to provide for the wider range of ability in the various classes. This is an area to be addressed so that other members of staff are properly supported. Extending the use of information and communication technology in lessons is recognised as an area for development beyond the current very effective use for testing students' knowledge of basic syntax and vocabulary.

225. Improvement since the last inspection in the Latin department has been satisfactory. No areas were identified as being of concern at that time. Standards of attainment in Latin at GCSE have remained broadly the same, although the subject has been dropped from the sixth form curriculum, as results were poor.

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

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

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

GCE AS-level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	6	100	62	0	15	2.3	1.5
Chemistry	1	0	43	0	5	0	0.8
Biology	1	0	52	0	2	0	0.8
Computer studies	2	100	74	0	13	3.0	1.8

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	40	95	87	48	43	6.2	5.8
Chemistry	31	100	90	68	43	7.9	5.9
Biology	36	100	88	72	34	8.3	5.3
Physics	9	100	88	22	40	5.8	5.7
Design and technology	3	100	91	0	30	6.0	5.4
Business studies	16	100	92	50	32	6.8	5.5
Economics	9	100	89	89	36	8.7	5.5
Computer studies	8	100	86	100	23	8.3	4.6
Art and design	13	100	96	77	46	8.6	6.6
Music	5	100	93	60	35	7.6	5.7
Geography	12	100	92	75	38	8.8	5.7
History	16	100	88	19	35	5.5	5.5
Religious studies	4	100	92	75	38	7.5	5.8
Sociology	7	100	86	43	35	6.3	5.3
Other social studies	16	100	87	63	34	7.5	5.3
English Language	24	100	92	58	30	7.2	5.3
English literature	9	89	95	33	37	5.8	5.9
Communication studies	1	100	93	0	31	4.0	5.5
French	9	100	89	67	38	8.0	5.6
German	5	100	91	60	40	6.8	5.8
Spanish	7	100	89	86	39	8.6	5.7

Other languages	2	100	93	50	56	7.0	6.8
General studies	87	100	85	69	30	8.0	4.9

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on mathematics, chemistry and physics, but biology was also sampled. In biology, examination results were very high in 2001 and students achieved well. Two lessons were observed; the teaching was good in both. The teachers' very good knowledge allowed the students to explore complex issues and they responded with great enthusiasm and concentration.

Mathematics

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

Strengths

- Teaching is good; teachers have high expectations of students and use effective teaching methods.
- The high quality of leadership and management is improving standards.
- The good level of knowledge and understanding of the teachers leads to clear exposition and explanation of concepts.
- The very good attitudes of students contribute well to their level of commitment to study.

Areas for improvement

- The 2001 A-level results were disappointing as a result of staffing problems last year.
- There is insufficient use made of information and communication technology that would give students opportunities to widen their experience.

226. The school offers mathematics at AS-level and A-level and it is very rare for a student not to complete the course. In total 63 students study the subject and the highest attainers also study further mathematics at A-level.

227. In the 2001 examination, results were above average. The results were lower than the previous two years owing to staff absence. The students' performance in mathematics was similar to most of their other subjects. In Year 12 there are no national results with which to compare results at AS-level, but standards appear to be well above the level expected nationally.

228. The standards of work seen in Year 13 are well above average and this represents a good level of achievement. The improvement in attainment is due to a change of teachers this year and improved teaching. Students' responses to their teachers' questions show a high level and depth of understanding. In a further mathematics lesson, they successfully applied the skills they had acquired in differentiation and were able to progress quickly to understanding and solving first order linear differential equations. In another lesson in mathematics, students showed a very good understanding of significance testing. They applied null and alternative hypotheses correctly when establishing hypotheses. They were able to carry out a hypothesis test given an assumption, for example, the claim that one of the group was psychic and the students tested this using drawings on cards. In mechanics, students demonstrate a very good understanding of moments when investigating the equilibrium of a rigid body. They tackle the necessary trigonometrical calculations in a very competent way.

229. The standards of work seen in Year 12 are well above average and this represents a good level of achievement given their attainment on joining the sixth form. Students are successfully extending their GCSE work into new areas; for example they have the opportunity to study mechanics and decision mathematics. In pure mathematics, students

have developed a very good understanding of algebraic fractions and use these techniques to solve partial fractions. Students present and structure their work very well and use skills learnt earlier in the course effectively. In decision mathematics, students develop a good understanding of linear programming. They select the appropriate algorithms to solve problems algebraically.

230. Teaching is good overall and all students learn well as a result. The best feature of the teaching is the very good knowledge and understanding of teachers. This is used to good effect when questioning the students. The explanations are clear, and the students are quick to learn, so that only one explanation is ever needed. This also promotes the students' confidence in and respect for their teachers. Students respond well to the challenging level of work and this enhances their learning. They have a mature approach to mathematics and are well motivated. Consequently they put in a good level of intellectual effort and acquire new knowledge expeditiously. Students are very attentive in lessons and show a keen interest in the subject. However, in a small proportion of lessons, there is insufficient scope for more active participation and opportunities for developing independence are limited. In the better lessons, the teachers conduct lessons at a stimulating pace, resulting in very good gains in knowledge, skills and understanding. Students are alert throughout the lessons and a high level of concentration is maintained. They participate well in discussions, responding well to questions. When given the opportunity, students respond enthusiastically to using computers, but this occurs infrequently and the potential of computers as mathematical tools is not realised.
231. Very good use is made of homework to consolidate and extend work that is introduced in the lesson. In the better lessons, this homework is often used as a starting point for the following lesson, so students can be supported with any problems. Teachers also use their knowledge to set demanding work for homework. The day-to-day marking and assessment of students' work is good. There is a good programme of regular formal assessments that allows teachers to see how students are progressing over time so that they can give effective support to those experiencing difficulties.
232. The good teaching and learning is the result of the subject having a high quality of leadership and management with an excellent perception of what is needed for students to succeed at a high level in mathematics, regardless of their background. There is a strong commitment by the whole team to improving standards by raising achievement for all students. The wide range of topics within the mathematics curriculum provides students with excellent opportunities to study new areas of the subject ensuring that interest and motivation are maintained and extended. The systems for monitoring and evaluation are effective in ensuring good teaching. There are very good procedures for assessing the students' performance as they progress through the sixth form. Teachers provide good guidance to students on the quality of their work and in supporting individual students.
233. There is insufficient information in the previous report to make a judgement on progress since the last inspection.

Chemistry

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

Strengths

- A-level results were very high in 2001.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and share their enthusiasm for the subject with students.
- High level skills are taught in all aspects of experimental work.

- Students are conscientious independent learners.
- Leadership and management are excellent.

Area for improvement:

- Some opportunities for challenging the ablest students are missed.

234. The school offers courses at AS and A-level. Around 40 students take up the subject in Year 12, and very few fail to complete the course. The A-level results in 2001 were very high, in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Compared to their GCSE results, students achieved very well. In Year 12 there are no national results with which to compare results at AS-level, but standards appear to be very high.
235. The standards of work seen during the inspection were very high in both Year 12 and Year 13. This represents a very good level of achievement. Students' knowledge and understanding of topics covered earlier in the course are totally secure, helped by detailed notes that are supplemented by photocopied material supplied by the teacher. Standards of literacy, oracy in particular, are very high; in both Years 12 and 13, students' answers to class questions are both articulate and accurate, while written work reflects the same high standards. Numeracy skills are very good, with calculations performed correctly and to an appropriate degree of accuracy, while graphs are skilfully drawn. Students are proficient in the use of information and communication technology. All students achieve equally well in terms of gender, ethnic origin and prior attainment, with attention to examination requirements evident in lessons to the benefit of all students.
236. Students following the AS course in Year 12 are, after one and a half terms, producing work that is far above the average for this course. Student assignments are detailed and fluently written, and high level practical skills are developed quickly, illustrated, for example, by the use of a hand lens to avoid parallax error when using a Beckmann thermometer during a calorimetry experiment. Experimental work is typified by an atmosphere where attention to detail, as well as health and safety considerations, are paramount. Students are equally at ease when following instructions or working independently to achieve desired outcomes.
237. Teaching is very good overall, with several examples of outstanding teaching evident during the inspection. The high quality of teaching is illustrated by a Year 13 lesson on nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy, where the clarity of the teacher's explanation and careful selection of spectra allowed students quickly to progress to the analysis of some challenging structural determinations. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, lesson planning is exemplary, and the very positive atmosphere in lessons has established an infectious climate for learning. Use of exposition and question-and-answer by teachers are skilful, guiding students to understanding. Students respond very well in this environment, co-operating with their teachers and each other so that an argument or explanation can be developed. However, on some occasions, the very highest attainers are insufficiently challenged and complete tasks quickly.
238. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Monitoring of teaching and learning are frequent and effective, with appropriate use of data on students' attainment in planning and evaluating lessons. Communication and support within the subject are very effective, leading to a consistently high quality provision.
239. There has been very good progress in chemistry since the time of the last inspection, when A-level results were above the national average; they are now very high. Weakness in monitoring, identified in the last report, has been remedied.

Physics

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

Strengths

- Standards are improving; students are now achieving standards in physics that are above the national average.
- Students have positive attitudes to the subject and ask for help when they find ideas difficult to understand.
- Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are always willing to provide extra help and support for students.

Areas for improvement

- Most students did not achieve as well as they should have done, in relation to their GCSE attainment, in the 2001 A-level examinations.
- Teachers do not always demand as much from students as they could do, in terms of expecting them to understand and apply new ideas.

240. The department offers courses in AS and A-level physics. There are 19 students in the current Year 12 and 11 in Year 13. It is very rare for a student not to complete a course.
241. The A-level examination results in 2001 broadly matched the national average for all schools and were similar to the results for 2000. In both years, all students gained pass grades. However, in 2001, the proportion of students gaining the highest grades A and B was well below the national average. In relation to their GCSE results, most students did not do as well as might be expected. Some students join the AS course from other schools; they indicate that they have found it easy to settle into the course and are pleased with the teaching they receive.
242. In the 2001 AS examinations, all students gained a grade D or above and the majority gained grades A or B. There are no national statistics with which to compare but, in broad terms, these results indicate that attainment in the new AS courses is better than it has been in recent A-level examinations. However, the AS results also show that students did not do as well in the practical and electricity parts of the examination as they did in other modules.
243. The standards of work seen during the inspection are above average, for students following AS and A-level courses, in both Year 12 and Year 13. This represents an improvement in standards compared with those indicated by recent A-level results and a satisfactory level of achievement. Students' knowledge and understanding of topics they have studied earlier in the course are generally good. For example, students in Year 13 were able to use their existing knowledge of a discharging capacitor and to compare its behaviour with the decay curve for a radioactive material. However, students in Year 12 are not as good at building electric circuits as might be expected for students whose attainment in GCSE physics or double award science was high. It is clear that these students have not had enough previous experience with electric circuits.
244. Students' files are generally well organised and provide sets of notes that are at least satisfactory for use in revision. However, there is a noticeable difference in the quality of the notes, and the level of detail they provide, between those of the highest attaining students in the groups and those belonging to other students. The monitoring of students' notes is not yet carried out sufficiently rigorously to ensure that all students keep a fully detailed set of notes on the various topics.

245. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and plan a variety of activities to hold students' concentration and reinforce the ideas that students need to learn. They make use of interesting resources. For example, in a lesson on relativity, the teacher's 'moving flag' demonstration provided a vivid and memorable illustration of the effect of a changed frame of reference on the apparent movement of an object. In the lesson on radioactivity, mentioned earlier, the teacher made good use of a spreadsheet to collect and produce a graph of students' results and then to draw the corresponding logarithmic graph. Students appreciate teachers' enthusiasm for the subject and, in particular, the additional help and support that teachers provide when they find things difficult. Teachers give students plenty of practice with examination questions and the resulting answers are conscientiously marked so that it is made clear to students what they need to do to improve.
246. Although individual lessons are often good, there are, nevertheless, some weaknesses in teaching that have an effect on students' confidence and reduce the progress they make over time. Teachers often warn students that they may find a new section of a topic demanding. This encourages a perception that the subject is more difficult than it need be for these capable students. The result is that students lack confidence and many are tentative in answering questions. Teachers sometimes do not require enough from students. In a lesson on alternating currents, for example, students were allowed to work fairly slowly through a routine experiment involving taking measurements from an oscilloscope. The questions in lessons are often rather undemanding and teachers tend to respond very enthusiastically to relatively modest effort or attainment on the part of students. Although praise is obviously valuable in building up students' confidence, it is not being tempered by the need to extend students' understanding and persuade them to try as hard as they possibly can to improve.
247. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Teachers are keen to raise students' attainment and welcome any suggestions about how things could be improved. The rising standards indicated by the first AS-level results show that the work that is being done on teaching materials and schemes of work is starting to bear fruit. The head of the science department carefully monitors the teaching in the subject but there is not yet any lesson observation within physics in order to share the better ideas and techniques from each other's lessons.
248. It is not possible to judge the progress in physics since the previous inspection. The previous report only gave an overall judgement on attainment in sixth form science. It did not give judgements on A-level results, attainment or teaching in the three individual A-level subjects.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on design and technology.

Design and technology

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

Strengths

- There is mutual trust and respect between the students and the teachers.
- Students are very mature in their approach to work and have positive attitudes towards the subject.
- The work of students is well organised.

Areas for development

- Much of the work lacks imagination and creativity.
- Teachers need to have a better understanding of the examination syllabus.

249. Design and technology is being offered for the first time at AS-level in Year 12. The subject has attracted 10 students this year and no students have dropped out of the course. There are no students in Year 13 studying design and technology.
250. Results in the 2001 A-level examinations were average. No student obtained a grade A or B although all students achieved at least a pass. Students' results in design and technology were not significantly different from those they obtained in most other subjects. The small numbers of students who have studied design and technology in recent years make it impossible to draw any conclusions about the trend in results.
251. In the work seen during the inspection the standards that students attain by the end of Year 12 are average and this represents a satisfactory level of achievement. In Year 12 students have a sound grasp of the design process and use this effectively to guide their project work. Most have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of terminology although some students do not always use the correct technical terms when describing their design activities. Students' work is well organised and their portfolios show a clear pathway and progression through the projects. Students use Gantt charts well to plot the progress of their work. Oral skills are of a very high standard. The key skill of communication is above average although the design work of students is average; it lacks imagination and creativity. Students do not like producing free-hand sketches – virtually all their work is of a finished quality to begin with and this approach is failing to bring the subject to life for students. Work is very well structured, but this is stifling creativity. Students continue to develop their understanding of design and manufacturing practice. They compare different industrial manufacturing practices such as vacuum forming and injection moulding. Students use computers confidently and they have a satisfactory knowledge of computer-aided design equipment. Analytical skills are above average and students manipulate data with ease. Most are satisfactory at annotating their projects although a small minority do this in a superficial way which does not inform their planning.
252. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject although there is a need for further training to ensure teachers have a better understanding of the examination syllabus. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson when the teacher returned the external examiner's comments about students' product analysis projects; it was clear that the work of students lacked sufficient detail and focus.
253. Students learn quickly and they often set the pace of the lesson; they make satisfactory gains in their knowledge and understanding of the subject. Teachers make good use of humour to motivate and encourage students. A sound learning environment is created and there is mutual trust and respect between the students and the teachers. The strategies used by teachers are satisfactory although there are occasions when the pace of the lesson falls away because of a lack of teacher input. Teachers do not always provide sufficient activities during a single lesson and this occasionally leads to students being off task although their learning is not drastically disrupted. This was seen in a Year 12 lesson when students quietly chatted away, not always about their work. Students are very mature in their approach to work and have positive attitudes towards the subject although there is not always a sense of enjoyment. Marking is of a good quality and is informative and guides students. There is good verbal interchange between teachers and students that helps to support students' work and also to help students develop the skills of working on their own. This was seen in a Year 12 class when students were discussing their case study with the teacher whilst other students were quietly getting on with their own work. Homework is set on a regular basis and students

always complete homework on time with most doing considerably more work than initially required.

254. Assessment procedures are good and informative. Positive and constructive feedback is provided on the coursework of each student. The guidance that students receive prior to embarking on the course is good.
255. The subject is well led and managed. Design and technology at post-16 level was not offered at the time of the previous inspection. However, good progress has been made because the subject is now offered in the sixth form and a good number of students have opted to study the course this year.

BUSINESS

The focus was on business studies, but economics was also sampled. In economics, examination results were very high in 2001 and students achieved well. One lesson was observed and the teaching was good. The lesson was planned well to build upon previous work. A variety of activities were used that kept the students active and enthusiastic throughout.

Business studies

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

Strengths

- Consistent high quality teaching that leads to very effective learning.
- Very thorough and constructive evaluation of students' work.
- Excellent development of students' independent learning skills and strategies for research.

Areas for improvement

- Improve access to departmental computers linked to the Internet.
- Ensure that the teaching environment is of an appropriate size and is conducive to learning.
- Consider creating an opportunity for students to study business education in Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

256. The school offers business studies at AS and A-level. Around 60 students are currently studying the subject and it is rare for a student not to complete a course.

257. Results in the 2001 A-level examination were well above the national average and students achieved well. Results have been consistently high for the past three years. Students gained results that were similar to most other subjects that they studied.

258. In the work seen, standards at the end of Year 13 are well above average and students are achieving very well. Students are making very good progress in understanding the central concepts of both business studies and economics. They use appropriate technical language with ease and fluency and relate well business and economic theories to realistic vocational contexts. Year 12 AS students who are investigating job, batch and flow, cell and lean methods of production, clearly correlated knowledge of Henry Ford's model 'T' production line to a well-known local company. This real firm made the switch from traditional flow production lines and reorganised production along cellular lines in 1995. Students could both eloquently 'sell' the change to the workforce whilst equally anticipating employee concerns. They also effectively outlined the benefits for both the firm and the employees and described the ensuing effects on efficiency. These lessons provide a secure grounding in Operations Management concepts for those students who will go on to the A-level course where they will study Herzberg and the effective motivation of staff and job enlargement. Students are able to describe the broad impact of European Union membership on the pattern of United Kingdom international trade and show an awareness of trends in key policy indicators for the United Kingdom and other nations.

259. The quality of teaching is very good. The teacher's expert subject knowledge underpins discussion and lends clarity to the explanations provided. Students work very well indeed. Lesson objectives are clearly outlined at the beginning of the lesson and students know what they are meant to do and then work very effectively. Subject content is always accurate and is well planned and clearly presented. Working methods are suitable for the task and enable students to make very good and rapid progress. Students are managed very well and their individual learning needs are fully recognised. Students are always challenged and inspired to achieve at the very highest levels. Students clearly benefit from thorough, evaluative marking of their work. This shows them where they are going wrong and what they need to do to improve their writing and extend their knowledge. There is exemplary emphasis on developing opportunities for independent study. Target grades are set for all students and assignments are assessed against these targets, allowing a dialogue between the students and the teacher on progress in meeting those targets. The experience of the teacher in charge as

an A-level examiner is used exceptionally well to ensure that the demands of the syllabus are matched by the content of the lessons.

260. Students have excellent attitudes to their work. They show interest and enthusiasm for their studies and enjoy good-humoured relationships with their teacher. Relationships with one another are positive and supportive. In a Year 13 lesson on business strategy, students worked together to create a presentation which gave a clear understanding of how an uncertain business environment affects business strategy. They could describe and explain the operation and failure of labour markets, the impact of skill shortages and surpluses, the impact of unemployment, and the changing pattern of employment and contract law as a basis for employment. Students complete all work to a high standard and their files clearly indicate that they each accept responsibility for their own learning.
261. The leadership and management of the subject in the sixth form are very good. The teacher in charge of the subject ensures a clear vision and educational direction and has a very good awareness of the strengths of the department as a result of the monitoring and analysis of assessment data and external examination results. In an effort to further improve the quality of teaching and learning in business studies, the schemes of work have been revised; suitable alternatives to coursework have been investigated; a new homework policy has been introduced; fresh industry links have been developed; and alternatives to Young Enterprise have been investigated.
262. There was no business report at the time of the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The focus was on information and communication technology.

Information and communication technology (ICT)

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

Strengths

- A-level results are excellent.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge that ensures learning is at the very highest technical level.
- Teacher lead high quality discussions that clearly target how students can obtain high marks in examinations.
- Students take a very high degree of responsibility for their own learning and achievement.

Area for improvement

- A few students are not entirely clear as to how they are progressing, as test results are not returned as specific grades.

263. The school offers courses at AS and A-level. Numbers have risen this year and there are around 50 students taking information and communication technology in the sixth form making this one of the most popular subjects in the school. It is very rare for a student not to complete the course.
264. A-level results in 2001 were very high compared to the national average and students gained results that were much better than those in the other subjects that they studied. All students gained a grade A or B and this represents very good achievement given their GCSE grades. There has been a steady improvement in A-level results over the past three years. Results in

the new AS-level examination indicate that the high standards are largely being maintained with nearly all students gaining grade C or above and two thirds obtaining grades A or B.

265. The standards of work seen during the inspection are very high in both Year 12 and Year 13. Students' knowledge of the theory associated with the subject is very secure. For example, students have a very clear understanding of the differences between the Internet, extranet and an intranet. In all their theory work students have a very good grasp of detail and they work with great accuracy. Students in both Year 12 and Year 13 have very good speaking and literacy skills, enabling them to express their understanding in lively class debates and in essays and other written work. Numeracy skills are well developed through entering complex formulae into spreadsheets. Students' practical skills are excellent in both Year 12 and Year 13 and this is best seen in their use of spreadsheets and databases. Practical work is always set in the world of work and students can clearly identify a client brief and develop clear specifications and end-user requirements. Students are very good at analysing human and physical resources. They use software very competently to meet the end-user requirements, carrying out detailed tests. Students present their work to the client in a very 'user friendly' form, with a front page or switchboard, together with high quality user and technical manuals.
266. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very quickly as a result. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and real enthusiasm for information and communication technology. Because of this, students quickly acquire accurate and detailed information enabling rapid progress towards the highest A-level grades. The level of challenge in all lessons is very high and they have very clear aims that are shared with the students. Lessons always focus on how students can gain the highest marks in theory and practical work and this makes for rapid progress and high attainment. Students' learning is accelerated through well-structured discussions and debates that highlight accurate detail as well as general facts. Planning is very good; for example, in a revision lesson students' progress was enhanced when after researching a topic they wrote examination questions, together with a mark scheme, for other members of the class to answer. This they really enjoyed! Practical work is very well organised and students' skills are rapidly improved through very well structured individual help given by the teacher.
267. Students' learning is greatly assisted by having the course scheme, past questions, model answers and revision material to refer to on the shared area, placed there by the teacher. Students' attitudes to information and communication technology are very good. They take a great deal of responsibility for their own progress and this has a very positive impact on standards. Students work with a high level of independence. They are confident in information and communication technology and feel they receive good support from the teacher. A-level students have a clear understanding of their predicted and working grades and value the very detailed feedback they receive from assignments. AS students are not so clear as to their expected grades because the results of tests are fed back as marks not as grades. A minority of AS students would like more help with improving practical work.
268. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Careful analysis of examination mark schemes and past answers are used to help plan lessons and ensure that teaching materials focus on how students can raise their attainment. Examination analysis is also used to plan time allocation to theory and practical work and to give students clear time limits for their assignments, ensuring high marks.
269. There was no report on information and communication technology in the sixth form at the time of the previous inspection.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Work was sampled in physical education. One AS-level lesson was observed and one from the general course that is open to all students. The AS-level is a new course so no examination results are available. The AS-level lesson was very good, with a wide range of activities including role-play and video used to set a cracking pace that was maintained for the full lesson. The lesson on the general course was taught well, with the teacher making subtle coaching points that allowed the students to improve their techniques while still having fun.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design and theatre studies, but music was also sampled. In music, examination results were well above average in 2001 and students achieved well. One A-level lesson was observed, aimed at improving students' listening skills, and it was taught well. The teacher had a very good knowledge of the subject, but tended to restrict the students' participation. One instrumental lesson was also observed. The good teaching led to clear improvement even during the relatively short time that the student was with the teacher because the teacher was able to concentrate on the smallest of errors in technique.

Art and design

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

Strengths

- The quality of teaching is very good. The teachers' superior knowledge about fine art is having a very beneficial effect upon the students.
- The students have excellent attitudes and positive opinions about the course, which lead to excellent quality learning.
- The sixth form students are talented artists who appreciate help and act upon advice, thus raising the standards of their work.

Area for improvement

- The sixth form students do not have their own studio and have to share the art rooms with other students.

270. The school offers art and design at AS and A-level. All students who take the courses complete them and most students who take AS-level go on to take the full A-level course. In the 2001 examinations, the A-level results were well above the national average. Results reflect excellent achievement in the sixth form and are still improving.

271. Students taking art are generally gifted in the subject, but benefit from the intellectual stimulus offered to them on their chosen courses. They have positive opinions about the courses, know where they are succeeding and how their work can be improved. Most of them say they have improved in skills and understanding since their GCSE courses and that current work in Year 13 shows great improvement from that completed in Year 12. There is little difference in the attainment of boys and girls. All consider that art is equally as demanding as their other subjects but accept that art will make great demands on their time. They are enthusiastic about the support given by the teachers and are pleased with personal success on various aspects, including working with oil and silk paints, portraiture and figurative work.

272. Standards of work seen in Year 12 during the inspection are well above average and reflect the most recent results. Individual projects show students' competence in drawing and painting, especially from direct observation. Portraiture, for example, is particularly well

developed, as students build up skills and confidence by doing quick line sketches before progressing to larger and more detailed drawings. When continuing the theme into cubism, they use their knowledge of this type of presentation and are successful in emulating the style. Sketchbook work is at a high level, with many students producing good quantities of experimental and finished work. Critical studies are developing well and many students use computers effectively for word processing and research.

273. Standards of work seen in Year 13 are well above average. When they were in Year 12, 75 per cent of students gained either A or B grades in AS-level examinations. In Year 13, students concentrate more on perfecting technique, improving their literary ability through speaking about their work and appraising that of others, questioning assumptions in art and developing their personal styles. They have made the transition between doing work at the suggestion of the teacher to planning their own and setting targets and time-scales. Painting is particularly strong. Students often work on a large scale, but never lose fine detail in their pieces. They understand fully about depicting tone and texture and are skilled in translating themes. The displayed work on 'Aspects of Evil' is powerful and thought provoking. Portfolios of art show that students carry out extensive research before embarking upon experiments in two and three dimensions and on final pieces.
274. The quality of teaching is very good and students' learning is excellent. Teachers are enthusiastic, highly skilled and have a superior knowledge of fine art. Relationships are excellent and there is mutual respect between students and adults. Dialogue is purposeful and in lessons, teachers allow sufficient time for practical work and end evaluation, all of which ensure students develop questioning ability and confidence in judgement. The quality of one-to-one help is very high. Students are given honest critical appraisal of their work, suggestions for improvement and a high level of practical assistance, all of which help them to sort out strategies for improvement and develop confidence to attempt adventurous works. Students are very independent, and concentrate and work extremely hard. The main learning strengths in the sixth form stem from the very good intellectual level of effort made by students. Many of them, for example, have enrolled themselves on a life studies course at the local art college.
275. Leadership is good and the department has made good progress since the last inspection.
276. Standards are rising steadily, more students now take art and the department targets to raise performance in A-level have been well exceeded. Teachers have made purposeful links with local colleges and attended professional development courses to help them introduce new modules of work and re-assess their teaching methods. Cultural influences have been strengthened by a partial re-write of the scheme of work and there is now a wide programme of visits to exhibitions, galleries and museums. The small amount of experimental work, criticised in the last inspection, has been extended. As there are increased numbers of students wishing to take advanced courses in art and design, the provision of a sixth form studio has to remain a high priority.

Theatre studies

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

Strengths

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and share their passion for the subject with students.
- Students take a very active role in lessons, creating their own devised performances which confirm and extend their understanding.

- The organisation of practical performance work is very good, enabling students to work quickly and derive maximum benefit from a wide variety of creative activities.

Areas for improvement

- Students do not at present have the opportunity to develop their skills beyond AS-level.
- The majority of students start the course with no prior discrete experience of drama lower down the school, particularly at GCSE level.

277. The school offers theatre studies at AS-level. There are nine students currently studying the subject. All students completed the course last year.
278. There are no national averages for comparative use in theatre studies at AS-level, but all students gained pass grades. As the majority of students start the course with little or no prior experience of drama and theatre studies lower down the school, they achieved very well and did much better than might be expected.
279. The standards of work seen during the inspection are broadly average. Students' knowledge and understanding of works they have studied earlier in the course are very secure. They can not only perform with character, communicating the role, but are able to put their ideas and interpretations down through detailed notes and essays; their ability to work independently and as members of a group is well developed. They have very good speaking and literacy skills and express their understanding clearly and in detail when answering spoken or written questions. They have a clear use of gesture, which they combine with a well-developed sense of imagination. They have, in a short space of time, developed a good sense of timing and the appropriate use and awareness of space.
280. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very quickly as a result. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and a genuine passion for drama and theatre studies. Students respond very positively and pose questions of their own to ensure that they fully understand what is being taught. An excellent atmosphere for learning is well established. Teachers present information quickly and clearly and use ambitious strategies to challenge students to stretch themselves in all their individual and group performances. Discussion is a central theme to all lessons and is valuable in both consolidating and extending students' understanding. There are occasional examples of the use of excellent teaching strategies. For example, in a lesson delivered in a non-specialist room, resources were prepared to enable the students to participate in a 'hands-on' exercise in group problem solving to establish a clear understanding of the technical terms and layout of a standard proscenium arch theatre. Their understanding was secured further because they were required to present their own verbal summary, with clear explanations.
281. Practical sessions are very well planned and organised. Students are provided with excellent guidelines and stimuli. The result is that students work quickly through a variety of very interesting and valuable activities, extending both their practical skills and their appreciation of how performance principles can be applied to various performance situations. Teachers make themselves available for students outside of lessons so that they can develop both their practical skills and their written work. This means students receive valuable individual advice and encouragement in order to raise the standards of their practical and written work.
282. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Monitoring of teaching and learning and the sharing of good practice is very effective. Theatre studies was not available at the time of the last inspection and its implementation has been most successful.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography and history, but religious education, psychology and sociology were also sampled. In sociology, examination results were above average in 2001 and students achieved well. One lesson was observed and the teaching was good. The teacher planned a good range of activities that kept the lesson moving, but found it difficult to get a response from the students in discussion. Results in psychology were well above average and students achieved well. One lesson was observed and the teaching was very good. The teacher used the results of students' homework exceptionally well to find out exactly what they had learnt and then changed the emphasis of the lesson to address the deficiencies. There were too few students studying for religious studies to make meaningful comparisons with national averages. Two A-level lessons were observed and the teaching was very good in both of them. In a Year 12 lesson, the teacher carefully placed students in particularly demanding moral dilemmas, skilfully using video clips and the results of the students' own research. The same method, of placing students in difficult situations where they have to think carefully about all the issues, was used in a Year 13 lesson on the nature of evil.

Geography

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

Strengths

- Standards in examinations are very high.
- The quality of teaching is very good and results in very good achievement.
- Students have very good attitudes to their studies.

Area for improvement

- Teachers do not demand enough of students in discussions.

283. The school offers geography at AS and A-level and around 30 students are currently studying the subject. It is very rare for a student not to complete the course.
284. Results in the 2001 A-level examination were very high in comparison with the national average and students achieved very well. Results have been consistently high in recent years. Students' results in the 2001 AS-level were very pleasing with many achieving high grades.
285. In work seen during the inspection, students' attainment in Year 12 and Year 13 is very high. This represents very good achievement since the start of the respective courses. Students have a very secure knowledge and understanding of topics and their analytical skills are of a very high standard. In work on natural hazards in Los Angeles, for example, Year 12 students compared the impact of earthquakes and flooding on the regional economy and carefully analysed how human activity has contributed to the impact of such disasters on the area. Students make very good use of mathematical skills in many topics. In studies of China, for example, students used data and equations to measure regional employment and on another occasion carried out calculations about atmospheric changes in air mass movements over the British Isles. Students are highly competent in the use of English and write well-structured, reasoned accounts with sound grammatical accuracy, except for the few who do not give sufficient detail in answers or make enough use of examples. Students have good research skills, using text and other publications to select and record information. Standards in timed essays are generally very high.
286. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of topics is excellent; they explain points clearly and as a result students make very good progress. Teachers have high expectations of students' effort and achievement and set challenging tasks for them. In a Year 12 lesson, for example, students were expected to show understanding of terms about glacial erosion and then develop ideas and written response about differences in glacier movement in temperate and polar regions of the world. Higher attaining students did particularly well in researching information to identify the different processes observed and made excellent progress in the lesson. Teachers regularly assess students' understanding of topics by consolidating work covered previously and through the setting of examination questions. The quality of marking is high and students are very well informed about the standards they achieve. The students' attitude to learning is mostly very good but there is reluctance among Year 13 students to take part in discussions. Teachers do encourage students but the methods chosen are not successful and progress is slower than expected in this respect.
287. The leadership and management of the subject are good. In the short time that the head of department has been in post, good progress has been made in updating the schemes of work, improving resources and in forward development planning. The curriculum is well supported by residential fieldwork in Wales and this complements classroom provision very well. The assessment of standards is very good and students have a good understanding of how well

they are doing and how to improve. Students speak highly of the support and advice they receive from teachers and which gives encouragement to maintain the effort to achieve high standards.

288. There has been very good progress made since the last inspection. Results at A-level have improved from well above average to very high in comparison to the national average. The progress that students make in their learning has improved from good to very good and this is reflected in the high standards seen during the inspection.

History

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

Strengths

- Teachers use their very good subject knowledge effectively, make the aims of study clear and help students to develop very good historical skills and understanding.
- Stimulating learning activities engage students' interest and involve them in informed and animated discussion of contentious issues.
- Students write very well and effectively display their understanding of challenging concepts.

Area for improvement

- Ensure that interactive teaching methods, that enliven the very best lessons, feature in the lessons of all teachers.

289. The school offers courses at AS and A-level. More than 30 students choose history in Year 12 and a very high proportion of them continue to study at A-level. All students complete their courses.

290. The A-level results in 2001 were in line with the national average for the subject. Those results were lower than in 2000 and do not reflect the higher standards attained in recent years. All students gained pass grades but most of them did not achieve as well as their very high GCSE grades suggested that they would. The results in the new AS-level examinations were among the best in the school and they hold much promise for the forthcoming A-level examinations.

291. The standards of work of students currently studying the subject in Year 13 are well above average. Their very secure understanding is evident when they engage in highly informed, indeed lively, discussions. In one lesson observed, for example, their discussions took the form of a formal debate about the criminality, or otherwise, of the poor in Tudor England. Whilst careful to follow the rules of debate, students supporting opposite sides of the motion could barely contain themselves in their eagerness to make their points or to challenge their opponents' views. Both their views, and the numerous 'points of information' that they attempted to make were supported by clearly attributed evidence and frequently referred to the work of eminent historians. The atmosphere was charged with involvement, passionately held opinions, and sheer fun – an educationally stimulating, challenging and intellectually satisfying experience for all in the room. The high standards of presentation that all students achieve in their written work also testify to their very positive attitudes to the subject; they write fluently, employing a very good range of appropriate vocabulary. Students of higher attainment successfully demonstrate, in their written answers to demanding questions, skills of analysis, interpretation and selection in their use of evidence that supports their conclusions. In an essay about Elizabeth I's settlement of religion from 1558-71, their very convincing answers are based on excellent analysis of the question, the well-focused use of appropriate information from sources and relevant references to their wider contextual

knowledge of the history of the period. This piece of work revealed how students of relatively lower attainment are less precise in their analysis of the question and more general in their exploration of the issues and in their opinions, making for less convincing answers.

292. Students in Year 12 produce good work that is always presented well. When their enthusiasm is stimulated lessons are lively and the quality of learning is high. Students' contributions to discussion in a lesson on the Catholic Reformation illustrate this point. Challenged by clear time limits, students attempted, individually, a recent examination question and then, after a brief period discussing their answers in pairs, joined in a whole-class consideration of the topic. The informed comments that were made by students, underpinned by telling amplification and clarification by the teacher, resulted in the group gaining a very clear view of what a high quality examination answer would contain. Their work files, again, show that higher attaining students successfully employ such oral knowledge and skill so that they write convincing answers. When explaining their views about 'Calvinism changed religious practices in Geneva more thoroughly than Luther did in Germany – explain why you agree or disagree with this statement, they show very effectively why Calvin had a more powerful local impact. The answers of less successful writers have weaker structures that reflect a less secure grasp of the issues and – in the frequency of over-long, more descriptive than analytical, paragraphs – less precise planning.
293. Teaching is good, overall, in both courses and this results in good learning. The basis of this quality is the very good knowledge teachers have of the subject and the care they take in setting targets for students' future attainment. The detailed comments they make in their marking of written work is also instrumental in helping students to understand precisely what they must do to improve. The best lessons, such as the ones described earlier, are highly and appropriately challenging and ensure that students work at a brisk pace and make important contributions to their own, and others', learning. A small proportion of lessons are rather pedestrian, relying much more on teacher input, and they have less success in motivating students to participate actively; the quality of learning is, therefore, diminished.
294. Students are well motivated and develop well as independent learners. Their reading is wide and they utilise a good range of historical information from various sources, including the increasing amount available through information and communication technology. They have very positive views about the school and the provision made for them through the subject, both in terms of their chances of examination success and the access it provides to higher education courses. Importantly, they continue to find the subject interesting and derive great pleasure from studying it.
295. The leadership and management of the subject are good. The head of department only took up post in September 2001 and has made an impressive start to the challenge of leading a very experienced team of teachers, all of whom have more senior posts of responsibility in the school. The educational direction of the subject is clear and development plans focus on maintaining students' attainment and aiming to raise standards even further. The assessment of students' progress is based on their prior attainment and leads to the setting of challenging targets that are consistently met.
296. The subject has maintained the good standards reported by the previous inspection. Students' attainment continues to be well above the national average and the standard of teaching and learning remains good. This represents good progress, especially when considered in the context of the three years when the subject was without a designated head of department, but benefited from the hard work of teachers who, despite a heavy workload from other senior responsibilities in the school, ensured that standards were maintained.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English Language, French and German, but English Literature and Spanish were also sampled. In English literature, examination results were average in 2001 and students did not achieve as well as they did in other subjects. Two lessons were observed and the teaching was good in both. In both lessons, the teachers' good knowledge of texts, films and productions allowed them to develop students' wider understanding of the text that they were studying. Results in Spanish were well above average and students achieved well. Three lessons were observed; two were good and one was excellent. All three lessons were very well planned with high expectations of the amount of work that could be covered. The difference in the excellent lesson was the way that the teacher had used her knowledge of the students to set up pairs in which one was a higher attainer and the other a low attainer. All had to have produced a lot of work at home and then produce a presentation for the rest of the class. The pairings made sure that the higher attainers could explain everything clearly, while the lower attainers benefited from the extra depth of study of the higher attainer. The whole lesson was very rapid because the teacher set very tight time limits on all the activities and stuck to them rigidly.

English Language

Overall, the quality of provision in English Language is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Students attain high standards in their work.
- Students are able to conduct research of a high quality on topics of their own choice.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards their work and this makes an important contribution to their progress.

Areas for improvement

- There is too much variation in the quality of teaching.
- Teachers require further training on the requirements of the new syllabus.
- Not all students have a course book.
- Students are not sufficiently encouraged to develop an interest in furthering their knowledge of the subject through independent reading.

297. Students' attainment at A-level in English language and literature in 2001 was well above the national average. There has been some fluctuation in the results obtained over the past three years, with the 2001 results being the best obtained of the three years.
298. The subject is popular in the school and over the past three years approximately 20 students a year took a course including English language. It is rare for any students to drop the subject.
299. The school no longer offers an A-level in combined English Language and Literature, but instead offers A-level English Language. The first year of students taking English Language sat AS-level in 2001. It is not possible to make national comparisons, but some results were below expectations and a number of students are re-sitting their modules.
300. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that standards being currently attained in English Language are well above the national average. When students' prior attainment is taken into account, their achievement is satisfactory. Most students have developed sophisticated skills in analysing the nature of language. They can, for example, explain the different stages through which children pass when they are learning language, using appropriate technical terms. They are able to explain the differences between different forms of English, such as standard, formal, dialect and business, and explain the contexts in which

they are used. Students have a good understanding of the links between sociology and linguistics. High quality work was seen, for example, on such topics as the influences that are currently re-shaping English and the presentation of gender in the media. Students conduct research of good quality on other relevant topics of their own choice. For example, particularly meticulous work was seen on how a part-time piano teacher interacted with students of widely differing ages, from lexical-semantic and grammatical perspectives. However, despite this range of skills, only the highest attainers read about the theoretical aspects of the work to the extent that might be expected so as to develop more fully their understanding, vocabulary and procedures.

301. Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, with some examples of good teaching. When teaching is most effective, teachers possess good subject knowledge, plan their lessons well, ensure that students understand the objectives for the lesson, provide lucid explanations, ensure that the lesson includes variety and maintain a brisk pace. One such lesson was on how people interact through language, with a particular emphasis upon 'face' and politeness. Students understood the concepts and explored them thoroughly by creating their own dialogues and then assessing how the participants had responded to each other. In a Year 13 lesson, opportunities were also provided for students to consolidate their understanding of topics covered earlier, though with the added challenge of being required to present them for a specified audience. The use of resources is variable. In some lessons, a good range of standard text and reference books and access to the Internet was available, whilst in others there was considerable reliance on photocopied material and course books were not provided for students. Where lessons are less effective, the teacher's subject knowledge is not secure, there are uncertainties regarding course requirements and the work lacks sufficient challenge. Students' attitudes to the work are very positive and this undoubtedly contributes to their progress. They work in close co-operation with each other and are willing to offer each other constructive criticism.
302. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. A new A-level has been introduced and it serves as a complement the A-level English literature. Appropriate in-service training is needed to support staff in the teaching of the new course, as is recognised by the head of department.
303. As there were no discreet judgements made about English the sixth form in the previous report, and no distinction was made between the different courses offered, it is not possible to comment on progress since it was published.

German

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

Strengths

- Students have very well developed writing skills and are able to argue their case convincingly.
- Students are very well prepared for the examination, especially in speaking.
- Marking is detailed and helps students to improve accuracy and style.

Area for development

- The range of materials used to develop students' listening skills is not wide enough.

304. All students continue with a language in the sixth form; most of them incorporate it into their general studies. There are 15 students currently studying for AS-level and seven for A-level German. Numbers rose significantly last year at AS-level; it is rare for a student not to complete the course.

305. In 2001, A-level results were above average. Over the past three years there has been a significant increase in the number of students with the higher grades. At AS-level students attained results in 2001 which were very encouraging; all are now continuing to study A-level. Results in the language-based general studies A-level were very high and students performed much better in this subject than they did in most of the other subjects that they studied.
306. Standards are well above average overall in both Years 12 and 13 and this is in part due to the very good teaching that they receive and in part to students' very good attitudes and willingness to work hard in their spare time. Students are achieving very well. Students in Year 13 have good knowledge of subjects such as the difference in the political systems in Germany and Britain today and the causes and effects of drug abuse, and can express themselves clearly in both writing and speaking. They are particularly skilled at putting their point of view convincingly when writing. When speaking, the range of performance is wider; the most fluent are the students who have managed to spend time abroad practising their German. All students develop their speaking skills during the course as they have weekly access to a native speaker who prepares them very well for the examination. In Year 12, when students have only just begun the course, they cover less complex topics such as the role of the education system in Germany and issues to do with youth. They are, nevertheless, able to discuss these matters with increasing sophistication and develop their arguments well.
307. Most students produce good written work and the quality and quantity improve rapidly during the course through regular practice. Students still make errors, even in Year 13, of case and word order, but when they check their work carefully they can almost always eradicate them. This is because they are building on some very solid foundations laid down during their GCSE years. The most able use complex language and express their opinions and arguments clearly; others have ideas which they express more simply but nevertheless accurately.
308. When reading German, students are given some difficult texts in class and are often asked to prepare these at home, which they do well so that they do not spend long in lessons checking vocabulary. To improve listening skills, all are given some materials to use at home but these are mostly limited to those linked to the textbooks. Because there is much work done during lessons on listening to tapes, students do make adequate progress in this particular skill but the diet is a little restricted and sometimes there are opportunities missed in class when a teacher uses a lot of English to explain a task.
309. Teaching is very good and leads to very good learning. The key feature is the pace of the lessons, which are planned to cover a variety of activities, often involving role-plays and extensive opportunities for students to practise what they have been taught. They are encouraged to use their skills in real situations, such as writing emails to colleagues in Germany or to their teacher. In Year 12 most students enter the course with a good understanding of grammar and there is much emphasis on reinforcing key grammatical points and new vocabulary so that most students, even those who came in with weaker skills, can write more accurately by the end of the first term. When students are challenged to tackle difficult current issues, such as writing about the events of 11th September, they do so very well and are able to express a depth of feeling. When given opportunities such as rewriting the ending to a book they have just read or when doing coursework on a film they have watched they also write very fluently and expressively.
310. Many lessons are well planned with resources that are interesting and up to date, reflecting what is happening currently in Germany. The marking of written work is detailed and

suggests to students how they might improve both content and accuracy. Teachers encourage students to work on materials at home in preparation for the lesson so that basic difficulties have been ironed out before they arrive. Students are very well versed in the requirements of the examination, their work is marked according to the criteria for the examinations and students are given good feedback about how to improve. Students use dictionaries and other reference materials well and refer to notes they have made on grammar, for example. Students keep their work in such a way that they can easily revise from their files.

311. Information and communication technology is used regularly during lessons. There are revision activities for almost all topics and grammar items which students use most weeks. The language laboratory is also used well at sixth form level, such as in one lesson where the group had to use it to listen to some German advertisements and answer questions about them. Because the activity was quite difficult, students benefited from being able to work at their own pace, replaying any sections they personally had found difficult. Students are also encouraged to use the Internet in their free time to research topics and extend their knowledge.
312. The leadership and management of the sixth form course are excellent. The new head of language college has not yet had time to implement all her plans but teachers regularly work together to plan the course so that improvements can be made when necessary and so that changes to the syllabus can be accommodated. Students are provided with many opportunities to use their German outside the classroom, such as producing a critical appreciation of a piece of art that has been produced by another student. The trips and language events they attend, including watching plays and films in German, significantly improve their language skills and motivation.
313. Progress since the last inspection has been very good, the number of students passing with the higher grades has risen significantly and teaching continues to be very good.

French

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

Strengths

- Attainment and achievement are very high because students are taught and learn very well.
- Students are able to develop their oral skills well, because they have regular lessons in small groups or individually with the assistante.
- Students can access the Internet to help them in their independent research.

Area for improvement

- Provide more books for students to read outside of lessons.

314. All students continue with a language post-16; most of them incorporate it into their general studies. There are 16 students currently studying for AS-level and seven for A-level. Numbers rose significantly last year at AS-level; it is rare for a student not to complete the course.
315. In 2001, A-level results were well above average. These results are better than those for the three previous years and they show a rising trend. Results in the language-based general studies A-level were very high and students performed much better in this subject than they did in most of the other subjects that they studied.

316. Standards by the end of Year 13 are well above average and students achieve very well. During the course, they acquire a very good range of the relevant vocabulary to enable them to understand and write about the wide variety of topics that they cover, for example pollution, the advantages and disadvantages of television, political systems and transport. Over the two years, they consolidate and develop the use of tenses in many exercises; they also learn to use the subjunctive and past historic tense. In a lesson on racism, they explained appropriately the racist words that they had been given to define and read aloud quite well. All students contributed well to the lesson. Later in the week, they successfully picked out from the texts the key words or phrases that describe aspects of racism. They understand the lessons, conducted entirely in French. They write accurately about the topics that they have covered, but there are few texts available for them to broaden their range of reading.
317. In a listening exercise, students filled in over 50 missing words in a text about a near-catastrophe on an aircraft, which they heard as a news item. Several students had high marks, whilst the remainder achieved well. They cover points of grammar very extensively, and acquire the relevant vocabulary for topics such as sport, the family and the French educational system. In their short written report about the French holiday season, however, quite a number of the class showed several basic errors in grammar, with the use of *beaucoup de* and the agreement of adjectives. Students' work is well organised in their folders and it is well presented.
318. The quality of teaching is very good. Students in both years are very well motivated and they apply themselves well to their tasks. Their positive attitudes mean that they learn very well. Teachers make effective use of the foreign language in class, and this promotes their students' understanding. One of the two teachers is a native speaker. They provide good opportunities for students to extend their knowledge and to develop their skills: for example, in the lesson on racism, each Year 13 student had to provide an oral definition in French of one of the key words. They then had to compare their definition with the one in the textbook that they had not seen previously. All four skills were covered in the lesson. Year 12 students read a passage on summer holidays in France for the gist and they extracted the key phrases. Teachers build on the very good foundation that the students bring with them from GCSE. They know the criteria for the examinations extremely well, and this helps students to achieve high grades.
319. Relationships within the groups are good. Students work well together. They all have the opportunity to develop their oral skills in small groups and individually with the assistante every week. Several students have taken advantage of work experience in France. In short interviews, Year 13 students spoke highly of the films that they had seen and how much they had enjoyed them. They have copies of the examination criteria, and major pieces of work receive grades, with comments on how they can improve. They talked competently in French about what they would like to do later in life. Year 12 students mentioned the big step upward that had to be taken from GCSE to AS-levels. Students have very good opportunities to conduct independent research on the Internet. Teachers provide them with sites, and they can also find many different ones in the revised edition of their French vocabulary booklet.
320. The same high quality of leadership and management seen in German exists in French. Progress since the last inspection has been very good.